Giving Every Student Opportunities to Succeed: An Analysis of Students Integrated (Written and Oral) Assessment at Tishk International University-Erbil

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Abstract: Aim: This article reports on findings from work at Tishk International University-Erbil (TIU) as part of research undertaken to assess the conceptual understanding and critical thinking abilities of undergraduate students through integrated (written and oral) assessment. The research had two purposes: (1) to measure the various elements of students written and oral works; and (2) to use these common elements to address the soft-skills development issues of students and create opportunities for every student to succeed both in assessment and skill development.

Methodology: 4-Year Degree program students take core courses, and their assessment is divided into 40% Formative and 60% Summative. In 2019 Spring Semester 100 students (59% male and 41% female) were included using comprehensive sampling method comprising 4 classes of TIU for the research purpose. The 4 cohorts' formative (continuous) assessments data of written and oral coursework was collated and compared for measures of academic performance elements and how course activities and assignments promoted students' soft skills development.

Outcomes: Data sets were analyzed using frequency distribution tables to identify predictive patterns of students' conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills. The findings indicate a significant difference among students' skill sets. Students' scores were Novice 0-65% ≤ (written) w 57% | (oral) o 47%; Beginner 66-75% ≤ w 22% | o 27%; Competent 76-85% ≤ w 14% | o 11%; Proficient 86-100% ≤ w 7% | o 15%. Results indicate that assessing students without knowing the level of student's personal development had negative affect on students' performance. There was also a relationship between written and oral assignments scores and students' levels of personal development with regards to acquisition of soft skills that clearly reflected in their overall formative score.

Significance: Formative assessments are a valuable indicator to identify competencies of students and recognize who is doing well and who is most vulnerable and at risk of failing the course. Results from this study is significant to Course Coordinators in Kurdistan higher education in enabling them to create learning and skilling opportunities for students, so that they succeed both in their education and in real-world.

Keywords: Formative Assessment, Conceptual Understanding, Critical Thinking, Student's Personal Development

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Tishk International University- Erbil is committed to providing students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds with an excellent university experience to promote student success. Academic course assessment is a well-established key contributor to student success. "Academic Writing/Presentation is designed to provide the knowledge, concepts and skills students need to write/speak effectively for academic purposes" (McNaught & Benson, 2015, p. 75). But measuring the outcomes of student learning is an elusive task. Yet, Advocates of assessment in higher education often claim that engagement with assessment not only "will help professors save time, streamline analysis, avoid unnecessary and pointless busywork, and, most important, improve student achievement" (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006, p. ix). Students who are engaged and who learn to be successful early in their university studies are more likely to achieve and persist with their studies.

Building up the capability of students is the goal in education, and assessment is more than a useful adjunct for this task. As Paul Black states: "Assessment issues are not marginal features of education they are central. …The structure of assessment and testing policies is a complex one, involving the intersection of aspects of psychology, pedagogy, curriculum, statistics, professional competence and status, budgets and competing public and political priorities" (cited in Pollard, 2002, pp. 287-288). Sustained assessment engagement hinges on students' early success and sense of capability in their studies presenting a challenge for students who may be academically unprepared or educationally disadvantaged. In learning community classrooms, forms of assessment are used, although for somewhat different purposes, for example, quizzes are used not only for instructional feedback to individual students, but also to group them and provide interim or final grades. In addition, other forms of assessment, including peer evaluation, presentation, group work, and self-evaluation, are made (see Cushner et al., 2000, p. 134). All these measures are combined when judging what grades a student has earned.

Offering an academic course, like any activity, can be done with varying degrees of investment of time and resources. Hence, from this perspective, teachers can examine the evidence of student learning found in the work done in the course, and there are opportunities for reflection on the quality of those achievements. It is possible that multiple offerings of a course can be considered at one time, resulting in a longitudinal account of the impact of successive attempts to promote understanding. Changing instruction planning and design to improve the learning outcomes of a course involves a variety of intellectual skills ranging from analysis to interpretation to evaluation. The insight needed to improve the effectiveness of iterative offerings of a course is certainly a high -end form of intellectual work (Bernstein cited in Davis & Buskist, 2002, pp. 215-217). These components were touched in this research and closely examined to find concrete solutions. They present an honest description of the teaching and assessment process, collaborative interaction of teacher with students and the strategies both learning as well as teaching used for improvement.

