

Bearings on Classroom Assessment Practices: From Perception to Practice

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the assessment strategies and practices at Oran University2, Algeria. It attempts to explore the impact of assessment procedures on learners' motivation and academic achievements. This research adopted a mixed-methods case study design wherein both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures were used to explore tertiary teachers' assessment strategies while assessing their learners' competencies. A random sample of 30 tertiary teachers formed the target population during the first semester of the academic year 2022. Findings reveal that some teachers continue to rely on a limited set of assessment tools, as the sole means of evaluation to meet the diverse needs of their learners. However, the study also highlights that teachers also showed a good understanding of the necessary knowledge and training required before implementing assessment tools to provide students with the necessary feedback. The results also indicate an essential need for in-service training, pedagogical support, and professional development, to meet the challenges identified by teachers in adapting and maintaining effective assessment practices at all levels of tertiary education.*

KEYWORDS: Assessment, diagnostic, formative, learning quality, summative

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1. Introduction

In contemporary education, teachers face multi-faceted challenges in meeting the diverse needs of learners with varying backgrounds and learning requirements. There is a growing focus on individualized learning, highlighting the importance of catering to students' unique educational needs. Consequently, teachers are encouraged to use a range of assessment methods and strategies. However, there is a significant lack of awareness among teachers regarding the effective customization of classroom assessment practices to address the needs of all learners and facilitate their attainment of learning objectives at their own pace. This field study aims to investigate teachers' perceptions and awareness of the principles necessary for the efficient implementation of assessment practices in their classrooms. Specifically, the study tries to answer the following question: Are teachers at Oran2 University effectively incorporating a variety of assessment strategies into their teaching and learning processes to optimize students' learning outcomes?

2. Literature Review

Education is a sensitive domain where assessment practices remain the most important. It is an integrated process of determining the nature and extent of learners' process and development (Bell, 2001; Boud, 2013). Assessment is critical to the teaching-learning process. Popham (2008) claims that teachers who can test well will be better teachers and effective teaching will enhance a teacher's instructional effectiveness. Malcolm (2007) argues that assessment is used to guide teaching, and is used as part of teaching.

Research has shown that teachers typically spend a minimum of one-third of their instructional time on assessment-related activities (Mertler, 2003; Bachman, 2014). Similarly, Stiggins (1992) assert that teachers spent approximately one third to half of their time in the classroom to prepare and engage with assessment-related activities. According to Schafer (1993), teachers spend anywhere from 30% to 50% of their instructional time assessing students.

Accordingly, assessment plays a significant role in promoting student learning and engagement. Increased research (Biggs, 1996; Anderson, 2003; Rowntree, 2015; Baer, 2006) consider classroom assessment as an essential aspect of effective teaching and learning. They posited that the way teachers perceive assessment could affect how they assess students. This field research explores various assessment strategies that have been identified to enhance learning outcomes and student engagement.

2.1 Forms of Assessment

Assessment is the process of gathering information about students' learning and performance to evaluate their progress and understanding of a subject. There are many different forms of assessment that can be used in educational settings, including:

2.1.1 Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is an ongoing process that teachers use to gather evidence of student learning and adjust instruction accordingly. It has been identified as a key strategy in promoting student learning and engagement. According to Black and Wiliam (2004), formative assessment involves evaluating student progress and providing feedback that can be used to improve their learning. Formative assessment enables teachers to identify areas where students are struggling and to tailor their instruction accordingly. It also provides students with opportunities to reflect on their own learning and to identify areas where they need to focus their efforts.

2.1.2 Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is a process in which students assess and provide feedback on the work of their peers. It has also been identified as an effective strategy in promoting student learning and engagement. According to Topping (2009), peer assessment involves students evaluating each other's work based on predetermined criteria. Peer assessment provides students with opportunities to give and receive feedback, which can enhance their understanding of the subject matter. It also promotes critical thinking and communication skills, as students are required to provide feedback to their peers in a constructive manner.

