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Empowering Language Learners through Educative Assessment: An Attempt to Develop Learners' Competence to Self-assess their Learning

Abstract

The paradigm in education has shifted from merely transferring knowledge to learners to developing human beings as whole, complete individuals. Complete individuals are marked by the abilities to set their own goals and purpose in life, in educational context; the goal and purpose of learning. The ability to set the goals and purposes of learning should otherwise be marked by the ability to determine one's success in learning.

Following the shifting of paradigm in education, the practice of evaluation and assessment undergo a major change too. Evaluating and assessing students were formerly designed and conducted to place students in ranks or grade and to inform the institution of the effectiveness of the running program. The teacher or the institution is the sole evaluator. The report of the evaluation is based on the subjective view of the interpreter of the result, while learners are never been involved in the assessment process.

The changes in assessment paradigm require students to be more involved in their own learning process. This new paradigm also gives teacher and learners wider role. Teachers inform learners how they will be assessed, show samples of performance required to meet the standard, and provide feedbacks so that students can improve their performance. Learners, on the other hand, have expanded opportunities to demonstrate their development in language learning, learn from the result of the assessment, and participate in the assessment planning process through portfolio development, for example. Learners have more responsibility and greater chance to measure and assess their progress in learning. This way, learners are becoming more empowered since they can make decisions about how they determine their own progress in learning a language.

Key words : evaluation, assessment, empower, self-assess

Rationale

Assess   *:to gather information about and measure a learner's level of knowledge or skills*

Test   *:a vehicle for determining a learner's level of knowledge or skills*

Evaluate   *:to interpret and/or assign a value to information about a learner*

Grade   *: to convert assessment information about a learner into a form that is understandable to the learner, such as a letter grade, points on a rubric, numerical score, or written feedback*

All the terms above are related to gathering information, interpreting it, and making decisions in a systematic way based on learner's performances of a given task, written or oral, Shrum & Glisan (2005: 355). Though referring to the same thing, the terms assessment and evaluation carry different fundamental implication. Hammadou (1998), in Shrum & Glisan, elaborates this idea by saying that in assessment, the results of the performance are reported to provide information; and in evaluation, those results are given some subjective judgment by the interpreters of the results.

As stated earlier that this judgment process is aim at providing information. Testing, assessment, and evaluation are conducted to obtain information which will be used to make decision. The decisions may be on the effectiveness of certain program, the effectiveness of the curriculum, or when it is in the form of students' assessment, it can be used to obtain information on learners' progress to later decide on the continuity of the learning program. Furthermore, Shohamy (2001), in Shrum & Glisan, states that tests can hold great power in the hands of bureaucrats who may use them to make predictions about the future, engage in decision-making that may impact a great of people, or even exercise power or control. Wiggins (1998: 13) enriches this idea by saying that the key policy implication is that school performance, like students' performance, must highlight the value added by schooling, using measures credible to the performers and teacher-coaches.

From the teachers and learners side, the perspective on assessment has gone through a great change. The former purpose of testing was to evaluate learner achievement and stating grades. In recent years, assessment is seen as the way or the mechanism to provide feedback for learners in order to improve learner performance, and

assess and inform instruction, Shrum & Glisan (2005). To strengthen that idea, Wiggins (1998: 7), states that the aim of assessment is primarily to educate and improve students' performance, and not merely to audit it. Shrum & Glisan (2005: 356) also report that the recent research centers around the concept of the benefits of what so called 'dynamic assessment', which gives the test examiner (i.e. the teacher) a greater role in intervening to help the test taker to improve test performance.

The Changing Paradigm of Assessment Practice

Shrum and Glisan (2005) state that an important concept in the new assessment paradigm is the emphasis on the use of multiple measures in assessing student progress in order to provide ongoing opportunities for students to show what they know and can do with the language. They also summarize the paradigm shift in the table below:

Table 1. Paradigm Shift in Assessment Practice

	Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
Purpose of Assessment	To evaluate learners and assign grades	To assess learner progress in proficiency and attainment of standards; to evaluate and inform; instruction and program design; to make a seamless connection between instruction and assessment
Place of Assessment in Planning and Instruction	Assessment occurs at the end of instruction	Planning for instruction includes design of assessments so that targeted goals and performances guide classroom practices (back-ward design)
Types of Assessment	Focus on either formative or summative assessment; limited number of assessments; largely paper-and-pencil and textbooks tests	Balance of formative and summative assessments; multiple measures; focus on performance in authentic tasks; integration of technology
Assessment Content and Formats	Testing of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary; contexts devoid of meaning; discrete-point items, often with one right answer	Integrated assessment of three modes of communication and goal areas of standards; meaningful contexts; open ended formats; allowing for

		divergent responses and creativity; oral assessments, TPR, observation checklists
Role of Learner	Has limited opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; must provide 'right' answers; receives little feedback about how to improve performance; has few a few opportunities to learn as a result of assessment; has no role in assessment planning and decision-making	Has multiple opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and kills; encouraged to be creative in language use; receives rubrics before assessment; receives regular feedback for on how to improve performance; learns as a result of assessment; participates in assessment planning and decision-making
Role of Teacher	Provides grades and corrective feedback	Describes targeted performance prior to administering assessments; reports on student progress; provides feedback for improvement; uses assessment results to improve program and teaching
Grading System/Feedback	Points/grades given for correct responses; corrective feedback	Rubrics to describe range of performance possible; points/grades given for both accuracy and creativity in language use; rich feedback that could describe how performance could improve

Taken from Shrum & Glisan (2005: 357)

The new paradigm emphasizes on the needs of test within an authentic (real-world) and meaningful assessment contexts. In the new paradigm, there is no place for non-communicative language tests which assess only discrete language elements like translation of vocabulary words, rather it puts the emphasize on communicative and performance-based tasks which relate to real-life communication that is the communication activity that reflects how people truly use the language in real world.

This new paradigm also gives teacher and learners wider role. Teachers inform learners how they will be assessed, show samples of performance required to meet the standard, and provide feedbacks so that students can improve their performance.

Learners, on the other hand, have expanded opportunities to demonstrate their development in language learning, learn from the result of the assessment, and participate in the assessment planning process through portfolio development, for example. This way, learners are becoming more empowered since they can make decisions about how they determine their own progress in learning a language.

Educative Assessment

Assessment can be educative when it caries at least two senses, as proposed by Wiggins (1998: 12). He states that an educative assessment system is designed to teach, to improve performance (of student and teacher) and evoke exemplary pedagogy. It is built on the basis of meaningful performance tasks that are credible and realistic – *authentic* in nature – hence engaging to students. An educative assessment system must also provide useful feedback to students, teachers, administrators, and policy makers.

In discussing educative assessment, authenticity of assessment plays a crucial role. Therefore the discussion will be started by discussing authentic assessment to envision the link between the terms.

Authentic and Standard-based Assessment

The importance of the use of an authentic assessment is stated by Shrum & Glisan (2005: 359) "If student progress in attaining the standards is to be effectively assessed, teachers must adopt an approach to assessment that includes authentic assessment as one type of measure." The term authentic assessment itself is defined as the type of assessment that mirrors the tasks and challenges faced by individuals in the real world, Wiggins (1998) in Shrum & Glisan (2005: 359). Wiggins (1998) also lists the standards for an assessment to be called authentic. He says that an assessment is authentic when it:

1. is realistic: replicates or similar with what real people do in real-world,
2. requires judgment and innovation: requires learners to use their knowledge and skills to solve the problems,
3. asks the students to "do" the subject: students need to explore instead of simply replicating what they have been taught or learnt,

4. replicates or simulates the contexts in which adults are "tested" in the workplace, in civic life, and in personal life,

5. assesses the students' ability to efficiently and effectively use a repertoire of knowledge and skill to negotiate a complex task, and

6. allows appropriate opportunities to rehearse, practice, consult resources, and get feedback on and refine performances and products.

In addition to that, Shrum & Glisan (2005: 359), states that in classroom practice, teachers can use a wide variety of assessments, which may vary according to the degree to which they are authentic, based on the *standards* listed above.