1.2 Assumptions and Theoretical Model

- Scholars advocate the practical use of data to truly inform instruction and to use that data regularly to improve instruction and student achievement (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006, p.95).
- Teachers must begin by focusing their energies and time on the recurring analysis of assessment data to better meet the diverse learning needs of all students. Assessment gives classroom teachers the timely data needed to provide students with the "educational booster shots" of differentiated instruction.
- Developing high-quality assessment tools within the university assessment culture by analyzing strengths and weaknesses in student understanding and predicting likely student performance to set and achieve definite goals for improvement.
- High-quality classroom data clearly reflective of the students' attainment of the most critical academic content – and available to teachers routinely throughout the semester/academic year – are the data teachers need to be able to analyze in order to determine if students are indeed "hitting the target" (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006; Davis & Buskist, 2002).
- Lastly, teachers need to learn that rather than stress weaknesses, assessments are holistic and constructive (Gross, 1997).

1.3 Objectives: General and Specific

To identify major issues related to teaching which instigate poor assessment performance of students and to act appropriate for overcoming the causes of poor performance. To offer practical steps to help teachers to develop data-driven between instruction and assessment to improve the quality of instruction delivery and enhancement of students' assessment performance. The specific objectives treated towards the achievements of the general objectives are:

- Identification of any meaningful relation between teaching practice and students' performance.
- To examine students' assessment data to truly diagnose learning needs and plan instructional modifications to achieve improvements.
- Understanding the role systemic analysis of assessment data play in an interdependent instruction and assessment system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Assessment: Principles and Purposes

Assessment, according to Wynne Harlen et al. (cited in Pollard, 2002, pp. 283-286) is the process of gathering, interpreting, recording, and using information about students' responses to an educational task. A major role identified for assessment is that of monitoring learning and informing teaching decisions on a day-to-day basis. In this role, assessment is an integral part of the interactions between teacher, student and learning materials.

2.2 Assessment: Key Principles in Education

- Assessment must be used as a continuous part of the teaching – learning process, involving students, wherever possible, as well as teachers in identifying next steps.
- Assessment of any purpose should serve the purpose of improving learning by exerting positive force on the curriculum at all levels. It must, therefore, reflect the full range of curriculum goals, including the more sophisticated skills and abilities now being taught.
- Assessment must provide an effective means of communication with stakeholders and other partners in the learning enterprise in a way which helps them support students' learning.
- The choice of different assessment procedures must be decided based on the purpose for which the assessment is being undertaken. This may well mean employing different techniques for different assessment purposes.
- Assessment must be used fairly as part of information for judging the effectiveness of universities. This means taking account of contextual factors that, as well as the quality of teaching, affect the achievement of students.

2.3 Assessment: Purposes in Education

- Formative Role: As a means for providing feedback to teachers and students about ongoing progress in learning, has a direct influence on the quality of students' learning experiences and thus on the level of attainment which can be achieved.
- Summative Role: As the means for communicating the nature and level of students' achievements at various points in their schooling and when they leave.
- Certification Role: Used as a means of summarizing for the purposes of selection and qualification, what has been achieved.
- Evaluative or Quality Assurance Role: As providing part of the information used in judging the effectiveness of educational institutions and of the whole system.

The literature on the purposes of assessment consistently stresses that: If assessment is to be used in classrooms to help students learn, it must be transformed in two fundamental ways. First, the content and character of assessment must be significantly improved. Second, the gathering and use of assessment information and insights must become a part of the ongoing learning process (Shepard cited in Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006, p. 21). This dual purpose of assessment is well expressed in the following statement: "Assessment must be seen as an instruction tool for use while learning is occurring and as an accountability tool to determine if learning has occurred" (National Education Association of America cited in Ainsworth & Viegut 2006, p. 21). Hence, the true purpose of the assessment results is to use them to their intended purpose – improving student achievement through differentiated instruction.

