An assessment of teaching strategies in the UK and Iraq

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Abstract

Assessment for learning is an essential part of education. The education authorities in Iraq should consider more extensive use of assessment for learning. However, the application of assessment for learning is known as a western construct in education. Iraq had the best education system in the Middle–East from 1970 to 1984. However, after this period, the education in Iraq has gradually declined until the year 2004 as a result of involving in wars.

The review and discussion of assessment of and for learning in the UK has had a long history since the seventies. In contrast, Iraq has a great experience of assessment of learning, however, this topic has given a little consideration. The assessment of learning in Iraq is summative and depends on examination and testing in schools and universities. In contrast, in the UK both are used equally and formative assessment is more frequently used than summative assessment for learning in schools and higher education.

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From this perspective, Iraq should move from the traditional way of learning, teaching and assessment to the modern methods of learning and assessment. Assessment for learning should be used more extensively to improve the quality of learning and raise the standards of education in schools and higher education. Additionally, teachers should use assessment for learning to gain information so that they are able to be used as feedback to students to improve learner's achievements during and at the end of the lesson. Tutors and students could use this assessment for learning as a significant part of the education process.

Keywords: Assessment for learning, Iraqi teaching, teaching strategies

1–**Introduction**

Assessment is known as a way to evaluate the level of students' understanding in a subject in the classroom. Teachers, therefore, use assessment activities to support pupils who have not totally understood the teaching objective in the classroom. Bartlett (2015, p. xiii) claims in his introduction that assessment for learning is employed "to develop outstanding learning" or it could be employed for evaluating students' achievement levels and reporting of those levels. Assessments are important during and at the end of the lesson in both learning and teaching within schools in order to enhance pupil learning (Heitink et al., 2016). Assessment can be divided into two kinds of assessment, formative and summative assessments that are used at the end of the class or each term (Boyle and Charles, 2014).

The reason for using Assessment for Learning (AfL) is to give feedback for both students and teachers about the students' understanding of the subject lesson to improve their ongoing learning. Nevertheless, assessment of learning is a strategy to test the students in each month or at the end of each term of a course. Black and Wiliam (1998) explain that assessment for learning (formative) is used to improve the standard of students' achievement. Tutors use assessment, whether Summative or Formative to recognise students who have achieved the learning outcome by the end of class. Approximately 15 years ago, there were many researchers who defined the Assessment for learning as " concerned with how judgement is about the quality of student responses" (Sadler, 1989, p. 120). AfL refers

to all activities that have been undertaken in everyday classes by teachers and students in the classroom, used to assess themselves to provide actual feedback from information used in the learning process to develop their understanding of future steps or the next lesson. AfL is seen as a significant tool to improve the standards of effective learning in schools. To evaluate the understanding of pupils in learning is to use the assessment for learning in the right way.

Reich, Collons and DeFranco (2016, p. 21) state, there are two concepts which are relevant to start a discussion of assessment for learning; promises and passion. Nevertheless, they add that "The problem is that if a hospitality programme does not have an effective assessment of learning and outcomes process in place, it is all but impossible to harness that passion". Moreover, Van der Kleij et al., (2012) have determined that "Effects of feedback in a computer–based assessment for learning" and showed that using technology which is a kind of assessment for learning in the class instead of using a paper test or traditional way.

Thus, this form of assessment could both have and provide advantages for better teaching outcomes in student learning. The use of assessment for learning in the classroom is valuable in education, helping pupils progress and develop the students' ability to learn how to learn. Teachers, therefore, should recognise and test that the curriculum is fit for the purpose of learning and teaching in schools (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Black et al., 2003). It is clear that the assessment for learning is a powerful tool to help and support students and develop their abilities in

learning and teaching. For instance, when teaching geography in class, students should know why they are learning geography, (this applies to all other subjects) hence the teacher can meet the students' needs by taking into account individual differences between them.