Wiggins (1994), in Shrum & Glisan (2005: 371) elaborates several benefits in implementing an authentic assessment; (1) it engages learners in non-routine and multistage tasks, real problems, or problems that require a repertoire of knowledge, (2) it involves 'transparent or demystified criteria and standards' so that learners understand exactly what is expected of them and how their performance will be rated, (3) it allows for thorough preparation, self-assessment, and clarifications and modifications through discussion with the assessor and/or one's peers. Shrum & Glisan also quotes *CLASS (1998) which says that authentic assessment enables teachers to "assess what we value so that we value what we assess". Furthermore, concerning the benefit of an authentic assessment, Liskin-Gasparro (1997) and Wiggins (1990) in Shrum & Glisan (2005: 371) state that "authentic assessment involve challenges and roles that help students rehearse for complex tasks that face adults and professionals, while focusing on whether students can create polished, thorough, and justifiable responses, performances or products".

Application and Implication

The discussion above will lead us to how the theories on educative assessment can be applied to help students to be more empowered learners. The discussion will cover the authenticity of assessment and the standards used to determine the authenticity. This section will also discuss the use of portfolio in assessment along with some considerations around it.

Empowering Students through Assessment

In a performance based, authentic, and standard-based assessment, learners are given more responsibility to determine their own success through actively involving themselves in the assessment process. Learners can learn from the interaction with their peers, obtaining and reflecting from the teachers' feedback, making decision on how to prove that they have learnt something, and formulating individual responses to problems or projects. This implies that learners are more *empowered* to play more important role in the assessment and the improvement of their learning. Concerning this, Shrum & Glisan (2005) state that "when students are empowered, they are better able to set personal goals for learning, self-assess accurately, seek out assistance when necessary, monitor their own progress, make improvements in their performances, and participate in learning communities".

Another way of empowering learners through assessment is by assigning students to assess their own progress and make decision on which samples of work best illustrate their progress to meet the standards. One of the ways to achieve this is through portfolio assessment which enables teachers to assess students by means of 'multiple perspectives'.

Portfolio Assessment

A portfolio can be defined as cumulative collection of the work students have done, Applebee & Langer in Penaflorida (2002). Brindley (2003: 318) elaborates the term portfolio by stating that a portfolio is

> …a non test procedure that can be used to gather ongoing information on learner's progress and achievement, including systematic observation, conferences between the teacher and student, and self- and peer assessment. It contains a collection of students work selected by the students that demonstrate their efforts, progress, or achievement over a period of time. Portfolios may contain samples of classroom tests, samples of writing, audiotapes, or videotapes of oral performances.

A portfolio, Shrum & Glisan (2005) add, documents the growth and development of students over a period of time; it is a rich description of a learner's work and offers perspectives that tests do not provide. As also stated by Wiggins (1998: 191), portfolio provides a unique opportunity to take stock of performance over a longer time frame than

that represented by single tests. Wiggins (1998: 190) also lists few basic implications on the purposes and uses of portfolios. He says that:

1. Portfolios can primarily serve instruction and assessment
2. They can be focused primarily on documentation or evaluation
3. Their contents can be defined by the students or by the teacher
4. They can be seen as a resume, as a representative sample of overall performance (good and bad) or as a constantly changing exhibit

Concerning the reason why portfolio can be a unique kind of assessment, Shrum & Glisan (2005) say that in a portfolio, learners have an opportunity to select evidence of their learning, reflect on it, and make it part of the assessment of their achievement in learning. Wiggins (1998: 190), furthermore states that in portfolio assessment students can choose to submit based on *categories* -kinds of work submitted, *criteria* -the guidelines for deciding what work fits into which categories and who makes the decision, and *specific product* -actual samples of work to meet the categories and the criteria.

Types of Portfolio

Wiggins (1998) classifies portfolio into *assessment portfolio* and *instructional portfolio*, each of which has its own characteristics. Assessment portfolio, he elaborates, requires a valid and reliable sample of work assuming it as a formal assessment of performance, follows the guidelines for what goes in the portfolio, can be compared against the standards (categories and criteria of evidence determined by professionals, and involves two terms: evaluation and assessment; assessment is more of a clinical look at performance, its characteristics, its strengths, its weaknesses, in evaluation we make further judgment as to whether such a portfolio is good or bad in light of institutional or personal expectations. On the other hand, in an instructional portfolio educators need not to be worry about either professional standards of evidence or making an evaluation, the goal is simply to provide students with a vehicle to develop a profile based on interests and abilities and/or to provide an opportunity for self-assessment and self-adjustment, standardization in categories, criteria, and contents is not necessary, and students are free to determine not only the contents but many of the categories and criteria.

