

Introduction to Formative Assessment AND Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Formative Assessment can be defined as the assessment carried out during instruction. Its purpose is to reveal to the teachers how students think and allow them to build on students' existing understandings of a topic and incorporate those into instruction to deepen the knowledge of the concept (Heritage,2007). The information gathered from evaluation under formative assessment can contribute to a change in the instructional procedure (Greenstein, 2010). It is used to adapt, modify and direct instruction (Larson et al., 2012). Unlike summative assessment, formative assessment treats the assessment procedure as an extension of learning rather than an end (LeMathieu & Reilly, 2004). Some examples of formative assessment include assignments given during class, quizzes, informal dialogue about the topic being taught. It is important to note that the instruments are not formative. Instead, the teacher's data from the abovementioned examples drive formative assessment (Shepard, 2017).

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is a constructive process that allows teachers to provide feedback about the students' progress during learning their learning strategies and modify the instruction based on the needs of the learners to reach intended instructional goals (Sadler,1989). AfL uses the student's status as evidence to drive instruction (Popham,2008). The data collected using AfL can be used to take immediate action (Herman,2013). The teacher's feedback from assessments must be used to alter the gap between the students' learning status and the goals. In the long term, it contributes to developing metacognitive skills and autonomy in learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Under AfL, feedback is more than just information. The information is generated for a particular purpose: to provide feedback to the students. The feedback must be domain-specific to ensure that the student excels with its help. (Ramaprasad,1983).

Example for Assessment for Learning (AfL):
Lesson (45-minutes class): Grade: 8 ; Subject: Political Science
Topic: Democracy in India

To incorporate AfL while teaching 'Democracy in India', I would first ask my students to volunteer by raising their hands if they know the answer to "What might the meaning of democracy be?" Depending on their answers, I would introduce a definition of democracy that is easy to comprehend. Based on the description I would provide the students; I will request them to write a definition of 'democracy' in their own words in their notebooks. After everyone has written their own definition, I would ask the students to exchange their notebooks with their partners, allowing them to assess their partner's understanding of the word and discuss the definition in greater detail. It would also allow them to make changes to their definition if needed. Afterwards, I would ask the students, "How is India an example of democracy?" by asking sub-questions such as "Who elects the government?", "Do we have options to choose from while voting?", "Whom does the government work for?", "Do we have some basic rights as citizens of India?" These questions will allow students to establish some critical characteristics of the Indian democracy instead of rote learning its features. Using their answers and facts, I will list down some key features of Indian democracy on the blackboard.

Further, I would allow the students to take some time to read the information on the blackboard, discuss it with the class, and share their doubts, which will ensure that the students understand what it means for India to be a democracy. After I have cleared their doubts, I will divide the class into groups of four or five members and assign each group a task. The task would be to choose a vital feature of Indian democracy and elaborate on it in front of the class after discussing it within their group. This would enable the students to take control of their learning and understand the concept in depth. It would also allow them to revise when one group

presents. Thus, when the class comes to an end, each student will have an idea about the elements of Indian democracy.

Description of Research Study that supports the Effectiveness of Assessment for Learning (AfL)

In a study conducted by Umar (2018), to identify the effect of Assessment for Learning (AfL) on learning on a group of Sudanese pre-medical students' performance in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), fifty-three subjects from Khartoum University in Sudan were chosen and randomly placed in the experiment (27 participants) and control (26 participants) groups. While the assessment group was taught ESP in accordance with AfL techniques and procedures and tools such as classroom observations, quizzes, and journals to reflect learning, the control group was taught ESP in accordance with conventional summative assessment procedures.

The experiment lasted for an entire term (16 weeks), after which, subjects appeared for a final exam that was intended for all pre-medical students. The final exam results revealed a significant difference in the scores of students in the experimental and control groups. While the control group's mean score was 77%, with the median being 76% and the mode as 75%, the mean score for the experimental group was 84.4%, with the median and mode being 87%. Therefore, the results favored the experimental group and proved that AfL significantly enhances students' performance.

Further, the same study assessed students' attitudes towards AfL through interviews and questionnaires, which were given to the subjects right after the course on ESP. The responses were interpreted through quantitative and qualitative analysis, which indicated a positive attitude of the students towards AfL. It was found that 84% of the respondents agreed that immediate feedback helped them discover their mistakes at an earlier stage in learning.

After witnessing that AfL positively impacts students' learning, the study recommended using AfL in a wider setting at the University of Khartoum. However, it is essential to note that to ensure the success of AfL strategies, educators need intensive training about how to conduct this form of assessment.

Benefits of Using Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Assessment for Learning (AfL) involves multiple tools and techniques that enable teachers to track their students' progress and modify instruction accordingly. AfL allows the teacher to carry out assessments according to students' abilities (Black & Wiliam, 2005).

Research findings suggest that AfL creates a learning process where students are actively involved and, thus, motivated to learn (Jeyaraj, 2019). Moreover, learning using the AfL model enables improvement in one session and facilitates a follow-up in the next class (Black & William, 2005). Some of the practical applications of AfL involve student self-assessment and feedback from teachers, which ensures that students are in charge of their own learning (Andrade and Heritage, 2017).

Another area where AfL has contributed is equity by providing individualized feedback instead of standardized instruction. Thus, AfL enables the teacher to recognise that each student is different and does not follow the same approach. Therefore, if AfL becomes standard practice in classrooms of low-achieving, low-socioeconomic-status students, there may be a drastic improvement in achievement, which will bring about equity (Heritage 2013).

Conclusion

While assessment is vital to any educational process, summative assessments continue to be the most used assessments even though a wide range of literature reveals that AfL is more effective in enhancing student achievement and motivation to learn. However, it is essential to note that to implement AfL strategies, teachers and educators must have to go through an intensive training process to learn how to incorporate AfL strategies such as regular and descriptive feedback, self and peer assessment, and open-ended questions into everyday lessons. While the training process may be time consuming and intensive, it cannot be ignored that AfL

has proven to bridge the gap between the students' current status of learning and their desired goals.

References

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