1.1 **History of Assessment for Learning**

In 1988, the Wales Office (WO) and Department of Education and Science (DES) published a framework for the assessment and testing in the National Curriculum for Wales and England by using "Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT)" (DES/WO, 1988). There has been a great deal of research on assessment for learning and teaching strategies within schools, for example in England, at Sheffield Hallam University and Hong Kong (McDowell, Sambell and Davison (2009). In addition, the idea of the use of assessment in the classroom is to help improve or enhance the learning process of students and this has been used in many countries (McDowell, Sambell and Davison, G. (2009). The learners' understanding of any topic was tested using marks, reports, and levels . The work of Black and Wiliam (1998) created a review, which focused upon pupil learning in a formative way which significantly achieved better learning compared with more traditional strategy.

According to Black and Wiliam (1998) assessment by teachers had some weaknesses including, a lack of assessment, lack of questioning in class and teachers not discussing these questions critically with each other. Secondly, there was less emphasis

in terms of the learning function, in contrast, there was more emphasis on getting marks. Thirdly, the learning was based upon rote teaching within the classroom and assessment of learning is seen as superficial learning. Furthermore, in educational literature, formative assessment has a long history of being used to improve and assist pupils in understanding the aim of the lesson and the standards that can be achieved in class if formative assessment is used (Sadler, 1998). A good example of using formative assessment in the school sector is seen as part of good class practice (McDowell, Sambell and Davison, 2009). This assignment will investigate the discussion of the application of assessment for learning strategies in Iraq, by giving a short introduction and a very brief history of the assessment for learning.

Then, what is meant by the assessment for learning and assessment of learning within schools, and the next part will focus on assessment for learning in the UK and assessment for and of learning in Iraq. Finally, the strategies of the assessment for learning and the conclusion with recommendations to be discussed.

2−Assessment for Learning in schools

Assessment for learning (AfL) in school refers to the activities that have been undertaken by teachers as well as their pupils in order to assess each other and to gain information that is being used as feedback during and at the end of the lesson. AfL is known as a part of educational practice which educators use in their pedagogies (Bartlett, 2015). AfL has been used for several reasons;

it is used to measure the individual differences amongst students in class, general goals and special aims. When it becomes clear that some students have not fully understood a subject teachers should investigate further by using some open questions with the pupils in class. This helps to evaluate the students' understanding of the lesson as well as offering feedback to learners themselves and addressing any misconceptions. For example, in the UK, formative assessment has been used in all schools primary and secondary (Boyle and Charles, 2014).

In contrast, the USA researchers have defined that the formative assessment is " a qualitative insight into student understanding" (Popham, 2008, p. 6). The aim of assessment in schools is to help teachers and students to develop a full understanding of progress to give them further advice for the future or next stage of their learning (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). In addition, assessment of learning leads to the evaluation of the student performance or the pupils' progress in school. Alternatively, assessment for learning is used to assess the students achievements through tests and exams. It can help teachers to evaluate pupils' understanding of a subject. However, in a modern context, assessment for learning (AfL) is how pupils are learning to learn, why they are learning, the purpose of learning about the subject and other topics. Thus, these questions need deep understanding to be answered.

In his discussion of the assessment for learning Lee (2006) states that the objectives of learning should be clear, also, before the start of the lesson the criteria of achievement should be

planned and shared with students in the class. The responsibility of the teacher is planning the class and the aims of the learning objectives should be set out very clearly. "Teaching objectives must be translated into learning objectives for a given lesson" (Lee, 2006, pp. 44–45). Of course, setting out the objectives of learning is difficult for any teacher as this depends upon the tests, curriculum and the pupils' background. A good example of setting a clear learning objective is the (AfL) strategy in schools in England which demonstrates that it is highly important for schools and teachers to create and set out clear learning objectives during the lesson along with students in order to evaluate 'what they have learnt' and 'what they will achieve' by the end of the lesson (Lee, 2006).

Students can see their progress by using the success criteria, moreover, learning objectives are general, but success criteria are specific (Lee, 2006). Furthermore, in the beginning of the lesson, teachers should have planned the success criteria. Tutors also should have different methods of explanation and clarify the topic (for instance, a way to teach a subject in geography). In other words, it is essential that the objectives of learning should be discussed and explored by the teacher with students in the classroom in order to help build student confidence in the learning on any topic, and so pupils can follow the success criteria.

