

## A critical comparison of formative feedback and final examination

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**Abstract:** Assessment as a process of collecting and discussing information from diverse sources to develop an understanding of what learners can do with their knowledge is crucial in education. This paper critically compares two methods of assessment, formative feedback and final examination. The two methods of assessment discussed in this paper are aimed at helping teachers and students meet the essential in education since they determine if the objectives of education.

**Key words:** Formative feedback, Final examination, Assessment

**Publication online:** 15 August, 2020

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### I. Introduction

The two methods of assessment are kind of interesting because formative assessment enhances learning while summative assessment measures the competency of students. The nature, frequency, and goals of these two methods of assessment are different because formative assessment provides ongoing feedback that enables teachers to progress teaching and students to improve learning (Black & Wiliam, 2010). On the other hand, summative assessment evaluates the learning abilities of a student at the end of course unit by comparing it against the benchmarks. Moreover, certain types of summative assessment such as final mark have received criticism because of its tendency to lean on the target that is directly related to the final overall grade while formative feedback is a requirement for learning. This paper

analyzes the two methods based on their approaches, learning outcomes and criteria, and how they influence learners.

### II. Formative feedback

Most types of assessments in schools are visible assessments because they measure what learners have learned at the end of a course unit. Final examinations ensure that students have met the standards of entering an occupation or earn a certification. As much as many education departments in the world prefer final analysis, the assessment also serves a formative purpose. Formative assessment refers to evaluate students' daily learning process including learning performance, learning outcomes and reflected feelings, attitudes, strategies and other aspects of development (Bennett, 2011). In formative assessment, teachers aim to build on students' ideas and to provide useful feedback for moving students forward during the process of their learning (Black & Wiliam, 2010). With feedback, teachers could provide information about the quality of students' performance, guide students for specific responses, and give new questions for helping students to improve the learning outcomes. However, there are constraints to the wider practice that includes the lack of connection between classroom approaches and assessment, perceived tension between classroom-based formative assessment and high visibility of final examination evaluation (Värlander, 2008).

### III. Theoretical underpinnings behind the

## **formative feedback**

There is a variety of ways for assessors to provide formative feedback on student's learning performance, for example, comments can be written on assignments, or giving oral feedback after a presentation, and so on (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The feedback has been positively connected with students. For instance, written feedback is an assessment process that facilitates the learning process by providing concrete explanations for the received grades. This process of appraisal gives a student an opportunity to look back and comprehend the reason for the current achievement levels. It also offers a bridge from the current grades to the future performance by enabling the learner to understand how they are performing currently and how they can enhance their performance in the future (Wininger, 2005).

Learners use that feedback to reflect on their recent works and try to examine how the constructive essay may have improved or altered their current performance and apply the feedback to the future. A written feedback has some components that a teacher should implement when assessing students. First, the teacher should give positive feedback in areas that the student has excelled. This positive feedback is known as reinforcement whereby it serves to increase a particular behavior (Collins, Reiss and Stobart, 2010). Thus it serves as to reinforce that will sustain and develop the occurrence of a task done well. In the process, the instructor should realize that it is significant to strengthen the performance of a learner with positive comments regardless of the quality of the paper.

Even if the assignment requires a lot of improvements on the key components, positive feedback on several factors like good efforts on coming up with an interesting way of looking at the topic should be featured. The instructors should provide feedback on the key areas that the learner should improve. This comment should be constructive rather than critical. Critical comments are usually negative and

judgmental and leave the student feeling disheartened and unsure of the areas to develop (Collins, Reiss and Stobart, 2010). On the other hand, constructive comments are more of descriptive than evaluative describing the aspects a student should improve and why.

Hence the method of assessment allows tutors to provide an assessment to all students regardless of the performance. Even a high-quality paper receives feedbacks for improvement. This non-selective assessment will enable average students to develop and refine their skills because they do not feel that they are targeted for assessment (Graham, 2005). Furthermore, written feedback should be offered on particular elements of the coursework as well as the overall feedback on the assignments.

