

Assessment practices in Algerian primary schools since the introduction of English language and physical education: A Didactic Analysis

ممارسات التقويم في المدارس الابتدائية الجزائرية بعد إدخال اللغة الإنجليزية والتربية البدنية:
تحليل تربوي

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Abstract:

The introduction of the English language and physical education into the curriculum of Algerian primary schools has generated significant interest from both teachers and education researchers. This paper examines the type of assessment used in this educational context in Algeria. It aims to understand how teachers assess students' English language skills and physical and sports abilities and analyze the didactic implications of these assessment practices.

Keywords: Assessment, didactics analysis, primary school system, English language skills, physical education abilities.

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ملخص

اثر إدخال اللغة الإنجليزية والتربية البدنية والرياضة إلى المنهاج المدرسي للمدارس الابتدائية الجزائرية اهتمامًا كبيرًا بين المعلمين والباحثين التربويين على حد سواء. يتناول هذا المقال نوع التقويم المستخدم في النظام التعليمي الجزائري. يهدف المقال إلى فهم كيفية تقويم المعلمين لمهارات اللغة الإنجليزية لدى المتدربين وقدراتهم البدنية والرياضية، وتحليل الآثار التعليمية لهذه الممارسات التقويمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية

التقويم، تحليل تربوي، النظام المدرسي الابتدائي، مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية، قدرات النشاطات البدنية والرياضية.

Introduction

Educational reform in Algeria has brought about significant changes in the primary school system, including the introduction of English language instruction (since 2022-2023) and physical education (2023-2024). These additions have raised questions about how English language skills and physical and sports competencies are assessed in this new context. Assessment is a crucial element of any educational system as it influences how teachers teach and students learn. In this paper, we will closely examine the type of assessment used in Algerian primary schools since the introduction of the English language and physical education, with a focus on the didactic implications of these assessment practices.

Our research questions are formulated as follows:

- How do teachers assess students' English language skills and physical abilities?
- What are the didactic implications of these assessment practices?

1. Literature review

Algerian researchers have produced a substantial body of work on the subject of assessment, highlighting the complex nature of evaluating learners. In the context of this research, we will mention two indicative works: El Hadi Soltani (2020) and Hakim HARITI and Fahima LAMMARI (2017).

In 2013, Boubekar Yahiaoui published a paper titled "School Physical Education and Sports in Algeria." The researcher aimed to uncover the various aspects of a noticeable decline in school physical education and sports. This regression could be attributed to factors of varying complexity related to history, political choices, teacher training, and more. The researcher attempted to analyze this regression phenomenon, understand its causes, and perhaps find remedies capable of initiating a beneficial change for the education of Algerian children and adolescents.

In 2017, Hakim HARITI and Fahima LAMMARI published a paper titled "Conceptions of Evaluation, Learning Regulation, and the Gender of Students in Physical Education." According to the authors of this paper, the analysis of regular and/or certificative evaluation practices in Algeria reveals that teachers engage in technical regulation (technical didactic regulation) since the curriculum focuses more on team sports. However, the certification of achievements is based more on athletic tests with a normative form where performance takes precedence. These regulation and certification practices result in gender-based inequalities in grading, as girls tend to

distance themselves from this model and prefer physical activities without necessarily needing to compete against opponents or produce outstanding performances. This paper summarizes the research findings conducted by the research teams at the Laboratory of Sciences and Practices of Physical, Sports, and Artistic Activities (SPAPSA) at the University of Algiers 3.

All the aforementioned works have allowed us to explore the epistemological reflections currently being conducted on assessment. In contrast to the previously mentioned works, our research will approach the question of assessment from a different perspective because our objectives are to develop assessment skills specific to the Algerian school context and attempt to find solutions to various assessment practices.

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1. Definition of assessment

This section aims to define what we mean by the term “evaluation”, present how it is perceived and experienced by various stakeholders, and categorize the different forms it can take.

