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Educational assessment: concept, forms, importance

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Abstract:

Educational assessment constitutes an inseparable component of the teaching–learning process. It is closely linked to the curriculum, as well as to educational, instructional, and social objectives. Moreover, it serves as a fundamental mechanism for evaluating the learner's performance in terms of quality and mastery. Its purposes include assessing levels of competence, verifying the degree of performance with respect to the teacher, and acting as a catalyst for developing intellectual capacities, fostering skills, enhancing performance, increasing efficiency, and identifying weaknesses in order to address them while reinforcing strengths. Educational assessment further contributes to the improvement and advancement of education through curriculum renewal and the implementation of necessary reforms aimed at enhancing learner outcomes. Overall, the sound application of educational assessment ensures the achievement of the intended goals of the teaching–learning process.

Keywords: Educational assessment, teacher, learner, objectives, measurement, teaching–learning process.

I. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is considered a fundamental component of the teaching–learning process and one of the essential pillars upon which educational practice is built. It is used to judge the extent to which the desired objectives have been achieved. Through its application, the degree of learners' comprehension of the curriculum content becomes evident. It also enables the identification of the impact of all planned and implemented teaching and learning activities, as well as their weaknesses. Accordingly, alternatives can be proposed to reinforce strengths and address areas of deficiency.

Thus, assessment encompasses all types of exercises, tests, and comparative research methodologies aimed at achieving intended goals through the use of efficient and productive approaches. Educational assessment is therefore not limited to the study of variables related to the learner alone; it also addresses curricula and instructional materials. Consequently, its applications are numerous and diverse. It plays an effective role in ensuring the success of the teaching–learning process by fostering balance and integration among its various components.

This raises several key questions: What is meant by assessment? What is the difference between assessment and evaluation? What are its forms? And what is its significance

1. The Concept of Educational Assessment: Linguistically and Terminologically

1.1. Linguistic Meaning of Assessment:

In Lisān al-ʿArab, under the root q-w-m (قوّم), the following meanings are provided: "He evaluated and appraised the commodity, i.e., he estimated its value… The term qīmah (value) is the singular of qiyam, and its origin is wāw, as it takes the place of the thing. The value is the price of an item as determined through appraisal. One may say 'they appraised it among themselves.' When a thing becomes compliant and its course is properly maintained, it is said to be straight (istaqāma). Istiqāmah (uprightness) refers to rectification, as in the expression used by the people of Mecca: 'I straightened (evaluated) the goods,' meaning 'I appraised them.' In a hadith, they said: 'O Messenger of God, would you fix prices for us?' He replied: 'God is the One who sets prices,' meaning determines their value." (manzur)

Similarly, in Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ, it is stated: "Qīmah (value), is the singular of qiyam. An object is said to have no value if it does not endure. 'I evaluated the commodity' means I determined its price. Istaqāma means to become straight or upright, and 'I rectified it' means I adjusted or corrected it; thus, it becomes sound (qawīm) and upright (mustaqīm)" (Al-Fayrouzabadi, 2013)

From the above, it becomes evident that the term qawwama (to assess/evaluate) conveys meanings related to straightness, rectification, and the removal of deviation or distortion. These meanings carry significant implications for the concept of assessment in the educational field. From an educational perspective, the term fundamentally refers to two essential aspects:

Correction and remediation of errors during practice or training.

Assigning a specific value to learners' outcomes across various domains

1.2. Terminological Definition of Educational Assessment:

The definitions of educational assessment have varied due to differing perspectives among researchers regarding this concept. Despite this diversity, these definitions largely converge within the same general framework. Accordingly, this study will focus on some representative definitions.

Educational assessment is defined as "the process in which the results of quantitative and qualitative measurement, along with any information obtained through other appropriate means, are used to make judgments about a specific aspect of the learner's personality and a particular component of the curriculum. Based on these judgments, decisions are made with the aim of developing or improving that aspect of the learner's personality or the curriculum element." (Dr. Ratib Ashour, Muhammad Fouad Al-Hawamdeh, 2003)

It has also been defined by Yahya Aliyah Al-Assali as "the process of determining the extent to which learners have achieved the intended objectives, and making decisions accordingly. It also involves identifying changes in the learner's behavior, determining the degree and magnitude of such changes, and taking the necessary remedial decisions in response." (Al-'Asali Yahya Aliya, 2005)

Accordingly, assessment can be understood as a diagnostic process through which both strengths and weaknesses are identified, and the extent to which learners have achieved the desired objectives is determined. Through this process, the effectiveness of the teacher, the learner, the instructional content, and the educational program can be evaluated. It also involves investigating the underlying causes of any shortcomings or weaknesses, followed by proposing appropriate solutions and remedial measures. Assessment may be either quantitative or qualitative in nature.

Furthermore, assessment is an operational process aimed at evaluating the efforts made to achieve the intended educational objectives in accordance with prior planning. It is therefore a diagnostic, remedial, and preventive process, designed to generate useful data and information that support informed decision-making, with the purpose of modifying and improving educational practices.