The literature review clearly shows that teaching – learning contains many components. Each of these components plays a powerful role, both independently and interdependently, in advancing student learning. The essential focus of this study is to showcase the roles of instruction and assessment as they connect to each these interrelated components. When intentionally aligned in this way, each level of assessment results can provide professors with "predictive value" as to how students are likely to do on the next level of assessment. If professors use the assessment data to diagnose student learning needs and

then modify instruction deliberately to meet those needs, the post-assessment results will certainly demonstrate student gains – if the assessments align so that a same – measure to same – measure comparison can be made. Further, when professors use that data diagnostically with the deliberate intention of bringing about improvements in student achievement – students are far most likely to achieve desired results.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Subjects

All 88 students enrolled in four different courses from Grade I, II, III and IV in the Spring Semester of academic year 2019 were selected using comprehensive sampling method. Twelve students had taken more than one course, hence, the total number of students taking the course come to total 100. The subjects for the study were rather homogenous: 51 were males and 37 females. Age and ethnicity were not assessed for this study. The students were instructed by the researcher in the said semester. The students' assessment data was used without their consent but by not disclosing their backgrounds, their identities have been protected. The Cohort were divided into four groups: SSCA, SSCB, SSCC and SSCD.

Table 1: Class-wise distribution of male and female students

No.	Students Distribution	Female	Male	Total	Percentage M/F Students
1.	Spring Semester Cohort A (SSCA)	05	13	18	28% Female 72% Male
2.	Spring Semester Cohort B (SSCB)	10	09	19	52.63% Female 47.37% Male
3.	Spring Semester Cohort C (SSCC)	12	12	24	50% Female 50% Male
4.	Spring Semester Cohort D (SSCD)	15	24	39	38.46 Female 61.54 Male
	Total	42	58	100	42% Female 58% Male
	Note: Students taking Multiple Courses	05	07	12	*Actual no. 88* *Female: 37* *Male: 51*

Source: Primary Date compiled through Department & Attendance Data Protocol

3.2 Collecting the Evidence

Four sources of data were used for this investigation, collected during the Spring Semester of academic year 2019: (a) 10% Quiz was administered as part of written assessment, (b) 10% Homework Assignment was administered to each student with specific topic pertaining to the course to encourage originality, (c) 10% Presentation was administered as part of Classroom work that related to the Homework Assignment but focusing on visual elements. (d) 10% was assessed as participation of low and high performers in classroom dynamics taking into consideration, most of all classroom behavior.

3.3 Methods of Data Analysis

After collecting the data with the help of assignments, presentations, participation and quizzes, the data has been analyzed. This was done first by editing the collected data to eliminate any errors in the collected data. Then, the researcher classified the scores according to their similarities to defined groups and described the relationship. The processed and analyzed data of the study was made using comparison and presented in the form of frequency distribution and percentage considering its appropriateness to the processed data and descriptive method of data presentation.

4. Results

Assessment is probably the most important thing we can do to help our students learn. We may not like it, but students can and do ignore our teaching; however, if they want to get a qualification, they must participate in the assessment process we design and implement (Clarke, 2012). For that reason, it is worth thinking through, individually and collectively (Cushner et al., 2000), what we currently do and exploring how we can do our best to ensure that our assessment practices help rather than hinder learning.

The researcher analyzed the overall gathered data to look at findings with practical significance in addition to statistical significance. This is very important since action research has the avowed intention of making things better than they were before. This intention can be actualized by the teacher/researcher if he determines that the fundamental purpose of pedagogical action research is to systematically investigate one's own Course Coordination practice, with the dual aim of improving that practice and contributing to theoretical knowledge in order to benefit student learning.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of formative score of students of all cohorts

