

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING: GRID FOR SUCCESS

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Abstract

On-going assessment is an effective strategy to improve teaching, learning and raising standards through empowering students to take responsibility of their own learning and success. This study compared 19 students' performance in the English Language coursework for 2 consecutive semesters before and after the use of the grid as a performance guide in PPISMP (Programme Persediaan Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan) which is a preparatory programme for the Primary School Bachelor of Education. This study also explored the effectiveness of using the on-going assessment as a teaching and evaluation guide while taking into consideration other contributing factors that could have possibly led to improved performance of both students and lecturers. By using the grid, the students were able to understand the aim of their learning while completing this task, where they were in relation to this aim and how they could bridge the gap in their knowledge. The grid charts the next step forward for students based on shared learning goals and evaluation criteria. Lecturers' use of the grid improves teaching based on the evaluation criteria set and charts the next step forward in their teaching based on their students' performance.

Abstrak

Penilaian berterusan merupakan satu strategi yang efektif untuk meningkatkan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran. Ia juga adalah strategi yang dapat meningkatkan tahap pencapaian pelajar dengan menjadikan mereka lebih bertanggungjawab terhadap pembelajaran dan kejayaan sendiri. Kajian ini membandingkan pencapaian dalam Kerja Kursus Bahasa Inggeris bagi 19 pelatih PPISMP (Program Persediaan Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan) bagi dua semester berturut-turut iaitu sebelum dan selepas menggunakan grid ini sebagai panduan pencapaian. Selain mengambil kira faktor-faktor lain yang mungkin memberi kesan pada peningkatan pencapaian pelatih dan pensyarah, kajian ini juga menyelidik penggunaan penilaian berterusan sebagai satu bentuk panduan pengajaran. Penggunaan grid ini dapat memenuhi keperluan kerja kursus di samping dapat membantu pelatih untuk lebih memahami tujuan pembelajaran, mengetahui kedudukan mereka berpandukan grid dan mencari cara untuk merapatkan jurang ilmu pengetahuan mereka. Perkongsian matlamat pembelajaran dan kriteria penilaian kerja kursus yang dicadangkan oleh grid ini telah membawa pelatih maju setapak ke hadapan. Para pensyarah juga mendapat manfaat melalui grid ini iaitu dengan menjadikannya sebagai panduan bagi meningkatkan mutu pengajaran mereka berdasarkan kriteria penilaian kerja kursus dan pencapaian pelatih.

Introduction

This study is carried out as a pilot project to encourage and promote the linking of assessment to teaching and learning as good practice among the lecturers in the English Language Department, Institut Perguruan Islam Selangor. Currently, this approach is also being promoted in the ongoing Master Training for Teacher Educators on the First Steps 2nd Edition.

This study involves students from the PPISMP (Programme Persediaan Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan) which is a preparatory programme for the Primary School Bachelor of Education to produce students with strong basic academic knowledge and skill in the related subjects. The structure of the programme focuses on the need to prepare students with education as its content discipline. Students are required to undergo the core academic and extracurricular components in order to prepare them for subject content knowledge.

The evaluation system in this programme is carried out in the form of examination and coursework. The coursework component is carried out at the teachers' training institute (IPG) level, according to the evaluation guidelines of coursework (KKBI) which is provided by Teacher Education Division (BPG).

Significance of study

This study hopes to pave the path to the use of assessment as a guide to effective and quality teaching and learning. This practice has a snowballing effect of improving students' and teachers' performance through strategic teaching and learning and also provides constructive feedback to programme coordinators who prepare the coursework.

There are 9 PPISMP classes but only one was interviewed for this study. However, the data collected for the whole population was analysed for triangulation purposes. Thus, the findings of this study might not necessarily lead to generalizations. Due to the span of time between the first semester and second semester, there is a possibility that other factors could have lead to the difference in performance among the students. This is addressed as part of the study. The grid as used in this study is a term that is also referred to as standard criteria, evaluation grid, performance guide and assessment grid. The grid is used as a metaphoric term in this study to emphasize its role as a guide to the teachers as well as the students. The term assessment and evaluation can be used synonymously though some might disagree (Arshad, 2004, pp 3). In this study the term is used interchangeably.