Hammadou (1998) in Shrum & Glisan (2005: 384), views the classification of portfolio based on four elements, that is who designs or develops the portfolio, the type of the assessment, the number of entries, and the audience of the portfolio. He proposes the types of portfolio as follows:

Table 2. Types of Portfolio

Portfolio Type	Designer/Developer	Type of Assessment	Number of Entries; Frequency	Audience
Show-case or best-works	teacher designs according to a set of established goals; teacher selects documentation of own performance	self-evaluation	few, over a career	hiring bodies, parents, school administrators, legislators
Documentation	teacher or supervisor designs, teacher or students compile it	student self-evaluation as well as teacher evaluation	many, over time	parents at parent conferences, student
Evaluation	outside agency or statewide group of teachers; students and teachers create a set of tasks	everyone completes the same tasks; standardization of evaluation	specified and limited number and format	legislators, parents, educational agencies
Process	students select goals; students select and narrate value of documents	self-reflection of the learning process, usually not graded	rough drafts, peer reviews; usually shortened intensive period of time or single task	primarily the student for self-reflection; also teachers and parents

Hammadou, 1998 in Shrum & Glisan (2005: 384)

Contents of Portfolio

The question now is how many works to be included in portfolio? Wiggins provides the answer for this tickling question. He says that " a huge collection is not necessary… therefore few papers, projects, and tests are likely to be sufficient….". He adds his idea by saying that portfolio is fundamentally a sample of work, regardless of its purpose. It is

not a file cabinet or exhaustive collection of artifacts, (1998: 191). Therefore, as long the samples are the valid ones, it can really represent the students ability.

In addition to that, Shrum & Glisan (2005) state that the *artifacts,* items to be included in the portfolio, include students' product, student goals, and self-reflections. Concerning self-reflections, they say that learners' self-reflections are usually prepared in the form of a narrative and justify why each piece of work was selected and what it means in the student's personal growth as a language learner. NCLRC (National Capital Language Resource Center) 2004b, as quoted by Shrum & Glisan (2005) states that the content of a portfolio may also be *attestations*; evidence of a student's progress that comes from teachers, peers, parents, or other adults; examples include records from a parent-teacher conference, teacher observation notes, and peer-assessment forms.

Steps in Designing and Implementing Portfolio Assessment

NCLRC, as quoted by Shrum & Glisan (2005) also proposes the steps for designing and implementing portfolio assessment as follows:

1. Set assessment purpose; this is to have focus for the assessment process. The setting of the purpose may be guided by questions like *What aspect of language learning will the portfolio be used to assess? Who will use the portfolio?* and *Why are we making the assessment?*

2. Identify instructional objectives; *What exactly do we want the students to achieve?*

3. Match tasks to objectives; *What can students do to show evidence of their progress toward the objective?*

4. Describe student reflection; *What self-assessment, goal setting-, and metacognitive tasks will we include?*

5. Set criteria; How will we determine the degree of students progress toward the goals?

6. Determine organization and logistics*; Where will the portfolio be stored? How often the artifacts be submitted? Who will select the artifacts? Will parents participate as an audience, and if so, how?*

7. Monitor progress; concerning with the validity and reliability of the portfolio. *Is the portfolio assessing the specified areas consistently? Are you receiving useful information about your students to inform instruction?*

8. Evaluate the portfolio process; *What worked well that you will include next time? What changes will you make for the next year?*

In doing the scoring and the grading of the portfolio, however, teachers are encouraged to develop rubrics which include the degree to which the artifacts really show the progress to meet the required standards and other learning objectives, quality of the self-reflections, organization, and presentation.

Conclusion

The paradigm shift in education, also change how practitioners view assessment. Assessment does not merely audit or test students achievement to later place students in grades based on the attained score. The new paradigm views assessment as a source of learning feedback and a way of obtaining information on learners performance in learning so that learners can learn from this to improve the performance. The new paradigm opens wider role for teachers and learners in the assessment process. Teachers are required to actively encourage and guide learners to improve their performance based on the assessment results. On the other hand, learners can be more empowered through having wider opportunity to monitor and self-assess their progress and their own success in learning through portfolio selection and collection. Because the most important feature in a portfolio assessment is that it should involve students in the selection process so that they can improve their learning performance and eventually self-assess their achievement.

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