The concept of evaluation has undergone several changes in recent decades in the field of education. It has become an essential activity in all teaching and learning situations, whether for the teacher or the learner.

Evaluation should not only help identify students’ achievements but also certify those achievements and the competencies yet to be acquired. According to Michel Barlow (2003), “evaluation is about assessing the degree of success, as well as the still-open possibilities for improvement and accomplishment”. Therefore, the evaluator’s objective is not only to judge the accomplishments but also to provide the opportunity for the student to do better.

2.2. Different assessment types

We present the different types of evaluation, namely diagnostic, formative, constructive, and summative evaluation. All assessments are not the same. Indeed, a teacher may assess their learners but may not have the same pedagogical objectives.

The work of Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus (1971) is the origin of the distinction between three functions of assessment. These three functions contribute to the same goal: regulating the processes of education. Firstly, there is diagnostic or prognostic assessment. It is conducted before a training action to adjust the modalities or direct the individual towards suitable learning. Diagnostic assessment provides an overview

of the learner's achievements. It allows for a joint definition between the learner and the trainer. According to Mondor: “Diagnostic assessment does not aim to immediately correct what appears to be poorly understood, incomplete, or missing. It simply provides a snapshot of the students' knowledge, which will allow the teacher to adjust their pedagogical planning”. (Mondor, 2017)

Secondly, formative assessment is aimed at guiding learning. It takes place during the training process to guide learners and facilitate their progress. It is a privileged moment for regulating learning. Formative assessment focuses on cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational processes that can explain encountered errors and developing approaches. The goal is to promote active learner engagement through the use of self-regulation tools and co-evaluation exchanges between the learner and the teacher. Through this, the learner gains a more conscious and controlled capacity for self-regulation of their learning. According to Scallon (2000), “formative evaluation is a continuous evaluation process aimed at ensuring the progress of each individual in a learning process, with the intention of modifying the learning situation or the pace of this progress, to bring about (if necessary) appropriate improvements or corrections” (p. 21).

Thirdly, summative assessment occurs at the end of a cycle and is certainly the most widespread type. It involves assessing and certifying the competencies and knowledge acquired by the learner at the end of a training course. This is the type of evaluation communicated to other stakeholders in the education system (parents, administration, universities, etc.). It often takes the form of exams, grades, or assessments. According to Viau, summative assessment “focuses on a terminal objective rather than partial

knowledge” (2009, p. 27). Summative evaluation is the most commonly used type, with many teachers assessing their learners only at the end of a session to assess their knowledge.

In recent writings on evaluation, a fourth form of evaluation has been described: constructive assessment. It resembles formative evaluation as it directly contributes to the regulation of learning. The main difference is that the learner evaluates their own areas of competence and difficulties. Constructive evaluation is suggested by the teacher, but it is the student who derives information from it. It helps develop the learner's self-assessment.

These four types of assessment are not contradictory; in fact, they are complementary. Diagnostic evaluation allows for adjusting one's teaching practice to the learners.

Formative and constructive evaluations are tools for preparing for summative evaluation, which is the final assessment of the pedagogical sequence.

3. Methodological approach

As part of our research on evaluation in the Algerian school context, we conducted a field investigation using a semi-structured interview method.

3.1. Presentation of the semi-structured interview

To understand the type of evaluation used in Algerian primary schools, we conducted a survey among English and physical education teachers. A semi-structured interview was conducted with these teachers to gather information about their assessment practices. Additionally, discussions were held with education experts to analyze the didactic implications of these practices.