Sr. No.	SSCA		SSCB		SSCC		SSCD	
	Raw Score	Frequency	Raw Score	Frequency	Raw Score	Frequency	Raw Score	Frequency
1.	36	1	34	3	30	1	36	4
2.	35	1	33	1	28	4	35	3
3.	33	1	32	1	27	2	34	1
4.	32	2	31	1	26	2	33	2
5.	31	1	30	1	25	3	32	2
6.	30	1	29	1	24	1	29	1
7.	29	3	28	1	23	1	27	1
8.	28	4	27	1	22	1	26	1
9.	27	2	25.5	1	21	1	25	1
10	26	1	24.5	1	20	1	24	2
11	24	1	24	1	19	1	23	5
12			23	1	18	1	22	2
13			19	2	16	2	21	4
14			18.5	1	11	1	18	1
15			15	1	10	1	15	5
16			10	1	5	1	12	1
17							0	2
		n= 18		n= 19		n= 24		n= 39
Mean Scores		24.83/ (62.08%)		24.81 (62.03%)		22.00 (55.0%)		20.74 (51.85%)
Average Mean Scores: 23.09 (57.73%)								

Source: Primary data compiled from Final Grade Reports

From Table 2, one can easily identify that the mean scores are: SSCA (24.83/40), SSCB (24.81/40), SSCC (22.00/40) and SSCD (20.74/40). The averages in percentage are: SSCA (62.08%); SSCB (62.03%); SSCC (55.0%) and SSCD (51.85%) respectively. This clearly shows that the classroom averages mean score is exactly 57.73%. This clearly indicates that the lower performers are significantly higher than students who have performed well in written and/or oral presentation. This does not augur well for Students who aspire to succeed in the course and acquire vital skills. Hence, the researcher is of the opinion that it is best to identify through assessment data, which students are struggling and students who are doing well so that remedial measures can be designed and administered on an ongoing basis and especially for the summative assessment.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of written and oral score of students of all cohorts

| Sr. No. | SSCA | | | SSCB | | | SSCC | | | SSCD | | |
	Raw Score	Freq.	W/O	Raw Score	Freq.	W/O	Raw Score	Freq.	W/O	Raw Score	Freq.	W/O
1	36	1	19/17	34	3	(i) 16/18 (ii) 18/16 (iii) 16/18	30	1	15/15	36	4	(i) 18/18 (ii) 18/18 (iii) 18/18 (iv) 18/18
2	35	1	17/18	33	1	16/17	28	4	(i) 12/16 (ii) 13/15 (iii) 14/14 (iv) 13/15	35	3	(i) 18/17 (ii) 18/17 (iii) 18/17
3	33	1	18/15	32	1	16/16	27	2	(i) 13/14 (ii) 12/15	34	1	18/16
4	32	2	(i) 17/15 (ii) 18/14	31	1	14/17	26	2	(i) 13/13 (ii) 12/14	33	2	(i) 18/15 (ii) 16/17
5	31	1	16/15	30	1	15/15	25	3	(i) 11/14 (ii) 13/12 (iii) 12/13	32	2	(i) 16/16 (ii) 18/14
6	30	1	15/15	29	1	15/14	24	1	10/14	29	1	15/14
7	29	3	(i) 15/14 (ii) 14/15 (iii) 14/15	28	1	16/12	23	1	10/13	26	2	(i) 18/08 (ii) 14/12
8	28	4	(i) 13/15	27	1	15/12	22	1	06/16	25	1	10/15

			(ii) 14/14 (iii) 15/13 (iv) 14/14									
9	27	2	(i) 13/14 (ii) 16/11	25.5	1	15/10.5	21	1	06/15	24	2	(i) 10/14 (ii) 18/06
10	26	1	12/14	24.5	1	12/12.5	20	1	07/13	23	5	(i) 10/13 (ii) 16/07 (iii) 10/13 (iv) 16/07 (v) 10/13
11	24	1	13/11	24	1	13/11	19	1	07/12	22	2	(i) 10/12 (ii) 15/07
12				23	1	13/10	18	1	12/06	21	4	(i) 10/11 (ii) 10/11 (iii) 10/11 (iv) 14/07
13				19	2	(i) 14/5 (ii) 7/12	16	2	(i) 11/05 (ii) 11/05	18	1	12/06
14				18.5	1	13/5.5	11	1	06/05	15	5	(i) 10/05 (ii) 10/05 (iii) 10/05 (iv) 10/05 (v) 10/05
15				15	1	10/5	10	1	05/05	12	1	0/12
16				10	1	5/10	5	1	05/0	0	2	(i) 0/0 (ii) 0/0
	n= 18			n= 19			n= 24			n= 39		
Mean Scores	24.83			24.81			22.00			20.74		
Average Mean Scores 23.09												

