

The role of assessment in higher education

[Education](#)



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Assessment of Learning 4. Issues and concerns ? Abstract Assessment is an integral part of curriculum practice. The prime consideration of educational institutions are the outcomes of learning, the enhanced abilities students can demonstrate because of their increase in knowledge , able to adapt and understand to changes because of their university experiences.

Our concern is how learning takes effect and how teaching and assessment affect the quality of learning in order for students to acquire the knowledge and competencies that is required for the work place. To acquire these industry relevant skills lecturers suggest assessment be integral to teaching and how learning activities are structured. Hence , this report reviews the role of assessment in curriculum design & change, it's importance of continuous assessment for enhancing learning, common assessment practices and it issues and concerns. 1. Introduction: In this report, literature researched was with regards to the role of assessment in curriculum design & change. Thus this report tries to answer the following questions in order to highlight the role of assessment in curriculum design, implementation and enhancement of learning. 1. What is curriculum and the role of assessment in curriculum development and enhancement? 2. What is Assessment of learning v Assessment for Learning and the practices in highereducation3.

Issues and concerns on assesment in teaching and learning at institutions of higher learning? 2. Assessment as a part of curriculum practice Curriculum is a Latin word and it refers to a ' course' or a ' track' to be followed. In education, the focus is learning, then the most appropriate interpretation for

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the word curriculum is viewed as a course or ' plan for learning' (ef. Taba , 1962). (Howell and Evans, 1995) defines curriculum as the ' what' of teaching. I would define curriculum as a course of study.

Then the process of curriculum development can be seen in short where one develops a product, which involves an ongoing improvement. Curriculum development is a long cyclic process of research, designing, implementing and evaluating learning outcomes based on the interest, needs and capabilities of learners, and the many stakeholders, which directs enhancement. The literature review report is in relation to the role of assesment in curriculum development and enhancement of Teaching and Learning. What is Assesment?

Assesment is any process that evaluates an individual's knowledge, understanding and skills. Van den Akker (2003) defines assesment as an integral component of curriculum practice. Assesment gives feedback on curriculum delivery which indicates about student learning, the curriculum and theacademicpolicies. Thus educators strongly believe that assesment and curriculum be integrated in the curriculum cycle. For example, Students achievement of knowledge and skills are determined by assesment.

Lecturers manage teaching and assesment of student competence according to the level of the course, giving grades, guiding and counselling and so on. These can only be possible if there are effective assesment procedures in the curriculum administration and practice. " In 1995 the Assesment Forum of the American Association of Higher Education led by Thomas A. Angelo went through an interactive process to develop a definition of assesment. The end-result of that definition process is as <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-assesment-in-higher-education/>

follows:” “ Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning.

It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education (Thomas A.

Angelo, AAHE Bulletin, November 1995, p. 7)” In order to measure a student’s learning outcome, progression and competence attained, various types of information need to be gathered to determine the degree of student’s attainment in the learning outcomes for the curriculum. Various methods of formal and informal observation of students during their learning, examinations and quizzes, performance on assignments, projects and presentations are used to gather this information. Lecturers advise that there should be a plan for assessment at programme, course and lesson level, which is often overlooked.

As Pratt (1998) stated, to make sure student achievements and grades reflect the learning outcomes established, assessments must be carefully planned, conducted, subject to continuous analysis, evaluation and enhancement. Learning outcomes (knowledge and competence of students), assessment, and teaching are all parts of an integrated whole. Assessment is <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-assesment-in-higher-education/>

believed to be essential to the teaching process in delivery and experience of the curriculum. But some students think of assessment as a form of control for lecturers. As (Pratt, 1998; Haladyna & Downing, 2004) stated when students progress from one semester to another they become displeased and suspicious about the assessment practices, and regarding them to be unfair and a means to demonstrate favouritism and punishment. " In institutions of higher learning, educators have the choice to choose the assessment types and practices. Since assessment results affect academic competence, educators are required to create a conducive learning environment and make assessment integral to educational processes.

