

LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN A SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

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ABSTRACT

Assessment in education must, first and foremost serve the purpose of effective learning. Assessment has an important role in a self-learning activity using self-learning material. It is a dynamic component of distance learning. Due to spatial and temporal separation between teachers and learners, assessment provides perhaps the only indication of the student progress in the learning process. Questions or tasks are continuously evaluated to determine whether the learners can challenge old assumptions and create new meaning perspectives. Learning assessment provide with the information about learner achievement after finishing the learning process. Assessment question in a self-learning material can be used as a tool to activate learner to study. This step is important in a learning process not only for conventional instruction, but also for distance learning. Without learning assessment we will not know the result of a learning process easily. So, it is important to use the right kind of assessment for the learning. This paper discusses the purposes and the role of learning assessment in a self-learning material.

Key Words: Assessment, self-learning, material, question, assignment.

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Assessment is a generic term for a set of processes that measure the outcomes of students learning in terms of knowledge acquired, understanding, developed and skill gained. Assessment serves many purposes. It enables students to obtain feedback on their learning and helps them improve their performance (Boud, & Falchikov (2007). Whenever we learn we question ourselves. How am I doing? Is this enough? How can I tell? Should I go further? In the act of questioning is the act of judging ourselves and making decision about the next step. This is self assessment (Boud, 2005). Self-assessment is about students developing their learning skills. Self assessment has great potential when it seen from the point of view of contributing to students learning and when it is used to engage students more deeply in the subject areas being studied. As Yorke, (2003) notes: the act of assessing has an effect on the assessor as well as the student. Assessors learn about the extent to which they [students] have developed expertise and can tailor their teaching accordingly. The past ten years has seen a counter-movement to the emphasis on what Peter knight, (2006) has termed "high-stakes assessment". Assessment for learning has begun to take a place on the agenda within institutions although it still takes a secondary place in public policy debates and in the media (Boud, & Falchikov 2007).

Assessment in distance learning is of paramount importance since the question of credibility and quality of open and distance learning system. Learning assessment is an attempt to gain knowledge of the learner's competencies. In particular, what competencies have they acquired as a result of learning process. Learning activities is designed to facilitate learner to learn various kinds of knowledge and skills related to the objectives developed earlier. As the result of these activities, the learner will gain their capabilities related to the objectives. There are five domains of competencies to be gained as the result of the learning activities. The domains are intellectual skills, cognitive, information, psychomotor and affective.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed paper mainly is descriptive-analytical in nature. Relevant books, articles and newspapers are used in this paper. Data and information are collected from the concern sources as per need to strengthen my research. Interpretative approach has been followed in this research.

Learning

For effective learning of any kind to take place, learners-whomever they may be-must develop capability of monitoring what they do and modifying their learning strategies appropriately. Such self-monitoring is what educational psychologists include as part of their term metacognition which now a central plank in cognitive theories of learning (Biggs and Moore, 1993). It is important all learners to develop the ability to be realistic judges of their own performance and to effectively monitor learning can be effectively undertaken when the learner monitors what is known, what remains to be known and what is needed to bridge the gap between the two (Boud, 2005). Melton, (1996) questions the effectiveness of the behaviorist approach to assessment in classifying students according to whether they have achieved or have not achieved specified objectives.

However, distance learning in the contemporary period has been associated with high product innovation and process variability where course curriculum and delivery mode can rapidly adjusted to meet the changing needs of distance learners (Campion, 1990; Raggart, 1993; Rumble, 1995). Assessment has two kinds of influence on the distance learner-it can empower him in many aspects of distance learning such as individual learning pace and the selection of course modules or it can severely restrict him to following the narrowly defined assessment criteria laid down by distance education institutions. The assessment mechanism or methods are crucial as these may have a greater influence on students' growth than the impact of supervising teachers or teaching materials (Boud, 1988).

The Purposes of Assessment

There are two main purposes for learning assessment:

1. To aid learners in their subsequent learning.
2. To report on what they have learned.

The first use of assessment is known as formative assessment since it is meant to form the learner's learning. The second is summative because it sums up what each has achieved.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is at the heart of effective teaching and that self assessment is an essential component of formative assessment. Studies over many years have shown that formative assessment is an aspect of teacher's class room work and that attention to improving its practice can enhance the learner's achievement (Gardner, 2012). Learning assessment could be used to investigate learning difficulties faced by the learner. Based on the result of assessment, we could decide of any treatment to be used to help the learner. The treatment could be improving some topics, or the whole of the topics of the subject being learned. This kind of assessment is known as formative assessment. Formative assessment is meant to make sure each learner achieve every specific objective of learning. Usually, instructor carries out formative assessment informally during the learning activity. A central argument is that, in higher education, formative assessment and feedback should be used to empower students as self-regulated learners. The construct of self-regulation refers to the degree to which students can regulate aspects of their thinking, motivation and behavior during learning (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002).

