

A comparison of traditional and performance-based assessment



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Assessment can be defined as an umbrella term which includes various tools and methods used to determine the extent to which the students are achieving the predetermined learning objectives and outcomes of a lesson. There are different types of assessment tools which can be used to test student knowledge and see their current levels on specific subjects and two major types of these tools are traditional types of assessment tools and performance-based assessment tools.

Traditional types of assessments are generally knowledge-based assessment tools which include conventional types of tests such as multiple-choice questions, short answer essays or constructed responses and standardized tests whereas in performance based assessments, students are required to perform a task rather than selecting from options provided and students are assessed according to their performance outcomes and to what extent those outcomes are in relation to the rubrics or feedback tools.

In the following parts of this essay, I compare the traditional assessment and performance-based assessment by stating the advantages and disadvantages of both methods. In addition, I discuss these methods in relation to their effects on teaching and learning by providing specific examples. Performance-based assessment includes a wide range of tools such as portfolios, research projects, role-play, drama, extended essays, research papers, peer feedback, observation and interviews, practical work, research projects and practical work.

The common feature of each one is that they do not only test students' knowledge, but also their ability to put their knowledge into use. In other

words, students can demonstrate what they know in such tools. One of the advantages of performance-based assessment is that it is possible to evaluate complex learning outcomes and high order skills that cannot be evaluated with traditional assessment. For instance, an English teacher can assess various language skills through drama activity.

Instead of preparing multiple choice questions about a specific novel, a teacher can ask students to perform a scene or scenes from a chapter in which students' creativity and interpretation are encouraged and assessed. In such an assessment, in addition to students' content knowledge, a teacher has the opportunity to assess students' oral and psychomotor skills as well as their use of grammar, stress and intonation, their interpretation of themes and so on. Thus, thanks to performance-assessment tools, a teacher can evaluate high level skills in Bloom Taxonomy in relation to the English subject area.

Another advantage is that it promotes student motivation since such activities can help students feel motivated and have fun at the same time. Since students take the responsibility of conducting a research, a project or creating portfolios by themselves, they feel encouraged and motivated by gaining a meta-cognitive awareness where they start to become their strengths and weaknesses more effectively by experiencing. The third advantage of performance-based assessment is that it makes learning more meaningful since it encourages the application of learning to real-life situations.

For instance, in an English writing class, after analyzing a novel about racism, they may be required to do research about the issue in different countries and then make a presentation. Relating the theme of the book to real life and finding real life examples contributes to students' learning process by making learning more meaningful and permanent. I believe that both in the preparation and the presentation process help students learn the topic effectively by gaining them multiple perspectives and internalizing the knowledge.

Although performance-based assessment has such benefits, it also has some disadvantages. One of them is that it requires considerable time and effort to use. Especially preparing a good and consistent rubric is not an easy task and the assessment can take too much time since each students' learning outcome are assessed one by one. Another disadvantage is that judgment and scoring performance is usually subjective and therefore it tends to have low reliability compared to traditional assessment.

In order to avoid bias, some steps should be taken such as not paying attention to students' names while marking or cross reading or assessment (with other colleagues). Unlike performance-based assessment tools, traditional assessment aims to assess a limited range of skills or knowledge since it does not leave room for student product as much as performance-based assessment. However, if questions are prepared appropriate to learning outcomes, traditional assessment also can be a part of formative assessment and may be appropriate to assess multiple skills as well.

One advantage of traditional assessment is that since they are objectively scored, they are not affected by scorer inconsistencies as in performance-based assessment. Thus, we can state that they are more reliable, valid and objective than performance-based assessment in this sense. Especially multiple choice tests can be read by machines and saves time, performance-based assessment relies on human judgment. In addition, scoring does not take as much time as performance-based assessment does since the outcomes are less complex and more specific than performance-based assessment.

In recent years, there has been a shift from traditional assessment tools to more authentic ones and it is evident even in public schools in Turkey. I believe that performance-based assessment tools should definitely be used because of the all advantages that I mentioned above such as assessing high order thinking skills, providing motivation, its applicability to real life, room for student creativity, providing meta-cognitive awareness and teaching students taking responsibility.

If its disadvantages can be minimized, I think all types of performance-based assessment tools are effective in teaching and learning since they are all amenable to constructivist perspective in education field. If curriculum does not allow to conduct various methods of performance-based assessment because of time constraints, at least one or two methods can be applied in a subject area. However, I do not prioritize any of these two assessment types since both have their own advantages and disadvantages.

I also think that traditional assessment can be effectively used because of its advantages as I mentioned above. It can be either summative or formative assessment depending on the outcomes it measures. For example, multiple choice tests or gap-filling exercises are practical to assess students' prior knowledge and their progresses throughout the unit. In my view, there should be room for both assessment and educators should benefit from all types of assessment tools so that that have the chance to assess various skills from multiple perspectives.