

Effectiveness of the Formative Assessments to Develop Communicative Competence

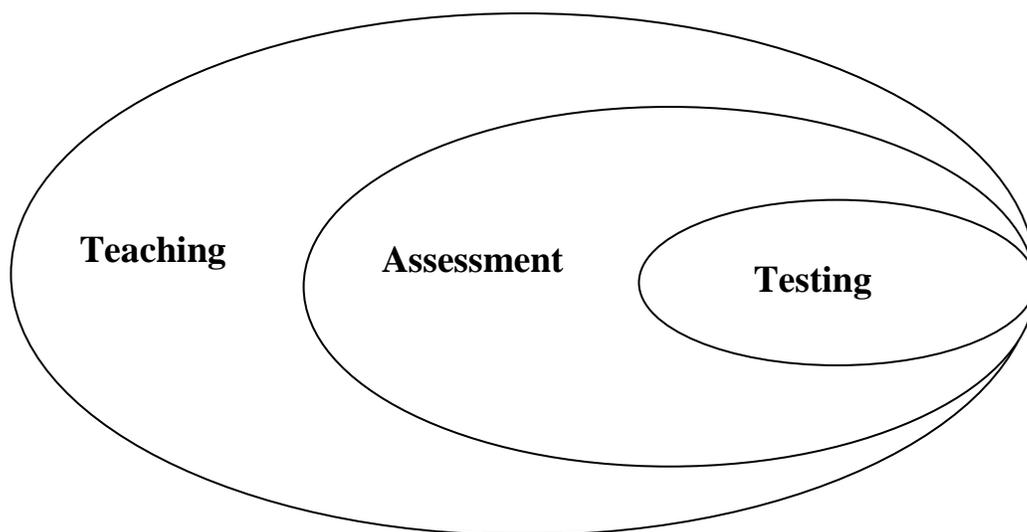
Dr. S. M. Gohil, Asst. Professor, Department of English, NMCA, NAU, Navsari

&

Ms. Sharon Patel, Research Scholar, H M Patel Institute of English Training & Research,
Vallabh Vidyanagar.

Introduction

Assessment and evaluation have become buzz words in the educational set up of India and particularly of Gujarat state. As everywhere else, assessment in education in India refers to collecting information on the progress of learners' learning using a variety of procedures, and evaluation refers to making judgments on the basis of the information collected. Teaching for successful learning cannot occur without high quality assessment. Assessment, therefore, needs to be integrated with the process of teaching and learning. According to Brown (2004), assessment is an important part of teaching and learning, and assessment is more than just testing. The below given diagram adapted from Brown (2004) supports the argument.



Assessment is directly related to teaching and learning and should go hand in hand with them. We do not assess students just to promote to the next grade. Instead, there are many reasons behind that. Some of the reasons we assess our learners are:

To make decisions:

- to place students in a course,
- to admit students to a program,
- to decide what to teach,
- to decide what needs to be reviewed.

To monitor students' performance and achievements , their strengths and areas to improve.

To monitor our own effectiveness as teachers.

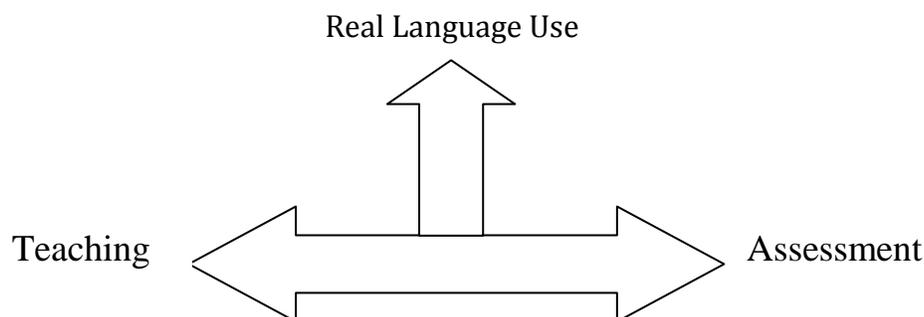
To report students' grades and progress.

Thus, assessment plays an important role in the education process but in the present context, assessment has become synonymous to testing. Teaching and testing have become two independent processes of the education system. According to Cameron (2001), assessment motivates the learners. It helps the teacher plan more effectively and informs the improvement of the instructional programme. Assessment must be congruent with learning and must include a variety of techniques. Feedback is an important aspect and it supports further learning.