Written feedback has principles that the teacher base on when evaluating their students. The method of assessment enables the teacher to explain the comments. When describing the performance comments to the students, each teacher has a preferred strategy of giving the feedback. Some tutors select to write the comments by highlighting parts that need revision in the draft while others write comments in question form (Harlen, 2005). Many factors are considered in the strategies that a teacher uses to provide the feedback, and this depends on the teacher's beliefs about comments. For feedback to be more actual, the teacher need to explain to the learner how they give feedback because written question and parts of the draft highlighted will not be revised.

Overall, written feedback is usually effective when the teacher implements classroom activities that are related to the feedback after the student has received the comments. For example, if a teacher has highlighted about the transition in a particular writing assignment, the teacher should prepare class activities that will aid the student in revising the draft about the transition. In this way, the student will be able to respond to the comments. This process works efficiently when the learner responds to the teacher how he or she will

revise the paper using a computer rather than pen and paper (Harlen & James, 1997). An individual approach to providing comments is an important aspect that teachers keep in mind when assessing the student. The approach is essential because the teacher knows the weaknesses of a specific student.

#### **IV. The Strengths of Written Feedback**

The feedback requires learners to take responsibility for their education thereby promoting reflection and metacognition about their work (Keeley, 2015). Thus, written feedback enables students to carry out a self-assessment that is embedded in the learning undertakings. Moreover, it offers learning examples that state what is relevant and the particular grading rubrics that assess the learning activities of students. Specific, immediate and related to the learning objectives is the ranking criteria for an evaluative feedback, which could give them opportunities to revise and improve their understanding.

Also, most teachers apply principles of written feedback to recognize areas for improvement and enhance practical and constructive values of assessment, and improved teaching to learning the skills. Most instructors that use written feedback have an aim of accomplishing the lifelong goals of learning (Harris, Brown and Harnett, 2014). There is quantitative and qualitative proof indicating that teachers who incorporate written feedback have elevated the students level achievement that has allowed them to meet the requirements of increasingly varied learner populations. Therefore, this assessment has enabled them to close gaps in equity of the outcomes of the students. In this way, the approaches of written feedback have guided teachers in developing the learning to learn skills among students that are critical in providing knowledge (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Furthermore, written feedback has enhanced learning as it promotes high-equity education for students as it places

emphasis on the learning and teaching processes that involve students. The method allows students to actively build their comprehension of new ideas rather than just absorbing information. Students are able to develop a variety of strategies to enhance their skills and put new concepts into a broad context, which are significant for learning in other domain of life (Harlen & James, 1997). Because of school leaders and teachers always use the feedback about learners to produce an understanding of what works and how to share the information with colleagues and build their skills in addressing the learning needs of students, the promotion of high-equity education strengths becomes a culture of information in the classroom.

#### **V. The Weaknesses of Written Feedback**

However, teachers should highly concentrate on the difficulties of 'written feedback', specifically speaking, written feedback does not acknowledge the way the progress of a learner has improved over time. Efficient assessment is challenging to achieve since it is logically difficult to offer a detailed description of feedback of each student in a class (Harris, Brown and Harnett, 2014). Even with a class of few students, the process requires continuous time dedication from the teacher. In some cases, the comments may include so many spelling and grammar mistakes thereby provide a little advice on where the student should revise. In this way, the student cannot tell in parts that they have performed well, what areas need change and why the grade. Such situations leave students unable to correct the paper because the teacher has not indicated where the student has failed.

Even though written feedback promotes learning during the process, most studies indicate that the feedback that is mostly regarded as too lengthy or controlling tend to be disregarded by students who have limited learning time (Lee, 2008). The assessment method involves self-assessment, peer feedback, and other reflective activities that

necessitate students to compare their performance with the established standards of presentation. Sometimes, the process of delivering the feedback could be inadequate in a way that a student receives various comments from different tutors on the same assignment. This situation leaves a student confused and not knowing the areas to correct.