Source: Primary data compiled from Final Grade Reports

Table 3 indicates individual students combined score in both written and oral works. There is no consistency in the performance. The students show varied skills: some are good in written work while others are doing well in presentation. The data has significant value for the professor to administer assessment based on the strength and weakness in either written or oral skills of the students. The professor can use the data to reinforce certain skills and to bring to the student's notice where the student is struggling and in which area the student is good (Zare & Othman, 2015). Feedback provided to learners can increase

their awareness of the gap between their current knowledge and skills, and their goals (Wharton, 2013). The more specific feedback is, the more it enables a learner to focus attention thoughtfully.

Table 4: Outcomes/results of written and oral score of students of all cohorts

STUDENTS' SCORES
• PROFICIENT: 86-100% ≤ (written) W - 7% | (oral) O - 15%
• COMPETENT: 76-85% ≤ (written) W - 14% | (oral) O - 11%
• BEGINNER: 66-75% ≤ (written) W - 22% | (oral) O - 27%
• NOVICE: 0-65% ≤ (written) W - 57% | (oral) O - 47%

Source: Primary data compiled from Final Grade Reports

As revealed in Table 4, the summary of final grades showed a gloomy picture. This finding suggests that in terms of performance, the students in novice and beginner levels far exceed the students in competent and proficient levels. A closer look at the Table indicates that there is equal ability of students at the novice and beginner levels with regard to written and oral assignments. While in the competent level, the students are better at written works than oral works. The difference is significant when it comes to the proficient levels. The written works shows lower performance while oral works are significantly higher. Hence, there is clear indication that students' performance is not balanced, and they need to be given feedback on improving their performance.

5. Discussion

Professors aren't getting the performance they need from their students. That's the results we found from the data that we analyzed. But often, the fault doesn't lie with the students, our research suggests. Rather, it rests with professors who fail to effectively tap diverse competency and perspectives of individual students – even with the best students (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006; Clarke, 2012). Some professors just don't recognize how profound the differences between their students are; others don't know how to manage the gaps and tensions or understand the costs of not doing so. As a result, most of the students' performance suffers and they fail to achieve the required grade and the skills they need to succeed in their academic and personal life.

It is common knowledge that the goal of education is for students to learn, but this raises the question – How do we know that learning has been achieved? Student evaluation is necessary if the goal is to ensure learning outcomes (Zare & Othman, 2013; Wharton, 2013; and McNaught & Benson, 2015). This study was used to predict level of competency of students' performance in writing and oral assignments and in retrospect whether it hinders/improve their soft skill development. The learning outcomes through assessment measures did result in statistically significant differences between the four cohorts. Based on the results of this study, students in the novice and beginner stages were in majority compared to the competent and proficient stages. Cole & Chan (1986 cited in Killen, 2009) suggested that an 'effective

teacher is one who maximizes the achievements of students in accordance with an explicit set of principles that have order, coherence and relevance in the particular context.' Achievements are an important factor for a professor to decide whether to teach a course or certain portions of a course in a particular way. It will depend on the student's motivation, interest, and language/subject competency to perform better and achieve the outcomes of the course and the program. Professor's self-reflection on the data gathered will be necessary when incorporating new forms of assessments into a course. Only then will individual professors be successful in addressing student's competency and by including student assessment data into the classroom dynamics.

Additional data analyses, research and follow-up studies are needed to predict the performance of students both in writing and oral works. Further, research could include how we all have two parts of our personalities that are in constant interaction: culture (which is what your upbringing teaches you to believe, do, and say) and temperament (which comes from your biology, genes, hormones, and neurotransmitters), and how they affect learning and assessment outcomes. Follow-up studies should assess how students perceive writing assignment and oral assignment differently and how they need to be addressed. Yet, other research may address how learning outcomes vary when students have a choice of their assessments (Wharton, 2013). This specific research did allow the author to reflect on his own teaching-learning style, and it also has the potential to impart faculty members in their efforts to incorporate student's differentiation into their classrooms. The author will continue to use the methodology as a teaching tool and further research and design successful assessment driven models for traditional classroom environments.