The PPISMP Programme

There are three semesters in PPISMP programme and each semester the students have to complete 1 KKP (coursework) and 1 UA (oral test) for the English Language. The English language has 4 credit hours per week and the assessment is divided into 3:

i) Written examination	40%
ii) KKP	30%
iii) UA	30%

The implementation of the coursework aims to assess students ability in

- i) acquiring knowledge,
- ii) mastering knowledge and skill,
- iii) transferring knowledge to real situation and context,
- iv) and practicing the values and ethics of the teaching profession.

The aim of the coursework is not only to assess students’ performance in academic components, but also to reinforce the process of teaching and learning. Coursework evaluation consists of various structures and needs to be implemented throughout the programme.

Coursework Structure

The activities for the coursework are planned from the stage of acquiring to the transfer of knowledge. The coursework assignment should be designed according to the level of learning which are divided into three categories - A, B and C.

- Category A assesses students’ ability in acquiring knowledge,
- Category B assesses students’ ability in mastering knowledge and skills and
- Category C assesses students’ ability to transfer the acquired knowledge in the real situation. This component relates to only the Project assignment.

The coursework is carried out as project, short coursework and practical assessment.

The Short Coursework Structure

The short coursework is a short term evaluation (not exceeding 2 weeks) for the non-academic subjects to conclude the achievement of the learning objectives through a designed coursework. The short coursework for PPISMP programme is divided into two categories. Both categories are carried out according to the syllabus.

Examples of KKP task for students:

CATEGORY A	CATEGORY B
Knowledge acquisition	Mastery of knowledge and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz • Test • Discussion • Short notes/ graphic organizer • Scrap book • presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily lesson plan • Report writing • Critical review • Reflection writing • Folio • Non-project based product • Essay writing (not more than 10 pages) • Practical (hands on)

Aspects and criteria of coursework evaluation

Evaluation aspects	Criteria
A. Knowledge Acquisition	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outsourcing skills Content Information comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variety of sources Precise and sufficient Comprehension
B. Mastery of knowledge and skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ability to plan and construct information meaningfully The ability to apply knowledge and skill. The ability to relate various elements in planning, implementing and producing product. The ability to develop thinking and self interpretation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structuring Transformation Knowledge application and skills Self interpretation
C. Attitude and personality	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment Reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task responsibility New insight from self perception

Statement of Problem

The overall performance of students in the PPISMP (Academic) for the first semester coursework was not satisfactory (Appendix 1). The results were:

Table 1. Analysis of Coursework for PPISMP English Language (Semester 1) in Grades

GRADE	F	E	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	T O T A L
Scale	0 to 19.0	20 to 29.9	30 to 39.9	40 to 49.9	50 to 54.9	55 to 59.9	60 to 64.9	65 to 69.9	70 to 74.9	75 to 79.9	80 to 89.9	90 to 100	186
Total	-	-	-	-	19	13	30	34	48	30	11	1	186
Percentage	-	-	-	-	10.22	6.99	16.13	18.28	25.81	16.13	5.91	0.54	100

MEAN: 67.89

Source: Adapted from BKKP Semester 1, 2007.

Lecturers on the programme were concerned of finding ways to assist, support and provide effective feedback to students to improve their performance. During an in-house training on Assessment for Learning in the English Language Department, the lecturers in the department accepted the suggestion by the researchers that lecturers on the programme should provide more support for trainees while doing their coursework. All the lecturers were also prepared to pool in their effort and resources to use a standards criteria as a guide. Lecturers could use the standards criteria for assessment and the trainees can use them as a guide to complete their coursework. This was in line with the need to integrate summative assessment with formative assessment to enhance and promote learning.

Objectives

This study aims to explore the use of the grid as a link between teaching, learning and assessment and factors that affect trainees’ performance in their coursework.

The objectives of this study are to explore the use of the grid as an instrument to guide trainees to enhance their performance in completing their coursework and also to assist teacher trainers in moderating their assessment. This study also examines, within the constraints of this study, other factors that could have possibly contributed towards better performance among the teacher trainees.