Finally, much attention must be paid to students' motivational beliefs and self-esteem. Feedback can have a positive or negative effect on motivational beliefs and on self-esteem (Lee, 2008). In terms of the negative feedback, this kind of feedback does not take care of the emotional aspect of receiving and processing feedback. For those students that have achieved lowly, the process is disheartening as it may arouse anxiety and depression. Therefore, the process requires teachers to preserve objectivity as there lacks a standard strategy format for the maintenance of learner distance and feedback (Lee, 2008). The system has many developed methodological challenges that need refinement to assess the effect of interventions. Sometimes, teachers give students feedback that is too cryptic such as "What's this?", "More" thereby not allow the students to gauge whether the comment is positive or negative.

## **VI. Final Written Examination**

As for summative assessment, it is the proper assessment of the results of classroom teaching, which usually carries out at the end of the term. When a module or a semester finished, assessment is required to both implement and evaluate final learning results, it can be called as final examination. For the assessment to be valid the results of the final examination need to be compared with a set of standards such as statewide or a national standard (Marchand & Furrer, 2014).

Summative assessment takes many forms such as performance task, oral product, written products, and standardized test. Performance tasks require learners to

complete a task that assesses a particular set of skills. For instance, final written examination has taken a high risk due to the consistent way in administered, scored and inferred. In terms of that, the performance of a large group can be measured. The assessment itself is not itself in high stakes, but it is often applied in high stakes purpose such as establishing the student that will pass or fail, the school that will receive more funding or reorganized (Lee, 2008).

There are impacts on the use of high-stake tests in the education curriculum and the way it affects the status of a teacher or a student. The use of final written examinations is a global trend whereby teachers focus on the content of tests, training students to answer different types of questions, using the transmission style of teaching, and administering frequent practice test. In such learning environments, teachers make little use of formative assessment in the education process (Marchand & Furrer, 2014). Thus summative assessment leads to the rise in scores since teachers focus on teaching students how to pass tests. But proponents of summative assessment have stated that it is not the achievement of the learning objectives as instructors can teach a student to excel any test, even thinking skills.

## **VII. Theoretical underpinnings behind the Final Written Examination**

Final written examination has heightened stakes that have changed the role of that teacher play. The institutional tasks of teachers have been improved as they are required to address work related testing apart from their instruction responsibilities. In this manner, teachers are needed to focus on some of the institutional tasks like coordinating the assignments of the students based on remedial programs and test scores, which has changed the nature of education atmosphere. Teachers are also required to group and regroup students based on the performance tests and analyze information based on the tests (Montgomery & Baker, 2007).

Due to spending a lot of time on formal work, teachers have little time for classroom activities. One research indicated that teacher waste 60-110 hours of instructional period a year due to the analysis and institutional work that is associated with summative assessment (Nicol, 2010). The rate of passing instructions to learners is diminishing because the curricula are designed for final written examinations. Final test assessment curricula require teachers to use prepared materials that they did not take part in developing. In this way, the system does not report about actual requirements in the classroom. In some examples, teachers may get limited opportunities to carry out instructional decisions; because they always teach courses with pacing guides and specific contents.

The assessment requires teachers to spend a lot of time on practicing tests that prepare learners for the final examinations. Therefore, such requirements reduce the instructions of teachers in the classroom. Instructional time is spent on strategies of how to perform well in tests (Montgomery & Baker, 2007). The feedback from the tests depends on rubrics that specify how the students are supposed to complete an assignment.