The latest research in the UK showed that engagement and enjoyment within school is an essential part of pupils' understanding (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012). However, some findings suggest that "the teachers' pedagogical knowledge

(PK) and content knowledge (CK) impact upon the ability to provide students with useful feedback", so educators without an understanding of the concept of a subject which is related to teachers' knowledge cannot give complete and accurate feedback (Heitink et al., 2016, p. 56). The purpose of assessment in classrooms provides information to help teachers, students and parents to recognise the current position of pupils and make decisions on the application of assessment for learning in the future (see Pellegrino, 2014). Pellegrino adds that assessment is set out for several reasons to develop the specific aims in the teaching process:

- Assessment to evaluate the teaching and learning.

- "Assessment of individual achievement" (Pellegrino, 2014).

- Assessment to assess the progress of pupils.

Planning of the lesson by the teacher should be well–established, teachers should ask themselves: why am I focusing on 'how am I going to teach?' and 'what am I going to teach?' when they should be concentrating on ' what are the students going to do?' (Black, Harrison and Lee, 2002). For example, when teaching geography in a secondary school, a geography teacher should have a clear objective of teaching geography subjects, for instance, how they are going to teach the students in a climate change subject, teachers and pupils should recognise its effects on agriculture and water supplement resources in the world or a state.

In contrast, students have to know the importance of learning climate changes in the lesson, thus, the implementation of the right assessments for learning has a positive impact on students' performance and outcomes. Finally, and the most significant is that the student is aware of what teachers want them to learn, what the content requires (knowledge) and 'how I am going to do it'.

3-**Assessment for Learning in the United Kingdom**

Assessment for learning has been used in the UK over the last two decades. A large number of reports have set out strategies to improve assessment for learning. Researchers have shown that it is not simple to improve formative assessment (Wiliam et al., 2010) however, Wiliam et al acknowledged that the most difficult part is making effective use of formative assessment by implementing this sort of assessment in schools in England as well as in the USA. This is due to the high–stakes which are related to performance and accurately.

There is a correlation between the higher–order aims and success in schools; raising the standards for examination and tests is not the right way to assess the learning achievement levels, schools should raise the higher–order thinking so as to increase higher achievements. Students should know how to learn and why they are learning, it is important for teachers, schools management and pupils to know why we are doing an assessment for learning. In the UK, teachers are required to understand the National Curriculum, in order to plan and implement this effectively.

Teachers may experience conflict between delivering content and teaching skills. Since 1987, the Wales' and England' government have announced some changes in the National Curriculum for pupils in primary schools in all subjects, to established programmes and studies that describe the student's needs to help enable pupils to reach or achieve learning goals (Pollard and Bourne, 2002). In addition, in 1988, there is a framework of assessment by the "Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT)" in Wales and England, that includes recommendations to ensure that students enhancing their performance (Harlen and James, 1997).

The framework also mentions the problems in the approach of assessment, such as formative and summative assessments. In some European countries (for example the UK, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand) the formative and summative assessment have different theories but they all have "national assessment policies" and formative assessment is set out by the teacher (Harlen and James, 1997).

The differences between formative and summative assessments are that formative assessment enables students to recognise their progress. In contrast, summative assessment is about performance reporting of levels or grades that move students to the next phase of study (Howe et al., 2004). McDowell, Sambell and Davison (2009) argued that assessment for learning has actual positive aspects for improving pupils' learning process, assessment for learning (formative) also enables tutors to assess their students' progress and give them feedback. Furthermore, the project for assessment for learning in Scotland made a similar comparison of

the assessment that provides students with information on their outcomes and information about their learning progress as well as students can take responsibility for managing their learning and their own progress (McDowell, Sambell and Davison, 2009).

The argument for moving assessment practice is essentially one of 'assessment of learning' to 'assessment for learning' – this is argued by Torrance (2007). Carnell and Lodge (2002) believe that schools need to set out which models of learning and teaching can support effective learning or what are the strategies that promote effective learning in the classroom, and students therefore learn how to become effective learners. Criteria success depends on the knowledge and skills of instructors so that they can give feedback which is a good opportunity for pupils to read a comment written by a teacher. If learners get praise or grades without feedback, these did not make further progress, while a student who has feedback makes much more progress in the class (Butler, 1987).