The purpose of this semi-structured interview is to collect relevant and specific data on evaluation in Algerian primary schools, highlighting the domains of English and physical education. The responses from teachers will help us better understand current

assessment practices and identify areas for improvement in these two important educational domains. The interview consists of three parts:

- The first part aims to gather general information about teachers' opinions regarding the type of assessment currently used in Algerian primary schools for English and physical education. The questions in this section address general topics such as the relevance of current assessment, suggestions for improvement, the impact of results on teaching, and potential administrative or institutional obstacles.
- The second part focuses on the assessment of English language skills. It seeks to understand the methods, frequency, and challenges related to English assessment, as well as teachers' specific training in this regard. The questions in this section inquire about the assessment tools and methods used, the frequency of formative and summative assessments, the management of standardized exams, the training received, and specific challenges related to English assessment.
- The third part examines the assessment of students' physical and sports skills. It explores assessment methods, consideration of disparities in access to sports facilities, the balance between technical skills and understanding of rules, and teacher training in this area. The questions in this section aim to gather information about assessment methods in physical education and sports, the management of disparities in facility

access, the relative importance of technical skills, teacher training, and approaches to measuring the progress of students' physical and sports skills.

3.2. Presentation of interview participants

Our interviews were conducted with around twenty teachers (10 English teachers and 10 physical education teachers) from primary schools in the western district of the city of Algiers (such as Said Ferioli, Hacene Benramdhane, etc.). We conducted these interviews during the second week of September. Each interview lasted for an hour and a half, during which our interviewees answered all the questions in our interview guide, as well as additional questions that allowed our interviewer to explore their thoughts in depth, enabling us to gather maximum information.

Our interviewees belong to different generations, with ages ranging from 25 to 60 years old. This diversity is important in our view because it allows us to understand the perspectives of different generations regarding the most effective type of evaluation.

4. Analysis of the semi-structured interview

Our analysis of the interviews conducted with physical education and English teachers is primarily qualitative in nature. This analysis involves identifying the opinions, beliefs, thoughts, ideas, positions, and assessment practices of teachers in the field.

4.1. General Information on Teachers' views regarding the type of assessment currently used in Algerian Primary Schools for English and Physical Education and Sports

In their daily practices, teachers state that:

- The type of assessment currently used in Algerian primary schools is suitable for teaching English and physical education and sports, as shown in this excerpt from one of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: "Do you think the type of assessment currently used in Algerian primary schools is suitable for teaching English and physical education and sports?"

Interviewee 1: "Yes, definitely".

- Teachers suggest increasing the number of teaching hours for these subjects to improve assessment practices because the current time is insufficient to adequately explain the curriculum, as indicated in this excerpt from one of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “Do you have any suggestions for improving assessment practices in these areas?”

Interviewee 1: “Increase the number of teaching hours for the subject because it is insufficient to explain the curriculum properly, which in turn affects classroom assessment”.

- Teachers affirm that assessment results have a positive influence on the teaching of both subjects (physical education and sports and English) as they allow the teacher to better understand the students' levels and address their weaknesses, as shown in this excerpt from the statements of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “How do you think the results of assessments influence the teaching of English and physical education and sports?”

Interviewee: “Of course, assessment results influence the teaching of both subjects because assessment helps the teacher get a good understanding of the students' levels, enabling them to find solutions to students' weaknesses and difficulties”.

- Teachers do not mention major administrative or institutional obstacles to implementing more suitable assessment methods, as shown in this excerpt from the statements of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “Are there any administrative or institutional obstacles affecting your ability to implement more suitable assessment methods?”

Interviewee 1: “We don't have any issues on the administrative side. Perhaps the classroom space could negatively influence assessment because we rely on movements and games to explain effectively”.

4.2. Assessment Practices in English Language

The analysis of interviews conducted with English language teachers revealed the following elements:

- Teachers use various methods and assessment tools, including exercises, repetition, games, and images, to assess the linguistic skills of their primary school students in English. This is evident in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “What methods or assessment tools do you use to assess the linguistic skills of your primary school students in English?”

Interviewee 2: “We prepare a lot of exercises, use repetition, incorporate games, and utilize images”.

- Teachers primarily use formative assessments at the beginning of the class. They believe that formative assessments are most effective in assessing ongoing learning progress. This is reflected in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “How often do you use formative assessments (assessments during the learning process) in English?”