2.1.3 Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is another strategy that has been found to promote student learning and engagement. According to Andrade (2019), self-assessment involves students evaluating their own work and reflecting on their learning. Self-assessment can help students take ownership of their learning by encouraging them to set goals and monitor their progress towards achieving those goals. It also promotes critical thinking skills, as students are required to evaluate their own work in a meaningful way.

Self-assessment is a process in which students reflect on their learning and progress. This strategy encourages students to take ownership of their learning and provides opportunities for students to set goals and evaluate their progress. Self-assessment can take many forms, including journals, self-evaluations, and goal setting. Teachers can provide prompts and reflection questions to guide students through the self-assessment process.

2.1.4 Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment is a strategy that involves assessing students' knowledge and skills in a real-world context. According to Fook (2010), authentic assessment can include projects, portfolios, and simulations. Authentic assessment provides students with opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world problems, which can enhance their understanding of the subject matter. It also promotes higher-order thinking skills, as students are required to analyse, synthesize, and evaluate information.

3. Rationale of the Study

Assessment of students' achievements is a central issue for teachers to identify student strengths and weaknesses, provide feedback, and assign meaningful grades. It is considered as a basic constituent of effective teaching and learning (Bryant and Driscoll, 1998; McMillan, Myran and Workman, 2002). Teachers must adapt their instructions to suit to the present-day learning climate to be in synergy with the objectives of the educational development to conform to what is required from the role of teaching, learning and evaluation.

Effective day-to-day classroom assessment is to diagnose students' needs and evaluate the impact of instructional treatments. Unfortunately, many teachers are not aware of the importance of assessment and lack effective strategies for adopting and implementing different forms of assessment as part of their teaching. Therefore, it is important for teachers to receive training and support in effective classroom assessment practices to ensure the quality of education.

Understanding teachers' perceptions of assessment is as important as knowing how they implement assessment activities in the classroom. Research has revealed that teachers have different points of views in regard to the theoretical framework of assessment strategies (Dietel, Herman, and Knuth, 1991). The way teachers perceive assessment may influence the way they teach and assess students' skills. Yao (2015)

noticed a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs about assessment and their actual implementation within the classroom. Many teachers lack a clear conception of classroom assessment, which may lead to a mismatch between their perception and their classroom assessment practices. The quality of education heavily depends on teachers' classroom assessment practices.

The researcher observed that students were assessed through limited assessment methods. There was a total lack of emphasis on promoting student learning through authentic assessment. Teachers primarily focus on students' exam performance. This may be due to a lack of familiarity with effective assessment strategies, leading to a focus on results rather than learning. Given that teachers' assessment practices are guided by their perception, it is important to investigate the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices of implementing classroom assessment strategies in the Algerian context.

3.1 Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of the study, a series of focused questions were developed, which addressed the following three research inquiries:

- a) How do university teachers in Algeria perceive classroom assessment?
- b) What assessment methods do teachers employ to evaluate their students' learning?
- c) Is there a correlation between teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment and their actual classroom assessment practices?

4. Methodology

This study is conducted with a predominantly descriptive approach. Data is collected through the use of questionnaires, interview, and observation checklists, allowing for a computable approach. Quantitative data analysis is conducted using statistical procedures and mathematical methods. However, to enhance the completeness of the study and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation, the researcher also incorporates a qualitative approach for triangulation purposes.

4.1 Population and Sample

The research was carried out at the University of Oran², located in Oran, Western Algeria during the first semester of 2022. The target population consisted of university teachers who were currently working and teaching first year students. A sample of 30 teachers was selected randomly to participate in the study. Sampling is an important constituent in field research because it is often neither possible nor desirable to collect data from the entire population Best & Kahn (1993:73). The researcher designated individuals and sites that can best supply relevant information needed to answer the research questions raised. The target teachers have different levels of teacher training and professional experience. They have university degree in an area of specialization such linguistics, literature, and civilization. Table 4.1 exhibits the sampling population used in this study.