But, for self-learning activity, formative assessment is an integrated part of learning material. It can be activities- - such as in-text questions (ITO) and self assessment questions (SAQ) or assignment on each unit of the material in order to monitor and develop learners own learning. Sometimes it may involve getting feedback from their colleagues-peer assessment. Self-and peer-assessment are powerful means for challenging the student's unconscious assumptions, beliefs and attitudes (Walter and Carey, 1996).

Formative assessment is such an assessment that is performed during the implementation of learning activity. The objective of such assessment is to recognize whether a learner can continue his/her activity into the next unit. Learners of a self-learning activity to assess the level of achievement by him/her can use formative assessment. If the result is adequate, the learner can move into the next subject matter.

The major stress of this formative assessment is to form the level of mastery on the material learnt. That is why within a self-learning material, the completion of formative assessment is put on the learners. The learning material developer solely provides questions and the answer key. The learners then answer the questions by him/her and compare answer key.

A tutor that will check the answer afterward also can oversee the formative assessment. Tutor may give any comments to the result. Based on the tutor's assessment, then continue his/her activity whether to re-read the subject mater the learner had learnt or to move into the next subject mater.

Hence, a teacher or an instructor to determine what kind of action needed to assist a student in a learning process could use the result of formative assessment. For student or teacher, the result of formative assessment can be used to measure his/her strengths or weakness. So the learner can determine what kind of effort should be done.

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is such a final assessment by which a student or a trainee is determined to be succeed or fail to accomplish his/her learning activity. This assessment is performed in the end of certain period of time of the course or training. For a self-learning activity, summative assessment can be performed in the end of a module or series of module. The material assessed in the summative assessment is more widespread than that in the formative one. The material includes the whole subject matter learnt for a unit of time. The objective of summative assessment is to report the whole things recognized or achieved by a learner after the learner follows a learning program. This assessment determines the success or failure of a learner in accomplishing any course or training program (Rowntree, 1997).

The classic case of the summative assessment is semester final exam in written or practical form. Nevertheless, the mid semester tests or certain tasks can be classified as summative assessment if their result is considered in the final outcomes. Continuous assessment is sometimes used for summative purposes since it is recognized that students are more likely to treat it seriously if it contributes towards the ultimate assessment of their achievements.

The Role of Assessment in Self-learning Material

Self-learning materials or modules are designed for students or trainees to study individually with less assistance from other people. A student or a trainee is expected to comprehend the learning content by reading the module as well as by conventional face-to-face tutorial. What could you do to active that objective? Try to discuss it, and then compare what you have discussed to the description below.

A high quality self-learning material or module should contain sufficient activities to stimulate student to study constantly. The integrated activities within the module should be able to create a certain situation similar to classroom learning activity. One of the stimulation's is question or practice form. Question and activity within module can be constructed in order to put back the dialogue between teacher or instructor and student or trainees occur in learning activity (Grange, Briggs and Wager, 1992). With the given question or task, student is encouraged to read the description or explanation within a module, so the learner can answer the question or solve the problem proposed. They are encouraged to read since they realize that without reading the description or explanation they will not be able to answer the question or the assignment.

The other role of the learning assessment is as a measuring tool to recognize whether a student or a trainee has understood the material the learner has learnt individually or by assistance of teacher or instructor. Through a self-test, a student or a trainee can measure his/her learning progress. Whenever the learner

masters the material, the learner can go on with another topic. On the contrary the learner should repeat learning the material if the learner failed to master it.

A teacher or an instructor can use end of module test or end of unit test to measure the student's or trainee's learning progress. This test result can be a measuring tool to determine whether a student or a trainee comprehends the module. According to the result a teacher or an instructor can decide whether a student or a trainee may step in to the next module or unit.

Assessment Question in Self-learning Material

The questions within a module act as a substitution of a teacher is an instructor's question in the classroom. The second function is to measure/assess the learning progress after reading the module. For both reasons, there are several types of question or assignment that can be put in a module. At least there are five type of learning assessment tools could be included in a self-learning material. The assessment tools are intext question, self -assessment question, assignment, end of module test, and end of unit test (Jenkins, 1987). Each question has its own purpose. Some of them are just to encourage learner to study actively. While the other are as tools to measure learner's achievement in learning.

In text Question

In open and distance learning materials in-text questions have encouraged students to think about and check their learning. The first type of in text question is applied to attract the learner to pay attention to a certain problem rather than to assess the learning progress. This type of question needs no written answer from a student. This question just reminds them to stop reading for a while to think or discuss with his/her friend(s) if they learn in a group.