Interviewee 2: “At the beginning of the class”.

- For summative assessments (standardized exams) at the end of each term, teachers ensure that they cover all the units taught, are clear and diverse, and start with simpler questions before progressing to more challenging ones. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation. This is evident in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “How do you manage summative assessments (standardized exams) in English at the end of each term?”

Interviewee 2: “I try to ensure that the exam covers all the units taught. It should be clear, varied, and begin with the simpler elements before reaching the more challenging ones”.

- Teachers have not received specific training to develop assessments tailored to the Algerian context for English language teaching. This is evident in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “Have you received specific training to develop assessments tailored to the Algerian context for English language teaching?”

Interviewee 2: “Honestly, not really”.

- The main challenge mentioned by teachers is the lack of prerequisites in English among students, primarily due to the novelty of the language for them and the insufficient amount of class time dedicated to this subject, as illustrated by this excerpt from the statements of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “In your opinion, what are the main challenges faced when assessing linguistic skills in English in the Algerian context?”

Interviewee 2: “English is a new language for students, so they have no prerequisites, and as a result, the amount of time allocated to this subject is insufficient”.

In terms of our analysis, the introduction of English as a medium of instruction has posed a major challenge in terms of assessment. Teachers primarily use formative and summative assessments to evaluate linguistic skills in English. Formative assessments include activities such as classroom discussions, written exercises, and oral presentations. Summative assessments consist of standardized exams at the end of each term.

However, challenges remain regarding the objectivity of these assessments. It is often difficult to accurately measure students' linguistic skills, especially in a context where English is not the native language. Teachers require additional training to develop assessment tools more suited to this context.

4.3. Assessment practices in Physical Education and Sports

The analysis of interviews conducted with physical education and sports teachers revealed the following elements:

- To assess students' physical and sports abilities, teachers use an observation sheet for each student (individual assessment) as well as continuous assessment (formative assessment). This is evident in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “What methods or assessment tools do you use to assess the physical and sports abilities of your primary school students?”

Interviewee 3: “First, we use an observation sheet (individual assessment), and then we use continuous assessment (formative assessment)”.

- Teachers acknowledge that disparities in access to sports facilities and equipment exist, but they try to work with the available resources in their schools, as shown in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “How do you take into account disparities in access to sports facilities and equipment during the assessment in physical education and sports?”

Interviewee 3: “For me, I content myself with working with the means available within the school.”

- Teachers place more emphasis on technical skills compared to understanding the rules and participation, depending on the age of the students, as they believe that correct and healthy positions are essential, as shown in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “How important do you consider technical skills compared to understanding the rules and participation during the assessment in physical education and sports?”

Interviewee 3: “I give greater importance to technical skills than to the execution of basic movements and maneuvers. It depends on the age of the students because they learn more about correct and healthy positions than understanding the rules”.

- Physical education and sports teachers participated in a training on assessment adapted to the Algerian context before the 2023-2024 school year, as shown in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “Have you participated in training on assessment in adapted physical education in the Algerian context?”

Interviewee 3: “Yes, I participated in the training for physical education and sports teachers before the start of the school year. The training lasted for 11 days”.

To measure the development of physical and sports skills of students throughout the school year, the teacher uses formative assessment in every session, evaluating students' performance in various movements and positions and correcting errors continuously, as shown in the responses of the interviewed teachers:

Interviewer: “How do you measure the evolution of physical and sports skills of your students throughout the school year?”

Interviewee 3: “I assess the development of physical and sports abilities of my students through formative assessment in every session (evaluating the student's performance in various movements and positions and correcting errors continuously)”.

Regarding physical education and sports, the evaluation focuses on physical skills, motor coordination, and understanding the rules of different sports. Students are assessed through physical performances, intra-school sports competitions, and written tests on the rules of sports.

However, concerns have been raised about the fairness of these assessments. Some students may have limited access to quality sports equipment or adequate facilities, which can influence their performance. Therefore, it is essential to take these factors into account to ensure fair assessment.