6. Conclusion

The result indicates that the professors should use assessment knowledge to choose appropriate interventions for struggling students so that their performance is constantly evaluated and improved (Gross, 1997; Cushner et al., 2000; Aisnworth & Viegut, 2006; Killen, 2009; Wharton, 2013 and McNaught & Benson, 2015). The poor quality of assessments can be explained by various factors, such as: students underestimate the demands of writing and oral presentation as required from them. Most of them may be particularly disadvantaged, often having less exposure to extended writing/presentation tasks in their final years of schooling, mainly due to their subject selections and/or temperament. It is also possible that many are "first generation students" to university and may lack the family support structures to assist with necessary skill development.

The use of assessment rubric for both writing and oral assignment enabled knowing which students can meet the requirements of the assessments and those who struggled. Based on the information provided by the research outcomes, the author can now address specific issues in his classrooms. Statistically significant differences in learning outcomes were identified in this education research, thus indicating that students participating in this project learned and performed better than they did in the traditional classroom setting.

In conclusion, the study results have significant implications for the way we assess our students that can really make a difference to how students learn. There are multiple and complex problems to resolve, and solutions are not easy to find, permanent, or universal; what works well in an introductory course probably

doesn't work equally well in an advanced course. So, we are left with the need for professional higher education practitioners to take the lead in ensuring that we do not allow the process to slip out of our hands. So, we need to keep abreast of new developments, evaluate tried and tested ones and experiment with our own initiatives, preferably within a supportive learning community of fellow practitioners. We cannot let bureaucratic regulations (whether from within our institutions or regionally) to skew our effective assessment processes. If we find our systems do not allow us to implement a valuable assessment innovation, for example, then we must find ways to change the system. We need to ensure that decisions about assessment strategies are based on the best available evidence-based research on assessment, rather than on custom and practice or what is easy to do.

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Appendix: I & II

Tishk International University
Faculty of Administrative Sciences & Economics
Business | Accounting | IRD
Course Coordinator: Associate Professor Dr. Neville D'Cunha

Course: _____   Submission Date: _____
Semester: Fall   Exam Type: _____
Student's Name: _____   Topic: _____

Rank	Component/Element	Weightage	Novice Below Expectation 0-65%	Beginner Needs Improvement 66-75%	Competent Satisfactory 76-85%	Proficient Exceeds Expectations 86-100%	Student s Score
	Assessment Rubric for Written Assignment						
1	Presentation: Format & Organization	10%					
2	Compositional Quality: Cohesion of Topic & Content	20%					
3	Conceptual Understanding: Research Efforts	40%					
4	Written Work Meets Assigned Criteria	30%					
	Grand Total 100%		Overall Assessment				

Feedback for the Student:

1. _____
    _____

2. _____
    _____

3. _____
    _____

Date: _____

Assessor's Name & Signature

Tishk International University
Faculty of Administrative Sciences & Economics
Business | Accounting | IRD
Course Coordinator: Associate Professor Dr. Neville D'Cunha

Course: _____   Submission Date: _____
Semester: Fall   Exam Type: _____
Student's Name: _____   Topic: _____

Rank	Component/Element	Weightage	Novice Below Expectation 0-65%	Beginner Needs Improvement 66-75%	Competent Satisfactory 76-85%	Proficient Exceeds Expectations 86-100%	Student's Score
	Assessment Rubric for Oral Presentation						
1	Presenter: Reflective	10%					
2	Content: Depth & Accuracy	25%					
3	Critical Thinking: Research Efforts	40%					
4	Presentation: Use of Communication Aids	25%					
	Grand Total	100%	Overall Assessment				

Feedback for the Student:

1. _____
   _____

2. _____
   _____

3. _____
   _____

Date: _____

Assessor's Name & Signature