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Teacher's Perceptions of Classroom Assessment Practices in the Algerian Primary School

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Abstract *The current research aims at elaborating and validating a set of scales to investigate the classroom assessment practices under the competency-based paradigm, implemented by the Algerian Department of Education since 2003. The study sought to probe the levels of teachers' assessment competency and its impact on the student learning quality. It addresses a practical issue often encountered in student assessment: how do teachers perceive and implement assessment in their everyday instruction? A sample of 156 primary school teachers in Algeria was involved and their perceptions were collected using a survey method. This study focused on the main challenges affecting teachers' classroom assessment methods and practices. It strives to establish which assessment strategies are mostly used by teachers in their daily instruction in order to describe how the challenges influenced their classroom assessment practices and thus the learning quality. The data analyses were descriptive. This study revealed that the teachers were skilled enough in traditional assessment methods. In contrast, they showed some weakness in dealing with competency-based assessment methods. Based on these findings, it is suggested that primary school teachers should be informed about the adequate methods and techniques to align with the competency-based assessment approach. Thus, workshops and in-service training programs about the new assessment methods are imperative to promote quality learning.*
***Keywords**: Assessment - competency - instruction - primary school - quality learning – teacher's perception*
Résumé : *La recherche actuelle vise à élaborer et à valider un ensemble d'échelles pour étudier les pratiques d'évaluation en classe selon le paradigme basé sur les compétences, mis en œuvre par le Ministère Algérien de l'Education depuis 2003. L'étude visait à sonder le niveau de compétence en évaluation des enseignants et son impact sur la qualité de l'apprentissage des élèves. Il aborde un problème pratique souvent rencontré dans l'évaluation des élèves : comment les enseignants perçoivent et mettent en œuvre l'évaluation dans leur enseignement quotidien ? Un échantillon de 156 enseignants du primaire en Algérie*

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a été impliqué et leurs perceptions ont été recueillies en utilisant une méthode d'enquête. Cette étude s'est concentrée sur les principaux défis qui affectent les méthodes et les pratiques d'évaluation en classe des enseignants. Il s'efforce d'établir quelles stratégies d'évaluation sont principalement utilisées par les enseignants dans leur enseignement quotidien afin de décrire comment les défis ont influencé leurs pratiques d'évaluation en classe et donc la qualité de l'apprentissage. Les analyses de données étaient descriptives. Cette étude a révélé que les enseignants étaient suffisamment qualifiés dans les méthodes d'évaluation traditionnelles. En revanche, ils ont montré une certaine faiblesse dans le traitement des méthodes d'évaluation basées sur les compétences. Sur la base de ces résultats, il est suggéré que les enseignants du primaire soient informés des méthodes et techniques adéquates pour s'aligner sur l'approche d'évaluation basée sur les compétences. Ainsi, des ateliers et des programmes de formation continue sur les nouvelles méthodes d'évaluation sont indispensables pour promouvoir un apprentissage de qualité
Mots clés : *Apprentissage de qualité, compétence, école primaire, Evaluation, instruction, perception de l'enseignant.*

1. Introduction

From 2003 onwards, Algeria has seen deep curriculum reforms to promote the quality of education. This process of curriculum reform was to follow the Competency-Based Education Perrenoud (2002) principles and standards, which focuses not only on the attainment of general knowledge but also on values, skills, attitudes, critical thinking and understanding. It was hoped that all educational levels would have been exposed gradually to the new curriculum, and that the years that followed would see a fundamental review of the new educational era with a view to improving and refining the curriculum goals.

Accordingly, every teacher has to elevate to suit to the present-day learning climate. Educational reform cannot, therefore, ignore the assessment of the students' learning outputs. It must be in synergy with the objectives of the educational reforms to conform to what is expected from the role of teaching, learning and evaluation. Assessment of students' achievements is a central issue in the development of any education system. It is considered as a basic constituent of effective teaching and learning (Bryant and Driscoll, 1998; McMillan, Myran and Workman, 2002; Stiggins, 2002). Thus, the new assessment method involves meaningful instruction that can offer data regarding students' problem-solving abilities, high-level thinking and creativity.

2. Literature Review

Education is a sensitive domain where the assessment issue remains the most important. It is an integrated process of determining the nature and extent of learners' process and development (Bell, 2001; Boud, 2010). Assessment is critical to the teaching learning process. Malcolm (2007) claims that assessment is used to guide teaching, and is used as a component of teaching. According to Schafer (1993), teachers spend anywhere from 30 – 50% of their instructional time assessing students. Thus, Poor assessment procedures may result in poor decision making in the teaching learning situation. Assessment enables educators to recognize the gap between what was taught and what is actually being learned.