Overall, teachers highlight the need to improve the time allocated for teaching English, for example, and emphasize the importance of assessments in better understanding students' needs. They seem to be aware of the specific challenges related to teaching these subjects and are looking to overcome them through adapted assessments.

5. Suggestions and proposals

Assessment practices in English language and Physical Education have significant implications for teaching and learning. To improve these practices, it is necessary to implement ongoing training for teachers to make them aware of the specific assessment challenges in these domains. Additionally, it is essential to develop assessment tools tailored to the Algerian context, considering linguistic peculiarities and material constraints. Based on our field research, we propose the following solutions:

- Increase Weekly Hours:

Propose increasing the weekly teaching hours allocated to English language and physical education in Algerian primary schools to allow for better understanding and practice of these subjects.

- Continual Teacher Training:

Organize specific training programs for teachers in the fields of English language teaching and physical education, focusing on assessment methods adapted to the Algerian context.

- Educational Materials:

Provide teachers with educational resources such as textbooks, audiovisual materials, and interactive tools to facilitate teaching and assessment in English.

- Continuous Formative Assessment:

Promote the regular practice of formative assessment throughout the school year to monitor students' progress and intervene promptly in case of difficulties.

- Diversify Assessment Methods:

Encourage the use of various assessment methods, including written exercises, oral assessments, educational games, and practical projects, to evaluate English language and physical education skills.

- **Raise Awareness of the Benefits of Assessment:**

Educate teachers, students, and parents about the advantages of assessment as a tool for improving learning and the quality of education.

- **Material Resources:**

Invest in sports infrastructure and equipment for physical education and sports to reduce disparities in access.

- **Individualized Monitoring:**

Implement individualized monitoring of students based on their assessment results, providing additional support to students facing difficulties.

- **Collaboration with Administration:**

Work closely with the school administration to address issues related to classroom space during physical education and sports instruction.

- **Teacher Collaboration:**

Encourage teachers to share their best practices in assessment and teaching to collectively improve assessment methods in Algerian primary schools.

These solutions and proposals aim to enhance the effectiveness of assessment in physical education and sports and in English in Algerian primary schools, taking into account the specific challenges faced by teachers.

6. Conclusion

The introduction of the English language and physical education in Algerian primary schools has opened up new possibilities in education. However, it is essential to review assessment practices to ensure fair and meaningful evaluation of English language skills and students' physical and sports abilities. Continuous reflection on the didactic implications of these practices is necessary to improve the quality of teaching and learning in these areas.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Teachers

Information about the Interviewee:

Gender:

Male

Female

Age:

Degree:

Years of Experience:

School:

Part 1: General

1. Do you think the type of assessment currently used in Algerian primary schools is suitable for teaching English and physical education and sports?
2. Do you have any suggestions for improving assessment practices in these areas?
3. How do you think the results of assessments influence the teaching of English and physical education and sports?
4. Are there any administrative or institutional obstacles affecting your ability to implement more suitable assessment methods?

Part 2: Assessment in English

1. What methods or tools do you use to assess students' language skills in English at the primary level?
2. How often do you use formative assessments (in-course assessments) in English?
3. How do you manage summative assessments (standardized exams) in English at the end of each term?
4. Have you received specific training to develop assessments adapted to the Algerian context in English teaching?
5. In your opinion, what are the main challenges encountered when assessing language skills in English in the Algerian context?

Part 3: Assessment in Physical Education and Sports

1. What methods or tools do you use to assess the physical and sports skills of your primary school students?

2. How do you take into account disparities in access to sports facilities and equipment during assessments in physical education and sports?
3. How much importance do you attach to technical skills compared to understanding rules and participation during assessments in physical education and sports?
4. Have you participated in training on assessment in physical education adapted to the Algerian context?
5. How do you measure the progression of physical and sports skills in your students throughout the school year?