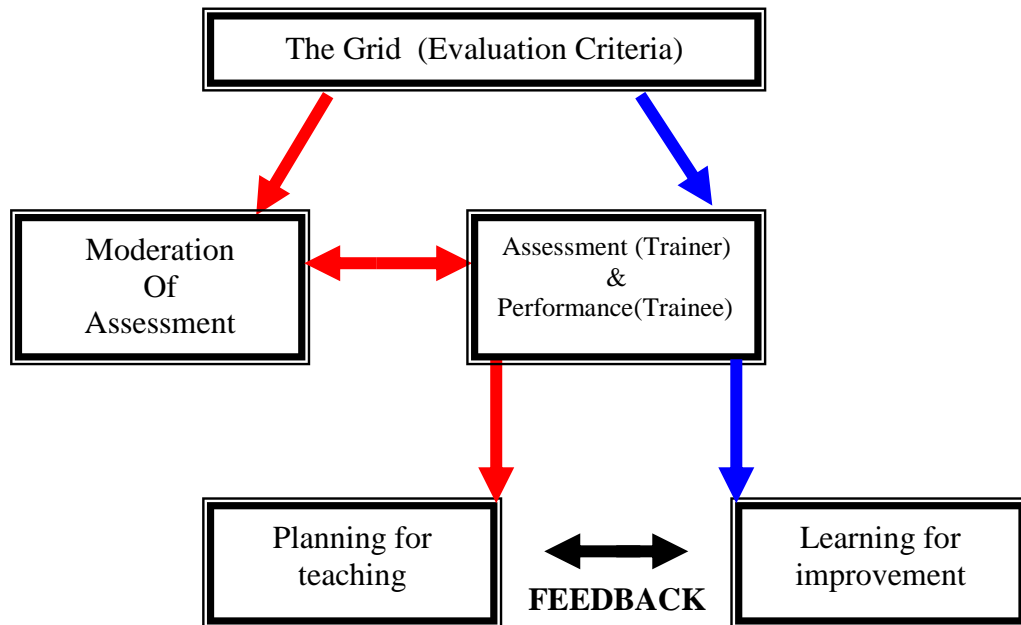
Research Questions

The findings of this study answered the following research questions:

1. In what ways did the grid help the trainees’ complete their coursework?
2. In what ways did the grid assist teacher trainers in assessing the coursework?
3. What contributing factors do teacher trainees identify when comparing the difference in their performance in Semester 1 and Semester 2?
4. What contributing factors do teacher trainers identify when comparing the difference in their trainees’ performance in Semester 1 and Semester 2?

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on a conceptual framework that integrates approaches from “Assessment for Learning” and First Steps 2nd Edition.



The grid (Appendix A) provides a three-pronged guide to the teacher trainers, that is, it guides them in assessment, moderation of assessment and in their planning for teaching. The grid guides trainers to assess trainees’ coursework with a specific focus based on the rubrics provided. These rubrics also function as a guide to moderate assessment between different trainers. Moderation here occurs while assessing (intra-

moderation) by one trainer and after assessing (inter-moderation) by different trainers. After moderation and assessment, the trainers are also able to use the same rubrics in the grid as a guide to planning their teaching to be more effective.

As for trainees, the guiding grid provides a two-pronged guide where they are able to identify their current performance and then plan for improvement based on the rubrics at the next higher level. The use of assessment as a form of guide to improving students' performance is the focus of current trends in learning where

The focus needs to be on helping teachers use assessment, as part of teaching and learning, in ways that will raise pupils' achievement.
Assessment Reform Group, 1999.

Literature Review

Assessment for learning is an approach that was promoted by Prof Val Klenowski, Queensland University of Technology during the "Assessment to Enhance Learning" course held in December 2007. She showed samples of projects/coursework tasks for Mathematics, English and Science with a standard criteria as a guide to enhance learning and teaching. Criterion-based assessment supports on-going assessment and it could relate to various levels. The focus of this study is the use of the criterion-based grid to assess trainees' short coursework. The manner in which the grid is used can support on-going assessment.

"On-going assessment includes all those procedures and routines that classroom teachers use to help them keep a constant check on their own teaching and the student's progress."
(Chitravelu et. al., 2005, pp 373)

Currently, there is global support of assessment for learning because it involves students in self-assessment, provides feedback that leads to student's recognition of their next steps and how to take them, is underpinned by confidence that every student can improve and involves both teacher and student in reviewing and reflecting on assessment data (Assessment Reform Group, 2002).

The use of the grid supports assessment for learning because it is embedded in a view that it is an essential part of teaching and learning, involves sharing learning goals with the students and aims to help students know and recognize the standards for which they are aiming" (cited in Assessment to Enhance Learning).