Characteristics	Variables	No	Percentage%
Gender	Male	12	40
	Female	18	60
Level	Professor	06	20
	Associate professor	15	50
	Assistant professor	09	30
Teaching experience	5-10years	06	20
	10-19 years	18	60
	+ 20years	06	20

Table 4.1. Demographic information

The study found that 60% or 18 respondents were female, while 40% or 12 were male. The majority of respondents 70% or 21 had a doctorate degree, while only 6 had a magister's degree. Additionally, 80% of the respondents had over 10 years of teaching experience, while only 20% or 6 respondents had between 5 to 10 years of teaching experience. These findings suggest that the lecturers in the study had considerable experience in conducting assessment practices.

4.2 Instrumentation and Data Collection

Three data collection instruments were adopted in this field study, namely: a Likert-type scale questionnaire, a classroom observation protocol, and pre- and post-lesson observation interview protocol. The researchers observed one class session for each teacher and conducted pre- and post-observation interviews with them. The 30-class sessions were selected using convenience sampling.

Quantitative data were presented using descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean, while inferential statistics like correlation were also employed. On the other hand, the qualitative data were analysed using predetermined themes that corresponded to the themes of the classroom observation. To facilitate the analysis, each teacher was assigned a code, such as T1, T2, T3, and so on, up to T30.

4.3 Reliability and Validity

To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, a Cronbach's alpha (α) test was performed using SPSS version 24. A Cronbach alpha value of > 0.60 is generally considered reliable. The overall reliability coefficient obtained from the data analysis was 0.753, indicating that the questionnaire used in this study was reliable. To determine the accuracy, the draft questionnaire was scrutinized by three college professors in Algeria considered being content experts in classroom assessment. Some items were reviewed for the sake of clarity and completeness in covering most, if not all, assessment and grading practices used by teachers in classroom settings, as well as to establish face and content validity of the instrument and items. Necessary revisions were made based upon their analyses.

5. Results of the Study

The relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices of classroom assessment is discussed and analysed under two major headings: 1-Teachers' ideas about classroom assessment and, 2-The relation between teachers' perceptions and practice of classroom assessment. This will explore whether or not these perceptions and practices are related to one another.

5.1 Classroom Assessment from Teachers' Perspective.

It was hypothesized that teachers' initial understanding of the curriculum may indicate their comprehension of the methods and significance of classroom assessment practices. 30% of the target population reported good mastery assessment knowledge. Meanwhile, 60% used only summative assessment. However, 10% of teachers stated that they had no familiarity with diagnostic and formative assessment.

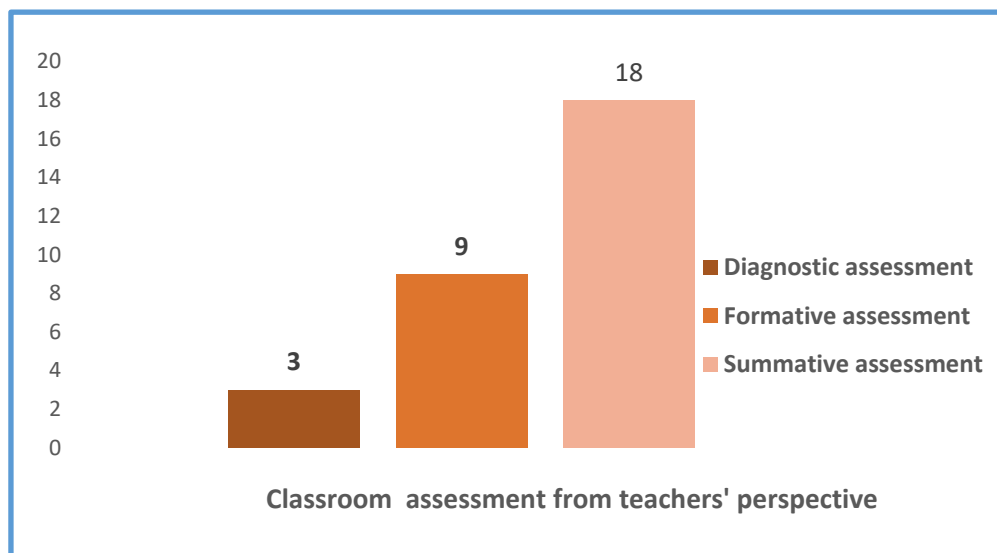


Figure5.1 Classroom assessment from teachers' perspective.