Another assessment is peer–assessment that is done successfully between learners. Here students have a discussion about an answer and then to come to an agreement. Moreover, self–assessment is a very important kind of assessment that makes learners critically assess themselves and students learning to talk about their own learning (Lee, 2006). Learners should be aware of their objectives, however, many students are unaware of themselves and their targets. Hence, teachers and students will have a good discussion of their own assessment and with each other (Black and Wiliam, 1998b).

In terms of improving learning, teaching and assessment, Ofsted conducted a description of Learners' views at the College of Chichester. Here students should not accept poor learning, teaching and assessment. Managers and teachers also should focus more on this matter at the beginning of each year of study.

In short, assessment for learning (formative) should be better emphasised rather than assessment of learning (summative) due to the effects of assessment for learning on learners' performance and outcomes. However, testing and examining students every month or each term cannot improve the pupils' attainment and the whole education process in the UKs' schools. Actually, both assessments of learning and assessment for learning are required. Formative assessment is a good way to improving learning in the classroom, because it includes feedback, peer and self–assessment, open questions, discussing these questions with each other, and sharing the learning outcomes.

Assessment for learning (formative) should involve leaders, headteachers, teachers and students in order to promote and enhance the schooling as a whole. Schools could have an online assessment in their assessment system so that learners are able to use multiple questions during the lesson and teachers can assess the pupils' outcomes easily. To improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment, education should take into account the objectives in the National Curriculums and these targets should be set out clearly in primary and secondary schools, as well as in higher education.

There is a need to better understand the best qualities of the objectives to encourage and motivate the students to achieve the highest level of learning. Teachers have to meet the pupils' needs in teaching and learning by effective planning for each lesson in the learning.

4– **Assessment in Iraqi Schools**

4.1 **History of Education in Iraq**

The Ministry of Education manages the schooling in Iraqi schools. Iraq also had the best learning in the Middle–East (UNESCO, 2004). The education system was established in 1921 and it includes both a public and a private sector. Schooling has become free for all educational levels, primary, secondary and higher education (undergraduate and postgraduate). Iraqi education has two ministries, The Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for primary and secondary schools, and The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) is responsible for undergraduate and postgraduate students at universities. Between 1970 and 1984, Iraqi Education was on the top and was the best education in Arab countries. These accomplishments of learning have been reached as of 1984:

- The rate of enrollment for both genders increased over 100%.

- The rate of illiteracy between ages 6 to 12 dropped to less than 10%.

- The lowest rates in Arab states and North Africa of pupils who leave learning or drop out of learning.

- "20% of Iraq's total government budget" was spent on education (UNESCO, 2004).

- $620 was spent for each pupil from the budget of the government.

- Learning involved males and females.

However, because of the Iraqi and Iranian war, the public resources and the majority of Iraqi budget was spent for military purposes (UNESCO, 2004). Thus, the education budget declined and suffered due to the deficit of money in Iraq. Moreover, the Iraqi educational sector weakened further because of the first "Gulf War" in 1990.

From 1990 to 2002, the education outcomes changed in Iraq. Firstly, education suffered from a lack of resources and a sharp decline in income. Secondly, only 8% of the government budget was spent on education. Thirdly, the government spent only $47 for each pupil (UNESCO, 2004). Fourthly, by 2002–2003, teachers' salaries had decreased from $500–$1000 a month to $5 per month.

4.2 The scale and structure of education in Iraq

Before 1990, the best educational system in the Middle East was Iraq, it had both quality and access (UNESCO, 2004). However, the situation of learning has become gradually destroyed day after day due to the sanctions on the Iraqi economy and wars. UNESCO

(2003, p. 57) states that analysing the schooling in Iraq, North of Iraq did not suffer too much because of the reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes, whereas in the south and centre of Iraq were worse due to the "provision of basics through the Oil for Food Programme". The main problem is the absence of funds and resources, teachers and students being displaced, corruption and the security of the situation. These factors raised the rate of illiteracy to 39% of the rural population and roughly 22% "of the adult population in Iraq has never attended school". Whilst, the rate of illiteracy in women has become 47% (UNESCO, 2004). In 2005, the "National Development Strategy of Iraq" published a new vision of schooling in Iraq, this included:

- Democracy and federal regimen.