2. The Difference between Measurement, Evaluation, and Assessment:

Table 1: The Difference between Measurement, Evaluation, and **Assessment**

Measurement	Assessment
It is the process of determining the amount or level of specific traits or characteristics in the learner	It is the process of evaluating and assigning value or quality to the components of the teaching–learning process.
Measurement is limited to providing specific information about the object or subject being measured; it aims at collecting data and information about the learner's performance.	Assessment aims at issuing a judgment or decision regarding the level of achievement or effectiveness; it also aims at diagnosis and remediation and contributes to improvement and development.
Measurement is quantitative.	Assessment is qualitative.
Measurement focuses on parts.	Assessment addresses the whole.
Measurement is the process of collecting data and information.	Assessment is the process of evaluating and assigning value to that data; it builds on both measurement and evaluation processes.
Measurement precedes assessment and constitutes its foundation.	Assessment encompasses both measurement and evaluation.
Measurement answers a single question: How much?	Assessment goes further by answering: What is the value of the scores in relation to educational objectives? What is their quality? How can they be modified, corrected, or improved?

Many specialists fail to clearly distinguish between these three concepts due to the overlap in their meanings. The concept of measurement is closely associated with the language of quantity; it is defined as "the description of characteristics or attributes in quantitative terms." (Ghoneim, 2004)Accordingly, measurement is a quantitative process through which the characteristics or features of objects are determined numerically, in accordance with predefined rules or standards. For example, measuring the achievement of a group of learners in a specific part of a subject through an achievement test involves correcting the test and assigning scores. The measurement process ends once these scores are determined and expressed as quantitative values.

As for evaluation, it is defined as "assigning value to something according to predetermined criteria."(Ghoneim, 2004) The evaluation process is limited to making a judgment about the value of a given entity. It involves a diagnostic aspect, such as assessing learning outcomes, appreciating learners' achievement and performance, and judging them as successful or unsuccessful based on valid and objective data. However, it does not extend to making decisions regarding improvement or development.

In contrast, educational assessment is the process through which judgments are made about the extent to which the educational process has succeeded in achieving its intended objectives. Its purpose is to identify strengths and weaknesses within the teaching–learning process. Assessment thus serves as a fundamental pillar for improving the quality of education. Therefore, the concept of assessment is broader than both measurement and evaluation.

Assessment involves assigning value to a given entity, making judgments about it, and correcting its deficiencies. Hence, it is more comprehensive than evaluation, as it does not stop

at determining value but necessarily includes modification and improvement based on the judgments made.

3. Forms of Assessment:

The forms of assessment vary according to the basis upon which the assessment process is established. Some are based on the timing of their implementation, others on a specific stage, and still others on their nature. In light of the modern conception of assessment—characterized by continuity and sequence—three main forms of assessment can be distinguished

3-1 Pre-assessment or (Diagnostic Assessment):

It is defined as "the type of assessment conducted by the teacher to examine students' readiness to learn a new topic, with the aim of determining their initial level, abilities, prior knowledge, and skills before engaging in the teaching process." (Ratib Qasim Ashour, Muhammad Fouad Al-Hawamdeh, 2009)

Accordingly, pre-assessment is a procedure carried out by the teacher at the beginning of the academic year or at the outset of the teaching process. Its purpose is to obtain information about the learner's prior competence, abilities, and inclinations. Based on this information, the teacher makes decisions regarding subsequent learning activities. In this sense, pre-assessment helps the teacher design instructional plans on sound foundations and accurate data about learners, thereby contributing to the success of the teaching–learning process.

The importance of diagnostic assessment lies in its ability to save time and effort. Instead of discovering at the end of a lesson or instructional unit that some learners lack the prerequisite knowledge necessary to begin new content, the teacher can address such gaps at the beginning of the lesson or unit. This type of assessment aims to:

– Determine learners' abilities and readiness to acquire specific knowledge and learning experiences.

– Help correct issues in the teaching–learning process as they occur.

– Identify learners' interests, tendencies, and learning styles.

– Enable the teacher to optimize effort, time, instructional materials, and teaching methods in ways that align with learners' cognitive, emotional, and affective characteristics.

3-2 Formative Assessment (or Constructive Assessment):

It is defined as "the type of assessment that accompanies the teaching process from its beginning to its end and is integrated into its various activities, with the aim of determining the extent of students' progress toward the intended instructional objectives, as well as their level of comprehension and understanding of the subject matter." (Ratib Qasim Ashour, Muhammad Fouad Al-Hawamdeh, 2009)

From this definition, it is evident that formative assessment closely follows and aligns with the teaching process, focusing on ongoing, real-time learning. Its purpose is to identify the difficulties and obstacles that hinder learners from effectively following the lesson, and, on the other hand, to address and overcome these obstacles by devising appropriate remedial strategies. It also aims to reinforce and enrich areas of strength and to refine learning objectives, which gives this type of assessment its formative character.