There is research evidence that highlights the negative impact of using formative assessment which emphasizes the giving of marks and grades rather than the useful advice that focus on learning functions, the use of comparison that supports competition rather than personal improvement and that it demotivates students by making them believe that they do not have the ability (Black and William, 1998). Thus, the use of the grid promotes a positive approach to assessment where students and teachers are guided towards achieving success in the teaching and learning process. This is further strengthened by teachers providing feedback based on the grid that focuses on the learning and teaching process instead of fulfilling the managerial

role such that teachers' feedback is used for social and managerial purposes (cited in Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2003).

Providing effective feedback is an important component of assessment for learning. Feedback provided should allow the learner to close the gap between the current and desired performance and this becomes most effective when feedback is linked to the learning intentions and learner understands the success criteria/standard (Assessment to Enhance Learning, 2007). Thus, it is crucial that feedback given to students is based on the learning intentions/goals set in the curriculum. The grid used in this study was built based on the PPISMP syllabus as provided by TED.

The First Step 2nd Edition also promotes linking assessment to teaching and learning. It supports the principles of Assessment for Learning where the criteria provide in the assessment is shared and understood by the learners, learners receive constructive guidance about how to improve and promotes reflective and self-managing learners (Assessment to Enhance Learning, 2007).

What matters most to learners is that assessment should be part of the learning process, and the thinking process about learning and talking about learning (Atkinson, 2003). Atkinson's research recommends that assessment must match learning and learners should know in advance what will be assessed. Thus, providing the grid with the short coursework task not only informs them what will be assessed but also lets them know in advance what will be assessed.

Methodology

Research Design

This study integrates qualitative and nonexperimental quantitative approach (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005) which incorporates data collected from various sources such as structured interview schedule for the lecturer who supervised and examined the respondents, structured interview schedule for the 19 PPISMP trainees and analysis of marks of all the 184 students in PPISMP Semester One and Two, a random survey of 10 students from all 9 PPISMP classes using a questionnaire (LAM-PT14-06). The data collected from the various sources is used to triangulate the findings. The data analysis from the BKKP (Semester One and Two) is used to compare the general view of all the PPISMP students on the use of the grid. Their views are further supported by detailed analysis of the 90 students' responses in the LAM-PT14-06, interview with the 19 students in one class and also analysis of the interview with the lecturer concerned.

The qualitative approach involves the detail analysis of structured interviews carried out with the lecturers who supervised and marked the coursework for the English subject in this programme and the structured interviews carried out with the 19 purposive-selected trainees from one of the nine classes in this programme.

Sampling

The population for this study is the PPISMP July 2007 intake trainees who are currently in their second semester. This is the three semester foundation programme

for the degree programme, PPPRP4T. This programme is identified for this study based on the current exercise of evaluating the PPPRP4T by the MQA for accreditation purposes.

A purposive sampling of 19 trainees from the Religious Study major option was done based on the fact that out of the 9 PPISMP classes, only that class had the same teacher trainer as their supervisor and examiner for both the first and second semesters. This is to maintain constant condition of the study.

It was decided at the Department meeting that the use of the evaluation criteria will be piloted for the PPISMP Semester 2 (Academic) coursework. The coordinator for the subject and the team of lecturers teaching the subject planned an evaluation criteria based on the semester coursework for the programme. To maintain a constant condition to this study, the second semester coursework was designed to mirror the first semester coursework while fulfilling the expected learning outcomes in the second semester syllabus. Both the semesters' coursework tasks incorporated the 8 elements given in the PPISMP Coursework Guideline. Views from different lecturers in the department were taken into account to enhance the criteria set for the evaluation of the coursework.

Trainees were given the coursework task with a copy of the evaluation criteria. They were briefed on how the coursework will be evaluated based on the criteria given. All the 9 PPISMP classes were assigned a supervisor each for trainees to consult if they needed further explanation or clarification on the task assigned.

The duration given to complete the coursework was two weeks as stipulated in the PPISMP Coursework Guidelines and during these two weeks trainees consulted their supervisors on a regular basis.

After two weeks, all the trainees handed in their coursework with a copy of the evaluation criteria. Respective supervisors of the 9 PPISMP classes marked and moderated their marks based on the evaluation criteria. Marks for the different components of the coursework were recorded in the evaluation criteria. The trainees' marks obtained for the coursework in Semester 1 and Semester 2 were recorded.