Recent years have witnessed increased research on classroom assessment as an imperative aspect of effective teaching and learning (Biggs, 1996; Rodriguez, 2004, Rowntree, 2015). They started from the assumption that the way teachers perceive assessment may influence the way they teach and assess their students Fennema and

Romberg (1999). The global trend toward competency-based education focuses on the teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment practices, and probes to gain an understanding of the dimensions to which teachers use different classroom assessment methods and tools to understand and to support both the learning and teaching processes.

Teachers form the cornerstone of the educational system including the process of classroom assessment, strategies and procedures in gauging the pupils 'learning. They are expected to integrate their assessments with their instruction and students' learning in order to meet the needs of the reform goals such as training students for acquiring long life learning skills. That is, they are expected to be able to assess students' learning in a way that is consistent with the new educational reforms.

This research was elaborated to probe teachers' awareness of classroom assessment practices and strategies to better understand the current knowledge that students possess. The study sought to understand the methods, tools and technics teachers use to assess their students. The researcher studied closely the way teachers manage classroom assessment strategies and tools to assess the learners. In addition, the researcher investigated teachers' attitudes towards the role of assessment to engage students in quality learning.

3. Data and Methods

Starting from the assumption that classroom assessment knowledge base and personal beliefs about assessment are the underpinnings of classroom assessment literacy of teachers, the researcher tried to examine the interrelationships amongst these variables that form the teachers' classroom assessment literacy construct.

This research tested a hypothesised conceptual measurement model to assert whether or not the model could represent relations amongst the four constructs of classroom assessment literacy. It also attempted to investigate the teachers' classroom assessment literacy level and its associated impact on assessment practices. It further examined the influence of the teachers' background characteristics on their classroom assessment acquaintance. That is, how teachers understand CBE in Algeria is important because such understandings are likely to influence how they implement the CBE curriculum in the educational system reform. Two main questions framed the present study :

- How do primary school teachers perceive classroom assessment?
- What impact did classroom assessment literacy have on assessment practices?

The study attempted to determine teachers' views about assessment, areas of classroom assessment practices that are utilized or under-utilized, and whether teachers' perceived skills match the frequency with which they use assessment practices to improve learning and instruction (Harris, Irving, & Peterson, 2008). It looked at the extent to which primary school teachers in Algeria perceive and use the six levels of Bloom's taxonomy (1956) to measure students' cognitive skills to promote quality learning Sosniak (1994).

A survey conducted in 2016 by the researcher revealed that 62.6% of students suffered a reduction of skill development and had repeated at least a grade. Repetition could be interpreted either as weakness in assessment practices, as a failure of the schools

to effectively teach the students or inadequate teaching and learning resources. Teachers have always been blamed for carrying both classroom and assessment practices that focus only on lower levels of cognition. Most classroom questions and test activities are designed to promote the development of memory level cognitive skills. Besides, lesson aims devised to call for higher order cognitive ability are not clearly interpreted into relevant classroom activities. Teachers' assessment procedures likely to hinder the students' development of higher-order cognitive skills. Tests and examinations for which the learners are prepared are made of lower order tasks.

3.1. Sample of research

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). The researcher designated individuals and sites that can best supply relevant information needed to answer the research questions raised Creswell (2008). Patton (2002) and Suri (2011) argue that the logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis of in-depth understanding.

The sample consists of 250 randomly selected primary school teachers from 40 schools located in Sidi Bel Abbes area, 500kms west Algiers. In the selection procedure of the sampling, geographical regions and type of residence (urban, suburban and village) were taken into consideration. The number of surveys collected and evaluated was 156 (62.4%). Of the participants, 117 (75%) were female, 39 were (25%) male, 80 (52.56%) were 3rd grade, 76 (47.44%) were 5th grade classroom teachers and only 38 (24.35%) previously obtained in-service training program and workshops on measurement and assessment.