Accordingly, formative assessment provides both the teacher and the learner with continuous feedback regarding learners' errors, learning difficulties, what they have actually learned, their level of achievement, areas of weakness, and the extent to which the planned objectives have been achieved. It also contributes to the improvement of teaching methods and may lead to the modification or adjustment of objectives when necessary.

This type of assessment aims to:

- Measure learners' outcomes and monitor their progress and development.

- Guide learners in the right direction.

- Diagnose learning difficulties by identifying strengths and weaknesses in learners' achievement and development.

- Provide feedback to the teacher.

- Assist the teacher in improving instructional methods and approaches.

3-3 Summative (Final) Assessment:

It is It is defined as "the type of assessment based on the results of tests administered by the teacher at the end of a lesson, a term, or an academic year, with the aim of determining students' final levels." (Asaad Hussein Atwan, Shaima Sobhi Abu Shaaban)

It is also described as "the form of assessment that takes place at the end of a semester, an instructional unit, or an educational program. It provides a basis for assigning grades or marks fairly to students and may also supply data used to prepare academic reports and certificates." (Ratib Qasim Ashour, Muhammad Fouad Al-Hawamdeh, 2009)

Thus, summative assessment measures learning outcomes through achievement tests or examinations conducted by educational institutions for the purpose of awarding grades or academic qualifications. It is a comprehensive procedure carried out at the end of a given instructional sequence to determine the extent to which the predefined objectives have been achieved. In this sense, it enables the teacher to identify learners' actual results and the outcomes of their efforts by assigning grades or evaluations that reflect their level of competence in mastering specific tasks.

Moreover, it is designed to assess learners' outcomes at the end of a defined educational stage, as is the case with the Baccalaureate Examination, which represents the culmination of learning across multiple educational phases. The main objectives of summative assessment can be summarized as follows:

- Assess learners' final achievement.

- Predict success or failure in educational programs, thereby evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the curriculum.

- Help determine the coherence and integration of the elements of the instructional situation, including objectives, methods, and resources, in achieving learning goals.

- Enable the teacher to identify the gap between intended objectives and actual outcomes.

Based on the above, it becomes clear that these forms of assessment are complementary and cannot be reduced to a single type. Diagnostic assessment is closely linked to both formative and summative assessment. While it is conducted prior to instruction, it may, in many cases, rely on the results of summative assessment. Likewise, formative assessment may sometimes be built upon diagnostic assessment. Therefore, assessment is a continuous process that accompanies educational activity at all stages; it is "a process that precedes pedagogical action, continues alongside it, and follows it—that is, before, during, and after instruction." (Muhammad Sari, 2002)

4. The Importance of Educational Assessment:

Educational assessment is a vital component of the teaching–learning process, as it enables continuous feedback on all its elements. Through this feedback, the degree of success or failure encountered can be determined, as it is reflected in learners' final achievement outcomes. It also provides the teacher with a clear understanding of their methods and performance. Accordingly, the importance of educational assessment lies in the following:

Identifying learners' educational needs and enhancing their motivation to learn:

Assessment helps reveal learners' strengths and weaknesses, reinforcing the former and addressing the latter. It also provides learners with information about their level of performance, learning progress, abilities, and inclinations. In this sense, assessment enables learners to become aware of their actual level and readiness.

Providing feedback to the teacher:

Assessment supports the teacher by offering information about their performance, skills, and instructional practices. This is achieved through identifying weaknesses and shortcomings in teaching methods. It also encourages effective lesson planning by clearly defining objectives in order to achieve desired outcomes. Consequently, educational assessment helps the teacher select effective resources and teaching strategies that align with learners' needs, abilities, and interests, while taking into account individual differences.

A fundamental pillar in curriculum development:

Through assessment, strengths and weaknesses in educational programs can be identified. This allows those responsible for the teaching–learning process to review and improve curricula, as well as to provide recommendations and proposals for enhancement and development. The primary aim of educational assessment is not merely to issue judgments, but to improve and develop education.

In conclusion, educational assessment encompasses and supports all components of the teaching–learning process (teacher, learner, and curriculum) in order to determine the extent of success or failure in achieving the intended educational objectives.

II. Conclusion:

In conclusion, assessment is a continuous, essential, and comprehensive process aimed at synthesizing the objectives of instruction across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, as well as the methods and tools used in teaching, in order to determine their effectiveness. Assessment is broader and more comprehensive than exercises and tests, as it encompasses all forms of measurement and testing that help determine the learner's level. It serves as an ongoing means of diagnosis and remediation, focusing on the learner, objectives,

content, methods, tools, and even the evaluation of assessment itself (meta-assessment). Thus, assessment is a human-centered process that is diagnostic, preventive, and remedial in nature.

Moreover, the purpose of assessment is to determine the effectiveness of the pedagogical process in all its integrated components: the learner, the teacher, and the method. This becomes particularly evident when learners are encouraged to mobilize and apply their linguistic repertoire to express various situations. The aim is to enable the learner to acquire and effectively use the knowledge they have learned, and to employ it in expressing their essential needs within the linguistic community.

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