### **VIII. The Strengths of Final Written Examination**

Final written examination is the greatest significance of standardized test, which holds the schools and teachers accountable and responsible to let learners know what they are required to know of the summative assessment (Marchand & Furrer, 2014). It is because the scores are kept as public records and the teacher whose performance is not satisfactory comes under intense pressure. The scrutiny may lead to job loss and the school being taken over by other management. Moreover, final examination offers an appropriate way comparing students in sub-groups. The comparison is based on schools and even districts. Without such examination,

the comparison would not be possible because public schools in some districts are allowed to sit for the same tests (Montgomery & Baker, 2007).

The most important is, final examination encourage students and their teachers to improve their performance. This in turn helps them to gain the rewards or avoid the penalties (Henry et al. 2011). Students' ability to accurately predict what they know and do not know is an important skill in education, but unfortunately students often make inaccurate predictions. Students may reread material again and again; so that they always overconfident in how well they know the material. However, taking a test could lead students become less confident, which could be called 'underconfidence-with-practice effect' (Henry et al. 2011). Testing can help compensate for the tendency to be overly confident, which results in a more accurate assessment of learning. Students may take a practice quiz, realize which questions or items they got wrong, and then spend more time studying the items they missed.

Also, final written examination can provide teachers with valuable feedback about what students do and do not know, and teachers will pay attention to how students perform on examination and use that knowledge to inform their teaching in the future. If many students fail a particular topic on the test, it may be a sign to spend more time covering that material next time or use a different approach to teaching the materials.

### **IX. The Weakness of Final Written Examination**

The further study has been done by Harlen (2005), which indicates that if pupils are given only marks or grades, they do not benefit from the feedback on their work. Therefore, the final examination only incentives students who anticipate success, and it only promote motivations of

performance goals rather than learning goals. On the other hand, as of less successful students, repeated test would put them into lower self-esteem, which increases the gap between high and low achieving students. In most cases, such students tend to fail standardized written examination and therefore it is not a valid measure of their ability. Their learning skills are diminished through standardized tests. Instead of getting required support from tutors, students may feel that their learning is blocked and find it difficult to understand the knowledge being used in such tests.

There are a number of objections of written examination. It limits the learning of students as they emphasize on the examination ignoring other features of learning that are critical to the success of a student. For example, teacher designed teaching materials base on the actual situation from real life. This usually gets students engaged in discussion and sharing ideas. However, when this teacher explained that this specific example was not absolutely needed for the exam but that it would help students understand the module, quite a few students stopped taking notes and did not engage in any discussion. In the lectures after that attendance was poor, sometimes as low as 50 percent (Sambell, 2013). Furthermore, most high school graduates who have undergone summative assessment have a far worse lifetime outside of school, because they lack essential qualities such as consciousness, curiosity, perseverance, and sociability (Nicol, 2010). If the final examinations are administered in the way that trainer were prevented to assist teachers to develop the non-cognitive skills and bolster better life outcome, it will reduce the possibility for students learn in a positive direction.

Another limitation on the learning of students comes from the negative opinions of standardized tests that can offer to learners about themselves and their capabilities. Research indicates that when students see a strange adult controlling the outcomes and administration of the tests they are expected to do, they start losing the ability to perform

well in an exam and graduate (Nicol, 2016).

## X. Conclusion

The critical analyses of the two methods of assessment are separately discussed because they have different functions in learning (Värlander, 2008). Written feedback is a balanced assessment approach that is efficient in getting the most out of the students. For this reason, the assessment is essential in delivering excellent learning practices to students, and it is a relevant tool in staying in touch with how the students are learning and what they are being taught. Final examination assessment is based on the merit of a student in the standardized tests at the end of a term. The fundamental difference between the two methods is the feedback that students can use to close the gaps between where they need to be and where they are. This study shows that the teachers should be aware of the different assessment methods that could be used. The assessment should be recommended that summative exams can also provide feedback as a formative way to assist learners to identify the areas they are struggling and address the issue immediately. There seems to be value in maintaining the distinction between formative feedback and final examination while seeking synergy in relation to the processes of assessment (Harlen, 2005).

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