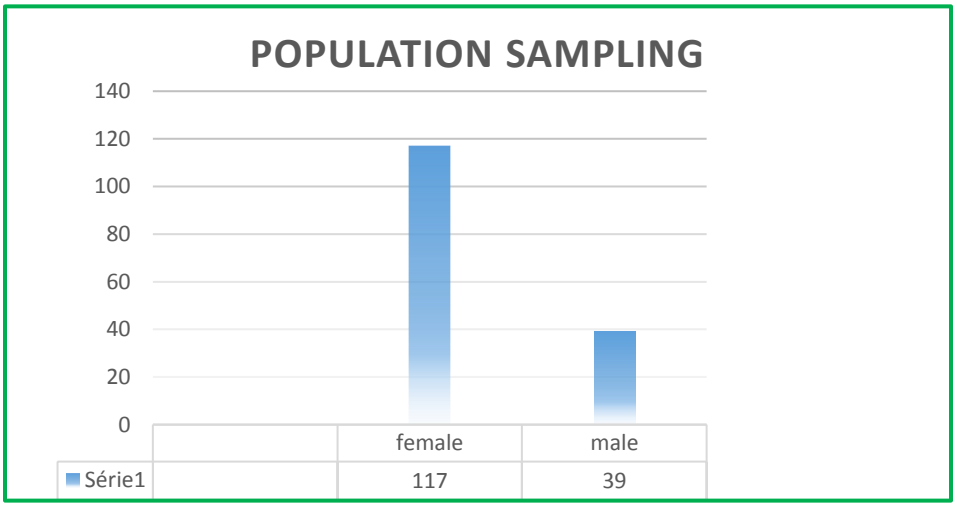


Figure 1. Population sampling

Figure 1 presents the sampling population under study. Attempts were made to ensure teachers were selected with varied qualifications, overall teaching experiences, age groups and gender. These variations enabled a broad range of perspectives to be sought

about competency-based assessment when presenting the main themes in the analysis and discussion.

Of all participants 50 (32.05%) are working in the urban area, 59 (37.83%) in suburban area and 47 (30.12%) in villages as presented in Figure 2.

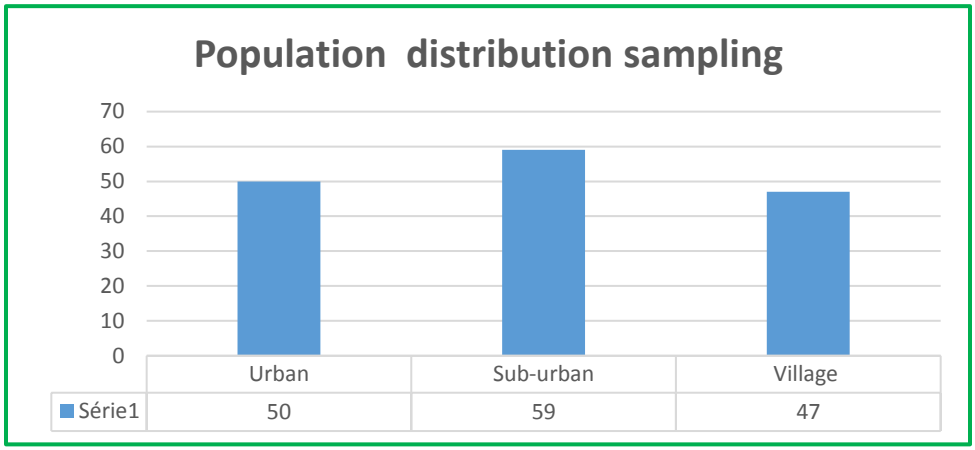


Figure 2. Population Distribution Sampling

The respondents' selection was chiefly linked to their faculty to contribute to the investigator's understanding of the assessment problems facing teachers, which means engaging in deliberate sampling Merriam (1988). Purposive sampling refers to the quest for individuals with particular expertise who are most likely to boost the researcher's interest and potentially open new doors Given (2008). Palys (2008) clearly define purposive sampling as a set of choices about with whom, where and how to do your research.

3.2. Instrument and data collection

A survey design was used to gather descriptive and comparative data for the purpose of describing the characteristics of primary school teachers Mertens (2010). Surveys can be a powerful and a useful tool for collecting data on human characteristics, such as their beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and behavior (Biemer, Paul P., and Lars E. Lyberg, 2003; Groves, R. M., E. Singer, and A. Corning, 2000; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Mertens, 2010). The survey design fit well within the framework of this study and interprets people's social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions.

The survey includes two parts: the teachers' demographic knowledge items including their personal, professional and qualification status; and the assessment methods scale including their level of familiarity with the competency based assessment syllabi and their level of training and experience dealing with competency based education curriculum and assessment. Some survey items were adapted from similar studies done by Yue (2012) and James and Pedder (2006) and modified so as to make them more applicable to the Algerian context.

A face validated Likert type questionnaire with a Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.71 was administered to 156 teachers. The scale comprises 17 items about the conception and

use of assessment methods and techniques (1 = not at all competent to 5 = completely competent) in Table 1.

A descriptive analysis was applied for surveying data. Each item in the scale was assigned with a value from 1 (no competence) to 5 (all competences). Then, frequencies, percentage rates, means, and standard deviations were calculated using the SPSS 20.0 software for all items. The point-ranges for the selected items in the scale are put as follows: "completely" 5 (4.21–5.00), "extensively" 4 (3.41–4.20), "moderately" 3 (2.61–3.40), "little" 2 (1.81–2.60), "not at all" 1 (1.00–1.80).

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of all items in the scale for primary school teachers in Algeria. The outcomes reveal that the respondent teachers find themselves "fully competent" in terms of mixed items (4.46), multiple choice (4.31), short answer (4.23); whereas they view themselves "less competent" in terms of assessment methods such as portfolio (1.77), essay-type task (2.08) and self-assessment (2.77) among all assessment methods and techniques.