- "Transfer Iraq into a peaceful country".

- A prosperous country.

- Develop the National Curriculum.

According to UNESCO (2004), The Ministry of Education in Iraq employed the National Curriculum Commission to review and develop all subjects in the curriculum.

4.3 **Current situation in Iraq**

Since 2003, the Iraqi politics has changed and the educational system needs to reform with a new philosophy. The Ministry of Education in Iraq with UNESCO conducted a new framework for Iraqi Educational Curriculum to develop the Education system in Iraq (UNESCO, 2012). Many schools need to be rehabilitated,

developing teachers' knowledge and skills and teaching methods, girls should be educated, developing curriculums, using computers in learning and teaching. Education should cover rural and remote zones, Ministry of Education should train teachers in a new way of learning.

4.4 **Assessment of learning**

Assessment of learning in Iraq is known as summative assessment due to all schools having set tests or examinations at each phase of study, whether in schools or universities. By testing pupils in primary as well as secondary schools, they can move to the next stage if they have successfully passed this exam. Moreover, most colleges have an examination each month, mid–year and the final examinations. In the author's experience, Iraqi education is suffering from a lack in several areas. For instance, teachers have a lack of using contemporary methods which are related to the use of the computer in the classroom.

Also, some of them have limited knowledge and skills in their specialities, particularly in the primary and secondary learning. As a result of some changes in the curriculums such as English, maths and geography, while at universities the professors have good knowledge and skills in their objectives as well as using computers more than in schools. Furthermore, Ministry of Education has a small number of training institutes which can help teachers develop their own knowledge and skills during the learning process.

Teachers used to write a daily plan that shows his/her plan for the lesson in each subject in every day. In general, the Ministry of Education has an overseeing responsibility of managers and teachers in schools. They are monitoring the learning and assessing the teachers by observing them in a subject in the class and then the overseer gives some comments about learning and teaching in the subject as well as to students. Each subject has an overseer specialist. Many schools have more than 30 students in each classroom. Schools utilise blackboards in learning and teaching and most schools do not have a good laboratory for learning and teaching science subjects. In the author's experience, after 2010, The Ministry of Education identified some initiatives which are related to developing teachers in the methods of teaching. When the author was appointed as a teacher in the secondary school he only did one session in teaching methods.

It was useful, but, it did not use the modern methods such ICT tools. Iraqi schools did not have an assessment for learning that can assess or evaluate the students' outcomes or performances. Teachers used to ask some questions at the end of the lesson in order to know whether students are understanding the subject. Sometimes they have a discussion on some difficult topics.

To sum up, schools do not have peer and self–assessments which are related to formative assessment. Additionally, teachers, do not write a lot of feedback to learners at the end of class. In addition, the books used are overcrowded with information and some of them do not meet students' needs with a full understanding of the subject such English Language, and maths. Success criteria

depend on grades that students have had in their results at the end of each year.

5–Strategies of Assessment for Learning

Strategies of assessment for learning is a very important part of the State's responsibility so as to develop personal learning, and improve the rate of advancement in education. Moreover, The National Strategies with The Department for Children, Schools and Families aimed to support schools to develop the assessment of students to improve the rate of pupils' progress by enhancing the learning (Kinght, 2008). According to Zlatovic, Balaban and Kermek (2015), stimulated learning strategies have a positive impact on students' outcomes by using online assessments. In contrast, the surface learning strategies have a negative influence on pupils' progress. Hence, the strategies of assessment for learning depend on good practice and schools have to use the information of assessment to improve the quality of assessment itself. The most effective institutes build on the successful strategies and how to make the assessment for learning and teaching more extensive.

5.1 Assessment strategies in Iraq

UNESCO (2012, p. 47) addresses a framework for Iraqi Curriculum which has assessment strategies for learning and teaching. It includes the process of assessment, the objective of the assessment, "the range of assessment tasks" and the examination. Assessment is not an individual event, but it is a process in schooling. Tutors should be able to understand what the pupil has learned and "what well they have learned" (UNESCO, 2012, p.47).