Rationale

The education department of the Government of Gujarat, recognizing the above mentioned importance of the assessment process, introduced formative assessments at the secondary school level. The objective was to encourage alternative assessment techniques and make testing stress free and interesting. It was also as part of introduction of Continuous Comprehensive Assessment.

The decision also applied to language testing which always faces a challenge of keeping near the real life language use needs of the students. In communicative language teaching, the assessment should reflect real language use as much as possible. The below given diagram shows assessment in Communicative Language Teaching.



To Black & Wiliam (1998) assessment broadly include all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning. Under this definition, assessment encompasses teacher observation, classroom discussion, and analysis of student work, including homework and tests. Assessments become formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs. When teachers know how students are progressing and where they are having trouble, they can use this information to make necessary instructional adjustments, such as re-teaching, trying alternative instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice. These activities can lead to improved student success.(Sawyer, Graham, & Harris, 1992)

Thus, this study was intended to arrive at clear understanding of the role of assessment process in language learning and to try out the newly introduced formative assessments to arrive at some conclusions in English Language Teaching assessment based on empirical data.

The Experiment

The experimental study was carried out by preparing a 30 hour language instruction programme with formative assessments as an integral part of the transaction process and involving different testing techniques. The students were given intensive feedback on their formative assessments and decisions regarding teaching were made based on the students' performance.

The study was carried out using single group pre-test > treatment> post-test experimental design. The population for the study was vernacular medium (GSEB) students of 9th standard and the sample was an intact group from a school of Ankleshwar, Gujarat. An intact group allows the researcher to give evidence in support of links between variables if not cause effect relation statements about findings (Hatch and Lazarson, 1991).

The study was guided by the following directional and null hypothesis.

- i. There will be a significant difference in the overall mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test.
- ii. There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test with respect to Vocabulary, Grammar, Reading and Writing Skills.

The pre-test and the post-test were major data collection instruments. The tests and the programme included Reading, Writing, Vocabulary and Communicative Grammar as language skills. The programme also involved speaking but it was not tested to delimit the study. The writing part was assessed with a well defined set of rubrics. In addition to the rubrics for the tests, each descriptive formative assessment had well defined rubrics which were shared with the students to make them responsible and sincere learners. The tests and the programme were given to the ELT experts for their views and feedback as part of data validity measures.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

The data collected through the test scores were analysed used advanced statistical methods to test the hypothesis. Testing the first hypothesis, the T analysis of the overall mean scores of the test revealed the following.

Table showing difference in post-test and pre-test score.

	Paired Difference	
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	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Pair I Post-test score –Pre-test score	3.2571	3.1747	0.5366	-2.0000	10.0000	6.07	34	<.0001

The T-valued obtained from the analysis of the overall mean scores of the pre-test and post-test is 6.07. The mean of the paired difference was 3.2571 with standard deviation 3.1747. The P-value or value of significance was <.0001, at the level of 0.05. The analysis revealed that there was a significant difference between overall mean scores of the pre-test and post-test at 5% level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis, **There will be significance difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test of the students** is accepted. The significance at 5% level suggested that the difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test was due to the effect of the treatment, not due to chance.

To test the second hypothesis, T- analysis was carried out for each skill. The analysis revealed that the formative assessment could bring significant difference in the score of the pre and post test for reading, writing and grammar. There was no significant difference found in vocabulary of pre and the post test.

Major Findings

Thus, it could be concluded that formative assessments can improve communicative competence of vernacular medium secondary level students as reading, writing and grammar including overall scores have shown significant improvement in the post test. The learners feedback also revealed that they enjoyed testing with different techniques and with the knowledge of what is expected through rubrics sharing. It can also be concluded that vocabulary needs more practice in the tried out programme.

Conclusion

The formative assessment is a very good way of testing Communicative English. The rubrics make the assessment more systematic and it also make the learners responsible without added stress. As assessment is a continuous process and done using alternative techniques, it becomes an integral part of the teaching - learning process as expected. The study has been tried out only in one region of the Gujarat state and requires further investigation in different regions with different students. It is also recommended that listening and speaking may be added for further research.

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Department of Communication Skills, Marwadi Education Foundation's Group of Institutions, Rajkot – Gujarat (INDIA)