Table 1. The means and standard deviations of all items in the scale for primary school teachers (N=156)

Items	N	*Mean (1-5)*	Standard Deviations
Mixed items	156	4,46	,689
Multiple choice	156	4.31	,689
Short answer	156	4,23	,707
Gap-filling	156	4,00	,630
Matching	156	4,15	,577
True/ false	156	3,92	,641
Home work	156	4,08	,707
In-class observation	156	3,85	,707
Student's exhibition / presentation	156	3,08	,641
Class discussion	156	3,00	,707
Project	156	3,15	,987
Interview	156	3,38	,768
Peer-assessment	156	2,92	,641
Group-work assessment	156	2,85	,555
Self-assessment	156	2,77	,725
Essay-type assessment	156	2,08	,760
Portfolio	156	1,77	,725

The analysis of table1 reveals that primary school teachers may be classified under two categories:

- Teachers perceive themselves most competent in using mixed items assessment multiple choice related assessment procedure (4.46), multiple choice (4.3) and short answer question type items (4.23)
- Teachers consider themselves not competent in portfolio item assessment (1.77) and very least competent in essay type question item (2.08) and portfolio.

The interpretation also showed that teachers felt themselves extensively skillful in five assessment methods namely in matching (4.15), homework (4.08), gap-filling (4.00), true/ false (3.92) and in-class observation (3.85). In contrast, teachers perceived themselves least proficient in five assessment methods namely project (2.54), self-assessment (2.77), group work assessment (2.85), peer assessment (2.92) and students' presentations (3.08),

The examination of the sub-factors of the scale showed that primary school teachers perceive themselves more competent in traditional assessment methods (4.17). On the other hand, they perceive themselves least competent in competency based assessment methods (3.13).

5. Conclusion

The outcomes of this study unveiled that the primary school teachers in Algeria consider themselves competent in traditional assessment methods such as mixed item related assessment, multiple-choice, short answer, matching, gap-filling, homework, true-false questions and in-class observation to a lesser degree. Finding may be interpreted on the fact that primary school teachers find themselves well-tuned to these assessment methods which they can be designed and scored easily. In contrast, the participant teachers didn't perceive themselves skilled at all in portfolio and very limited in essay type question. This may be explained that my informants failed to cope with the competency-based assessment techniques and thus prefer to use this method less. This result concurs with several research findings (Adams & Yang-Hsu, 1998; Mertler, 1999; McMillan et al., 2002; Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003; Özsevgeç et al., 2004) which show that teachers usually opt for teacher-made tests based on traditional methods.

Competency assessment methods are moderately scored in this study. The primary school teachers were found to consider themselves limited in competency-based assessment methods such as projects, demonstrations, rubric, self and peer assessment, interview and portfolio. The findings confirm that the primary school teachers lack insufficient knowledge about competency-based assessment methods implemented in the Algerian school since 2003 Thaâlibi (2006) and Tawil (2006). Similarly, many studies reported that teachers fail to manage competency-based assessment and alternative assessment methods (Zhang, Z., & Burry-Stock, 2003; Roegiers, 2006).

The findings of this investigation indicate that primary school teachers are suffering from a significant lack of in-service training programs and constant workshops in the context of implementing the competency-based assessment policy. It is important to note that teachers are usually expected to engage in a variety of assessment-related activities

whilst simultaneously engaged in teaching activities. For instance, they need to know how to cope with the learners' needs and how to plan and use different assessment strategies in their classrooms.

Based on the research results, the researcher suggests some procedures to be followed in the implementation of assessment policy efforts in Algeria. Teachers should be provided with adequate opportunities to reach necessary professional improvement. The in-service training programmes should be devised to ensure that all teachers have the conceptual knowledge, skills and understanding of assessment as a corpus of instructions that takes an extended span of time to be implemented correctly. Teachers need to be encouraged and spearheaded by the educational stakeholders to keep abreast of the assessment changes and the learners' constantly evolving needs. Besides, they need pedagogical resources and even techniques to deal with the assessment methods and become involved in intensive training so as to be able to practice the new strategies and tools in planning and designing future lessons.

Teachers should be considered as major stakeholders and not as passive consumers of pre-packed teaching and learning methods. Their proficiency and craft knowledge need to be appreciated. Meanwhile, inspectors and educational specialists should be able to offer expert advice and support to teachers and to help them conduct and implement the new assessment policy more effectively.

Thus, each educational conscription should mount constant in-service workshops on assessment to underpin the teachers' understanding regarding assessment-related aspects to connect teachers' existing knowledge with the current approach by reflecting on their perceptions, assessment practices, and the relationship between their beliefs and their practices. Further studies could provide deeper insight into assessment issues and challenges that hinder teachers' efforts to use different assessment methods to satisfy the students' learning needs.

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