Figure 5.1 shows that 18 out of 30 teachers (60%) consider summative assessment as classroom assessment, while 9 teachers (30%) identified it as formative assessment, and 3 teachers (10%) did not differentiate between diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. They viewed diagnostic assessment as the only tool to evaluate learners' performance. Accordingly, most of the target teachers do not have a clear-cut conception of classroom assessment.

An overwhelming majority of teachers (70%) believed that classroom assessment involved oral question and answer sessions. A large percentage of teachers also considered written activities (80%) to be important forms of classroom assessment. Interestingly, the majority of teachers (70%) viewed the purpose of assessment as providing guidance to students' learning. In addition, a significant number of teachers (60%) stated that their goal in assessing students was to ensure their active engagement in the teaching and learning process.

5.2 Teachers' Perceptions and Classroom Assessment Practices

5.2.1 Diagnosing Learners' Competencies

Table 5.1 below shows that teachers expressed strong agreement towards investigating students' existing knowledge (M=3.20) and identifying and addressing students' misconceptions (M=3.30). Additionally, teachers agreed that linking prior knowledge to new information (M=2.90) should be considered.

Statements	N	Perception Mean	Practice Mean	Correlation Coefficient
1. Investigating learners' existing knowledge.	30	3.20	1.90	-0.416
2. Linking prior knowledge to new information.	30	2.90	2.87	-0.295ns
3. Identifying and addressing student misconceptions	30	3.30	2.67	-0.321ns

Note. N=Sample Size, ^{ns}=non-significant

Table 5.1: Teachers' views and implementation of diagnostic assessment

But in practice a major difference is found in implementing diagnostic assessment activities. Sometimes teachers asked questions to investigate learners' existing knowledge (M=1.90) but not all the teacher adopted diagnostic assessment strategies in their classes.

While some teachers (M=2.87) recognized the critical role of connecting prior knowledge with new information in the teaching and learning process, they did not always provide enough engaging content to keep their students fully immersed and focused.

The majority of teachers did not place a high priority on addressing students' misconceptions about their learning (M=2.67). This lack of focus on individualized instruction may hinder students' learning progress. Table 5.1 shows that there is no significant correlation between teachers' beliefs regarding the use of diagnostic assessment and their classroom practices, as the p value is greater than 0.05. Thus, all of the findings are considered statistically insignificant.

Statements	N	Perception Mean	Practice Mean	Correlation Coefficient
1. peer assessment	30	3.40	2.47	0.193ns
2. self-assessment	30	3.03	1.47	0.255ns
3. questioning	30	2.77	3.13	0.055 ns

Note. N=Sample Size, ^{ns}=non-significant

Table 5.2: Teachers' views and implementation of formative assessment

Table 5.2 shows that teachers exhibited strong agreement for using peer assessment (M=3.40) as a means of evaluating learners' learning skills. They also expressed support for assessing learners through formative questions (M=2.77) and promoting self-assessment (M=3.03) by encouraging individual involvement in the assessment process.

In reality, teachers did not engage in much practical work or use self-assessment techniques (M=1.47) to evaluate their students' classroom performance. Additionally, the implementation of peer assessment strategies was found to be infrequent among teachers (M=2.47) to assess their students' progress.

Although the teachers exhibited a high level of skill in conducting oral assessments, their over-reliance on oral questioning (M=3.13) as the sole method of evaluating student learning in the classroom may limit

the effectiveness of their assessments. It is important for teachers to consider alternative methods of assessment that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' knowledge and skills.

The results presented in Table 5.2 indicate that there is no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment practices and their actual implementation, as the p value exceeding 0.05. These findings suggest that although most teachers expressed agreement to use peer assessment, self-assessment, and questioning to assess their students, they did not actually engage in these activities during their classroom practice.