In an encouraging learning environment a healthy dialogue takes place, trying out ideas, reflection, discussion, ask questions and enjoy the process of learning. (Pratt, 1998) Assessment is an important component and has several purposes. It directs the teaching process. Monitoring, discussion and observations in the classroom is also an important kind of assessment. This allows the instructor to gauge how well the lesson is going and whether learning is taking place with healthy discussion, participation and answering sessions (Nittko, 2004).

Assessment helps in identifying learning difficulties, students' strength and weakness. This then allows the instructor to set questions that can help build on the student's weaknesses both formally and informally. Secondly assessment provides feedback on the learning. Information from assessment helps in programme evaluation (Pratt, 1998). Thirdly assessment declares ones achievement for various stakeholders like students, parents, the

institution, prospective employers, the government sectors, accreditation body, and professional bodies.

Assessment in the form of quizzes, tests, class projects, assignments and informal observations declare how well a student has achieved the learning outcomes and grade in his/her course, module or unit (Nittko, 2004). Besides, assessment points students to pedagogical priorities and directs students approach to experience course curriculum. Classroom questions test and examinations would indicate to students, important topics of the curriculum. Example, if questions are based on trivial information, then students focus would be at factual recall and knowledge.

If tests require substantive knowledge and deep understanding then students change their perspective to curriculum. Assessment motivations, improves self image and a sense of self power of students. When assessment is well designed, it produces success in learning; it motivates and stimulates student confidence and wanting to learn. Meherus and Lehman (1991) describes assessment as an important tool as it increases motivation towards their course, which establishes healthy study habits, which also provides feedback to lecturers to determine students' strengths and weaknesses.

Assessment gives lecturers an opinion on students' learning. Assessment results enable the lecturer to provide further guidance about their learning. Therefore, lecturers in institutes of higher learning should be aware of the significant role of assesment in curriculum and thus have the skills and tools to effectively setup curriculum at programme level. 3, Assessment for Learning v Assessment to Learning What is Assessment for Learning? It could <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-assesment-in-higher-education/>

be defined as: •a form of positive formal feedback [e. g. lecturers comment; self-assessment systems] •provides informal feedback [e. g. dialogue teaching; peer interaction] •it gives an opportunity to the student to try and apply knowledge, skills and their understanding • assessment tasks that are relevant •it guides students to develop independence and •it has an appropriate balance between summative and formative assessment. There should be a balance between formative and summative assessments. Continuous assessment or assessment for learning is practiced less compared to summative assessment.

As stated by Careless (2004), lecturers in institutions of higher learning tend to choose more for theoretical knowledge than for practical and procedural knowledge in assessing students. Such assessment focuses on theory and concepts really do not help students for the real world. This limits the students of skills that employers look for. Brown & Glaser (1999) states improving on assessment practice improves student learning. Further to that, standards of learning rose through ongoing assessment practice. It is noted that students' behaviour and attitude towards learning changes, when assessment methods change.

Students become more responsible and take ownership of their learning. But there are challenging problems with assessment for learning. Problems identified by Black and William (2004) with regards to assessment for learning in institutions of higher learning as: •Assessment methods used by lecturers are not effective to promote good learning •Grading practices gives rise to competition rather than self improvement and •Feedback on assessment if practiced, often has a negative impact on less performing

students which makes them believe that they lack ability and thus are not able to learn.

Diamond (1998) further goes to describe the basic problem with assessment practice in institutions of higher learning, as a mismatch between learning outcomes and the assessment methods and criteria used by lecturers to assess and grade their students. Frequently, learning outcomes are expected to demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving skills, but the assessment type used would most frequently focus on recalling and recognition of content learned. Assessment used for the purpose of promoting student learning is described as assessment for learning.

Assessment used for accountability purpose, grading or certification is assessment of learning. Assessments that promote enhancement to learning is one where there is a continuous process of back and forth between the student and the lecturer which provides feedback on progression until the outcome is well met. This sort of assessment is called 'assessment for learning' when assessment evidence is used to adjust teaching to meet learners needs and difficulties (Black & William 1998). Assessment is part and parcel of learning. Assessment in fact, shapes learning.