Such question can assist to conclude certain ideas by his/her own. These questions can link the subject matter to his/her experience. It also can be used to encourage the learner to make a discussion with his/her friend. How important this type of question is supposed to be? Pretend it is important, why is it not designed so that the student should answer that in written way? This type of question is somewhat important. It can assist to attract the learner's attention and enhance the comprehension the learner has acquired without disturbed by certain requirement. However, they will be impatient if they are frequently asked to stop reading and to write. That is why this type of question needs to written answer.

Self-assessment question

Self-assessment question is such a task that requires written answer from a learner. As the learner completes the task, he/she is asking to check his/her answer with the answer key provided in the module. A distance learner rarely meets his/her teacher. That is way the task should be given within the module in which the learner can check the answer by his/her own. Accordingly, the learner knows his/her learning progress. Transformation of assessment approach from assessment by teacher to self-assessment by learner is one of the characteristics of open and distance learning.

Self-assessment could be developed in various form of test question such as easy question, fill in the blank, multiple choices, true-false and matching. What is the function of this self-assessment test for the distance learner?

Self-assessment test could strengthen learning process performed by the learner. Using this kind of test they can see their learning progress regularly. Clearly these activities should avoid focusing on self-marking alone which does not involve students in establishing assessment criteria (Boud & Falchikov, 1989). Self-assessment test with essay question has an important function in self -learning material. The first function is to encourage learner to think independently in developing idea. Another function is to help learner to associate what they learned with their own experience. Self-assessment can lead to significant enhancements in learning and achievement. For example, McDonald and Boud, (2003) have shown that training in self-assessment can improve students' performance in final examinations. Since self-assessment is a critical tool in working towards increased reflective ness (Jarvinen & Kohonen, 1995).

Assignment

Another assessment tool in self-learning material is assignment. Assignment is more substantial rather than a self-assessment question. Assignment is an application of what the learners learnt from the module into their own situation. Assignment could be presented in many ways such as mini project, observation report, and description of learner's experience regarding the materials they learnt. This type assignment tool will present a unique lesson for each learner.

Unlike self-assignment test, assignment generally requires some feedback from the instructor. Based on this feedback, a learner understands their weakness in comprehending the material from a module. The most important function of an assignment is to provide the learners with feedback about their product that they could not measure themselves. For a practical reason, usually the assignment has a time limitation. This limitation will help the learners to manage their own pace in learning the self-learning material.

Assignments within a self-learning material will help learners in their learning process. Assignment will help the learner to focus their attention to the main idea and the most important competency included in the self-learning material. It will help them finishing the assignment.

End of Module Test

End of module test is a test to be given to the learners after finishing learns is a self-learning material or module. End of module test will assess learner accomplishment of learning a module. If they succeed than they can continue to learn the nest module. In contrary, if they failed they should repeat learning the module until they achieve the objectives. The learners could not assess end of module test. There will be no answer key for this test. Instructor will measure the test and will give the grade to the learners work. The grade of this test will be used to decide whether the learner passes or fails. For the learners, feedback of the end of module test could be used to improve their mastery of the material they just learned.

End of Unit Test

The end of unit test is a test given to learners after they finish studying a set of module. This end of unit test is a summative test for particular lesson comprises several modules. If we compare it with the face-to-face tutorial, the end of unit test is similar to the test given to learners after a course is accomplished. As like as a end of module test, the end of unit test is not assessed by the learner but assessed by the instructor. The report of this test result is an assessment to the success or failure of a learner in accomplishing a particular lesson or course. Referring to the purpose of the test, the first three types of assessment question described above are classified as formative assessments. The feedback from answer key or from comments of instructor intends to encourage learners rather than to make final assessment of their learning outcomes. The following two types of test- end of module and end of unit- - are summative ones since they assess learner's learning outcomes after accomplishing a module of a set of module (Rowntree, 1995).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Of all ideas associated with assessment, self assessment provides the fundamental link with learning. Self assessment is concerned with learners valuing their own learning and achievements on the basis of evidence from themselves and from others. It occurs within a particular context, with respect to particular domains of knowledge and with particular goals in mind. The necessity of emphasizing learning assessment is perhaps best reflected in the constant thirst for innovations and radical advances, which is the essence of competitiveness in post modern society today. As such distance education providers must explore and provide an assessment mechanism to promote distance learning. Along with this comes the need to evaluate the way distance learning material is written and presented and perhaps the way courses are conducted. In distance education context, the assessment model should accommodate the possibility of little communication and different pace of learning and yet be flexible enough to allow distance learners and teachers to make appropriate decisions such as assessment criteria and the number of assessments to be taken throughout the course. Distance education institution must ensure a transparent and valid assessment mechanism to continue to enjoy public

acceptability since distance education itself owes its credibility, after all, to arguments that face to face contract between teachers and students is not essential and learning can take place in a non-contiguous mode. Learning assessment thus becomes a necessity in gauging an effective mechanism for promoting self-learning material.

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