The process of assessment, therefore, follows these stages:

| Gather Information | → | Make judgements | → | Take action |

Figer (1) my own work

In terms of assessment of objectives, assessment in Iraq can be divided into types which are an assessment of learning that allows teachers to create "conclusive judgements" on pupils' learning levels and the quality of education (UNESCO, 2012, p. 48). Basically, the education system in schools depends on the type of a summative assessment of testing or examining students. The result of these examinations can be used to inform the parents about their childrens' attainments at mid–year and the end of the year. The second type of assessment is an assessment for the purpose of learning that allows teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' schooling. In both informal and formal methods, teachers should carry out assessment for the purpose of teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2012).

On the other hand, all pupils should recognise how they are learning, as well as understand what they need to improve in their learning. All teachers should know how to create good judgements about students' achievements and understand the principles of learning progression (Kinght, 2008). Furthermore, the learning outcomes should assess by assessment tasks which are constructed by teachers. In contrast, all schools should have a

well–structured plan as well as a systematic assessment system that can make useful, regular and manageable contribution so as they can make an accurate assessment of the student. In addition, all parents should know how pupils are learning as well as what they need to do to improve their learning. In the author's experience, Iraq should use the assessment for learning in the whole education in order to improve the quality of learning outcomes in schools.

6–Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion: Iraq had the best education system in the Middle–East from 1970 to 1984. However, after this period, the schooling in Iraq has gradually declined until the year 2004 as a result of several wars. The review and discussion of assessment of and for learning in the UK has a long history since the Seventies. In contrast, Iraq has great experience of assessment of learning, but there is little evidence of assessment for learning. A further result, the assessment of learning in Iraq is summative and depends on examination and testing in schools and universities.

In contrast, in the UK both are used equally and assessment for learning (formative) is used more than assessment of learning (summative) in education, whether in schools or higher education. Education in Iraq is based upon rote learning in schools and success criteria is totally dependent on passing the exam or test in every topic, phase and year to move to the

next class or from primary to secondary schools. It showed that teachers used blackboards in their learning and teaching rather than a whiteboard and schooling does not use ICT tools such computers in the classroom. Even though the National Curriculum has been reformed and developed since 2003, there is little evidence which shows that Iraqi education has moved from the assessment of learning (summative) to assessment for learning (formative).

Teachers also did not have enough training during the learning process in schools. The education system has been almost destroyed as a result of the economic blockade on Iraq after the Gulf War 1990. Consequently, this economic crisis has had a big impact on the whole learning that included teachers' salaries and students' outcomes. The assessment in the UK tends to use AfL (formative) rather than an assessment of learning (summative). This is due to many reasons which are relevant to the purpose for learning, the quality of learning and students' achievement levels in both schools and higher education.

6.2 Recommendations

Assessment for learning is an essential part of education. The educational authorities in Iraq should consider more extensive use of assessment for learning. However, the application of assessment for learning is known as a western construct in education. Hence, Iraq should move from the traditional way of learning, teaching and assessment to the modern methods of learning and assessment.

Assessment for learning should be used more extensively to improve the quality of learning and raise the standards of schooling in schools and higher education. Moreover, learning and teaching in schools should use assessment for learning as a method to enhance teachers' and students' performance. The assessment system in Iraq should also change from a more summative assessment to a formative assessment as exists in the UK, whether in schools or higher learning. The UK could focus more on an online assessment for learning.

Perhaps, this assignment may be useful for the educational specialists in Ministry of Education. Additionally, teachers should use assessment for learning to gain information so that they are able to be used as feedback to students to improve learners' achievements during and at the end of the lesson. In terms of further work, Iraqi researchers should work on developing learning, teaching and assessment for learning to enhance the education to return the education to its previous position as the best schooling in the Middle–East. Headteachers, teachers, families and students should co–operate to meet the pupils' needs. Iraqi government with Ministry of Education as well as Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) should develop the National Curriculum with clear objectives and facilitate learning. Tutors and Students could use this assessment for learning as a significant part of the education process. Thus, they enable use of formative assessment that includes peer assessment, self–assessment and open questions during and at the end of a topic in order to improve and share learning outcomes.

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