Much has been discussed and written that to enhance student learning, assessment has to be integrated with teaching (Wright, et. al, 1997). Gibbs and Simpson (2005) regards assessment for learning as a system which directs and controls student learning based on the power of summative assessment and grades in addition to providing feedback. Assessment and teaching has to be blended to contribute to the goal of improving learning.

Good instructors do pay careful attention to assessment and teaching, and to have learning activities well structured.

Despite this suggestion, lecturers in higher education do not practice the real importance of assessment. As Black & William (1998) says this could also be because lecturers are not well trained in this area. In most institutions of higher learning assessment is used to test knowledge and does not test the critical and problem solving skills. Example, multiple choice questions promote de-contextualised, rote learning and this narrows the curriculum to basic skills with low cognitive demands. In contrast to this, the industries demand for transferable skills like communication, information retrieval, critical thinking, problem solving.

And because of this, institutions have fast inclined to formative, holistic form of assessment which is described as 'authentic' assessments. However, as Black & William (1998) argues that traditional form of assessment cannot be easily replaced because they are embedded in complex histories, culture and power relations of school societies. Shepard (2001) also suggested that conventional assessment method based on theories and psychometric principles conflicts with implications of assessment for learning which is based on cognitive and constructive learning standards.

James (2003) findings indicate a number of major effects with assessment methods and students self-perception and confidence level. For many students, they were disappointed with feedback, on how to improve their level of competence, for others was the concern on how to achieve higher marks. Term exams were rarely discussed or available so that students could use them to improve their knowledge and skills. Assessment plays a

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significant role in implementing curriculum. There should be significant guiding principles for this to happen. James (2003) had put forth the following guiding principles for assessment for learning:

- Ensure ssesment methods used promote and reward desired learning activities and outcomes.
- Students have got clear instructions on assessment requirements.
- Provide effective and timely feedback with comments on a continuous basis.

The first principle is based on Bloom's taxonomy, which is to recall and recognition, comprehension and application, critical thinking and problem solving. In his second principle (James: 65) states the following: " Assessment procedures in higher education are likely to become increasingly open to security to candidates, and to candidates appeals.

The need for commonly agreed marking procedures and techniques is obvious, if collectiveresponsibilityfor candidates is maintained, full openness between colleagues and demonstrable internal consistency of courses and related assessment procedures are vital importance" There can be a problem in generalised good assessment practices for learning. Different subject discipline like Engineering versuspsychologywould have different pedagogic assumptions. So if general principles cover all subjects, the way in which they manifest may differ for different subjects (Black & William, 2004).

Boud (1990) suggests alternate developments in student assessments in higher education, which is careful monitoring of assessment to see how relevant they are to the students. He also challenges that current assessment methods do not really prepare students to the real world. Meherns & Lehman, 1991 & Nitko 2004, state quality teaching and assessment are intertwined. They greatly improve students' learning.

Teaching will be effective when teaching activities, learning outcomes and assessment methods are well aligned.

As Nitko (2004) suggests 4 key questions lecturers got to ask themselves when preparing for teaching and to implement continuous assessment. •Is my lesson going well? Is there progression in student leaning? To align to these questions suggested assessment methods could be classroom observation during class activities, response to questions and students' interactions. •How can I improve to make the learning activity better? Diagnosis types of errors made by students, identify students who are not participating and also at the assessment methods used. •What feedback to be given about the student's learning?

Assessment methods used are informal observation and encouragement, how well they have achieved the learning outcome, assignments, quiz and consultations. •Finally are the students ready to progress to the next level? Informal observation, checking and questioning students about their understanding of homework, test, quiz and grades obtained to decide on their progress to their next learning or do they require remedial instructions. Lecturers should use a variety of assessment methods to help student achieve the learning outcomes as stipulated in the course curriculum. In most cases lecturers generally use pen-and-paper achievement tests.