The 19 samples were returned a copy of their completed evaluation criteria and they were also given the first semester marks for. Based on their performance, the trainees answered the structured interview (whole class) questions.

The responses from the 19 samples and the lecturers interview schedule were analysed to identify patterns that reflect the trainees views about using the evaluation grid as a guiding grid.

Data Collection

At the end of the Semester 1, trainees' coursework were marked and recorded. These marks were entered into the BKKP (Borang Kerja Kursus dan Peperiksaan) for the Examination Unit. Then at the end of Semester 2, the trainee's coursework marks were also recorded.

The samples of 19 students were given the evaluation criteria with their marks on it for the different categories and they were asked to respond to the questions given in the structured interview scheduled. Trainees were also provided with their previous semester marks for comparison of their coursework performance. Trainees were given sufficient time to reflect and write their responses.

Ten students from each of the 9 PPISMP classes were identified in each class and they were given the LAM-PT14-06 questionnaire using a Likert scale of 1 to 4. This questionnaire is an ISO document provided by the TED. These questionnaires were analysed using SPSS. Only the first two constructs given in the questionnaire that relates to the use of the grid will be considered for analysis for this study.

Data Analysis

The data collected on the overall coursework performance of the trainees for Semester 1 and 2 is analysed using Excel (BKPP). The analysis is based on the mean and percentage of grades achieved.

The questionnaire given to the 90 trainees (10 from each class) is analysed using SPSS descriptive statistics that is frequency, mean and percentage. The questionnaire given to the 19 samples is analysed qualitatively to highlight recurring key words that reflect trainees’ views on the use of the evaluation criteria.

The structured interview schedule for the lecturer who supervised and examined the 19 samples is analysed qualitatively.

Findings

The findings of this study answers all the four research questions.

a. Overall analysis of the population (Appendix 2)

Table 2. Analysis of Coursework for PPISMP English Language (Semester 2) in Grades/Scale

GRADE	F	E	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A	T
Scale	0	20	30	40	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	90	O
	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	T
	19.0	29.9	39.9	49.9	54.9	59.9	64.9	69.9	74.9	79.9	89.9	100	A
Total	-	-	-	-	13	11	19	23	37	39	40	2	L
%	-	-	-	-	7.07	5.98	10.33	12.50	20.11	21.20	21.74	1.09	100

MEAN: 71.72

Source: Adapted from BKPP Semester 2, 2008.

The mean of the overall performance in Semester 2 has improved from 67.89 in Semester 1 to 71.72. The significance of this improvement is reflected in the quality of the trainees’ performance in achieving better grades. In Semester 2, 42 trainees

(22.83%) obtained grades A and A- as compared to 12 trainees (7.45) in Semester 1. This improvement has affected the trainees’ achievement in the Grade B range where there is a drop from 112 trainees (60.22%) in Semester 1 to 99 trainees (53.81%) in Semester 2. There is also a drop in the number of trainees in the Grade C range from 62 (33.34%) in Semester 1 to 43 (23.38%) in Semester 2. This analysis confirms that there is a significant improvement in the quality of the trainees’ performance in their coursework in Semester 2.

b. Analysis of questionnaire

The analysis using SPSS of the 90 PPISMP students’ questionnaire (LAM-PT14-06 – Appendix 3) gave a mean of 3 which is “Agree” on a Likert Scale of 1 – Disagree, 2- Partially Disagree, 3- Agree, 4- Strongly Agree. The following is the analysis of Construct 1 and 2:

Construct 1:

Guidance for completion of coursework is clear and easy to understand.

Table 3. Analysis for Construct 1 in the questionnaire (LAM-PT14-06).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 2	8	8.9	8.9	8.9
3	58	64.4	64.4	73.4
4	24	26.7	26.7	100
Total	90	100.0	100.0	

The above analysis using SPSS for Construct 1 in the questionnaire shows that 58 trainees (64.4%) agree and 24 trainees (26.7%) strongly agree that the guidance given for the completion of the coursework was clear and easy to understand. The grid was the main form of guidance given to the students for this semester.

Construct 2:

Coursework briefing and the evaluation criteria is easy to understand.

Table 4. Analysis for Construct 2 in the questionnaire (LAM-PT14-06).