Statements	N	Perception Mean	Practice Mean	Correlation Coefficient
1. projects	30	3.30	1.27	-0.031 ns
2. portfolios	30	3.67	1.40	0ns
3. essays	30	2.90	2.87	-0.295ns

Note. N=Sample Size, ^{ns}=non-significant

Table 5.3: Teachers' views and implementation of summative assessment

Table 3 illustrates that teachers expressed a strong willing towards using projects (M=3.30), portfolios (M=3.67), and essays (M=2.90) as effective measures to assess student performance and mastery of skills. However, there was no significant correlation found between teachers' perceptions of different summative assessment techniques and their actual implementation in the classroom.

In actual classroom practices, teachers showed little enthusiasm for encouraging students to undertake projects (M=1.27), thereby depriving them of the opportunity to showcase their advanced critical thinking skills. Additionally, the use of portfolio assessment technique (M=1.40) and essays (M=2.87) were largely neglected by the majority of teachers.

Most teachers rely solely on testing to gauge student progress and do not implement alternative assessment methods when students struggle to meet learning objectives. The findings suggest that there is a disconnect between teachers' beliefs and their actual implementation of effective assessment practices in the classroom. This highlights the need for further exploration and professional development opportunities to bridge this gap and improve instructional practices.

6. Discussion of the Findings

The study findings suggest that a majority of teachers view classroom assessment primarily as summative assessment, focusing on assigning grades to students based on paper-pencil tests. However, while tests can be a valuable component of assessment, they may not provide a comprehensive understanding of students' learning. It is important for teachers to recognize the limitations of relying solely on tests and consider incorporating other forms of assessment to gain a more holistic perspective on their students' progress.

According to Ainscow (1988), Stiggins (2005), and Swan (1993), the purpose of classroom assessment in many schools appears to be unclear and therefore not effectively contributing to student learning. Susuwele-

Banda (2005) claims that teachers who view classroom assessment solely as a form of testing may not fully comprehend their students' learning progress and challenges throughout the learning journey. In the same line of thought, Frey and Schmitt (2010) state that paper-pencil tests were found to be the most commonly used form of assessment format among teachers.

The research findings indicate a discrepancy between teachers' stated purpose of classroom assessment as a means to guide and support student learning and their actual practices. Despite claiming to prioritize student learning, teachers frequently used assessment solely to evaluate the level of student comprehension, rather than adjusting their teaching methods based on assessment results.

According to Beckmann, Senk, and Thompson (1997), teachers may not use multiple assessment methods for three reasons: limited knowledge of different forms of assessment, lack of time to create different forms of assessment, and little or no professional guidance leading to a lack of confidence in trying out other forms of assessment.

The study also revealed that teachers did not employ diverse assessment strategies in the classroom or connecting students' prior knowledge with classroom instruction. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers adopt a range of assessment methods and strategies to effectively monitor student learning and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matters.

There is no single strategy that can meet the needs of all students, but using diverse methods like written tasks, group work, peer work, assignments, probing questions, portfolios, and projects can help teachers comprehend students' learning processes and align with their needs. Prioritizing meaningful assessment in the classroom benefits both teachers and students, as it provides insight into growth and thinking and helps students realize their learning potential and achieve their objectives more effectively.

7. Conclusion

The study findings indicate that there is no significant correlation between teachers' perceptions and their classroom assessment practices. However, teachers who aim to align their assessment strategies with their perceptions and students' learning requirements can use the study's approach to support students' learning. These results emphasize the varied assessment needs of teachers and the potential benefits of professional development to address these challenges.

Teachers view classroom assessment primarily as a means of summative evaluation rather than a tool for guiding student learning, leading to inconsistency between their assessment perceptions and practices. Teachers should incorporate various assessment techniques, such as self and peer assessments, portfolios, and projects that would stimulate learners to reach a high level of critical thinking. Thus, facilitate students' learning progress rather than simply evaluating their knowledge or memorization abilities.

The present study aims to enhance the comprehension of teachers' perceptions and practices concerning classroom assessment activities at the tertiary level. By examining the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices, this study can shed light on the need for educational assessment training that addresses the specific needs of teachers. The evidence can be valuable for the educational assessment community to revise their training strategies and focuses on addressing teachers' unique requirements.

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