Meherns & Lehman (1991) argue that classroom evaluation should not be restricted to pen-and-paper but other forms like observation techniques, checklists etc. Continuous assessment is practical for everyday classroom use. Test, presentations, projects, journal, collaborative works are some that could be used to assess students and lecturers their stand in relation to <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-assesment-in-higher-education/>

knowledge and skills. Smith (2003) and Shepard (2001) stated that assessment trends are moving away from traditional methods to a variety of new approaches. For instance, Observation is greatly used by experienced teachers to identify students' progression or having difficulties.

Portfolio or records of work are also another form of assessment practice. Portfolio is a kind of file where student's written works are kept. Portfolios provide cumulative evidence of learning over time in much detail and substance than a mere list of scores. Self and peer assessment are also essential to learning. Students' self-reflection and their understanding are used to inform for further teaching and areas the lecturer needs to spend more time and effort. Brookhart (2001), Shepard (2001), and Stiggins (1999, 2001) maintained that students should be actively involved in self-evaluation as a form of assessment.

Their argument was that students need to monitor their own progress by applying ongoing feedback that is helpful in showing them how to meet the ultimate learning outcome. However, self-assessment is only possible when lecturers help students develop assessment skills, because it is difficult for students to think of their work in terms of learning outcomes (Black & William, 2004). Peer-assessment is also another important form of assessment. The learning task is placed in the hands of the students. While the lecturer is able to observe and reflect on what is happening and frame helpful interventions.

The lecturer finds this form very helpful indeed. Misconceptions are highlighted and these are discussed when they go over the assessment. These forms of assessment require student active learning. As one student

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stated ' after a student marking my assignment, I can now acknowledge my mistakes easier. I hope that it is not just me who learned from the work but the student who marked it also' (Black & William, 2004: 16). Feedback and comments to students about their learning is a good practice in assessment. Feedback should state ways for improvement.

Grades or marks are not providing enough feedback to help improve student learning (Nitko, 2004). Feedback is effective when it provokes thinking in students. With regards to this, Back & William (2004) stated marks are likely to set comparison; while only feedback and comments help them to improve. Research studies on feedback showed 60% improvement on performance. Feedback with no comments was more of judgement or grade with no indication for improvement (Black & William, 2004) Hence it is important for the enhancement of student learning that lecturers emphasise on feedback and comment on assessed work of students in the learning process. . Issues and Concerns Staff One of the main concerns in assessment will be the lecturers. Especially here in Malaysia in the private sector , many lecturers lack the knowledge in assessment practices. Universities and college do not believe in investing in training. Another factor is lecturers have heavy teaching work load and large class sizes that formal assessment would be replace by mere test, assignment and examinations due to time constrains. Cost Costs to the faculty and institution are an important factor. Some form of assessment processes can be time consuming, involving student supervision in observation of activities.

Time, of course, is money. Also investing in additional resources like technology increases cost. This does not enable the lecturers to use

innovative methods of assessment. Standards To increase pass rates standards are compromised. Assessment requirements have placed more weightage on coursework, so student achievement has appeared to improve the assumption coursework is easier than exams. In some cases institutions do not have a quality system in place. Validity and reliability of assessment could be questionable. Conclusion

Assessment is a vital component of curriculum practice that has important contribution for effective practice and operations of curriculum. Lecturers' acknowledgement for continuous assessment practice has significance for students learning of knowledge and skill. Lecturers should set assessment tasks that are practically challenging, provide feedback as they assess and get students engaged in the assessment process. Finally lecturers should change their views and practices of assessment and be committed to prepare competent graduates with the knowledge and skill in their specific field of study for the market place. References Akker, Van Den. (2003). Curriculum landscapes and Trends (pp1-10). Curriculum Perspectives: An Introduction. Black, P and William. (1998). Assessment and Classroom learning. Assessment in Education 5(1) Black, P. , and William, D. (2004). Inside the Black Box: Phi-Delta kappan, 86(1): 9-21 Diamond, R. M. (1998). Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula: A practical Guide. Sanfrancisco: Jossey-Bass Inc Boud, D. (1990). Assessment and the Promotion of Academic Values. Studies in Higher Education 15(5): 101-111 Gibbs, G. & Simpson, C. 2004-5) Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning. Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 1 (1), 3-31. Brookhart, S. M. (2001). Successful students' formative and

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