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1	1	1.1	1.1	1.1
2	13	14.4	14.4	15.6
3	47	52.2	52.2	67.8
4	29	32.2	32.2	100
Total	90	100	100	

The above analysis is for Construct 2 in the questionnaire that focuses on course briefing and evaluation criteria which is the grid. Out of the 90 trainees, 76 trainees (84.4%) agreed and strongly agreed that the coursework briefing and the evaluating criteria is easy to understand. However, there were 13 trainees (14.4%) who

responded with “Partially Agree” to this construct. Moreover, there is one respondent who disagreed to this construct. We feel this is cause for concern and calls for review, identification of weaknesses and improvement of the existing grid and the briefing provided such that more trainees will benefit from the use of a criteria grid to improve their learning. On the other hand, this response could be due to the trainee’s own language weakness in understanding the grid and briefing because on-going guidance was given by the supervisors and examiners throughout the 2-weeks duration of the Coursework.

c. Analysis of trainees structured interview schedule (Appendix 4)

This interview was carried out for the 19 samples identified and close analysis of their responses revealed some recurring idea/views on the use of the grid. All 19 responds agreed that the grid was of help to them. The trainees were requested to identify 2 ways how the grid helped them (38 responses). Table 5 summarizes their responses based on the frequency of certain recurring words they used to describe how the grid had helped them to complete their coursework.

Table 5. Analysis for trainees structured interview schedule

	Guide/ Focus	Understand task/ coursework requirement	Marks	Irrelevant responses
Frequency	19	9	5	5
Percentage	50	23.7	13.1	13.1

The above responses answer Research Question 1 that the grid functioned, in descending order of frequency, as a guide/focus to complete the coursework, to understand coursework requirement, to score better marks and some irrelevant responses. These irrelevant responses included statements that are not focused on the use of the grid. The grid seem to have been a guide to improve the trainees score and quality of performance as confirmed with their overall performance based on the BKKP Excel analysis above.

The trainees identified a number of factors that could have led to the difference in their performance in Semester 1 and 2. These responses answer the second Research Questions where the most frequent response from the trainees was that they revised more. Other factors stated included that they had a better understanding of the coursework, the coursework was easier and they were more focused in their learning. Based on the overall response to the role of the grid as a guide (94.7%), it is possible that trainees understood the coursework better with the use of the grid. Furthermore, the criteria provided for each component of the coursework task could have also lead to the fact that the trainees found the coursework easier. Moreover, there was one response that highlighted the fact that familiarity to the coursework format could be another factor.

d. Analysis of trainer’s structured interview schedule (Appendix 5)

The trainer who supervised and examined the 19 respondents’ coursework identified that the grid guided her to do a “more thorough evaluation”. Further probe during the interview revealed that the trainer was able to use the criteria given in the grid as a guide to look for specific characteristics in the coursework to evaluate. The grid also helped her to guide her trainees and “explain to them how to arrive to the desired” level and also to “point out to students their mistakes and what they should/can do”. Thus, the grid provides a guide to the trainer to provide effective feedback to her trainees. Providing effective feedback assists the trainees to close the gap and move on to the next level in their learning. During the interview, the trainer also mentioned that apart from providing focused feedback based on the grid, she will also be able to plan her teaching to provide sufficient and appropriate input for her trainees. The above responses provide answer to Research Question 3.

The trainer also stated that other factors that may have contributed to her students’ improved performance could be self-motivation (internal factor) and close-guidance and advice by the lecturer (external factors). These responses answer Research Question 4. There is a valid possibility that the improvement in the students’ performance in the second semester could be due to experience gained in the first semester whereby both trainer and the trainees were new to the format of the coursework.

Based on the responses provided by the trainees involved in this study and the lecturers on this programme, the grid (Appendix 6) was reviewed and revised for effective evaluation based on the learning goals set in the syllabus and Coursework Guideline.

The use of the evaluation/assessment criteria seems to have positively affected the teaching and learning process. The improvement in the quality of the trainees’ performance is more significant than the quantity. The grid is based on the syllabus requirement. Thus, the feedback provided by the trainers based on the grid is clearly linked to the learning goals. While providing feedback, the trainers are able to make the trainees understand the success criteria, close the gap in their current and desired performance and plan their teaching based on the student’s performance. Feedback thus becomes the linking factor between teaching and learning as conceptualised in the framework above.

Suggestions and recommendations

The copy of the grid given to learners/trainees need not include marks. Marks are meant for recording purposes for the trainer/lecturer only. However, learners need to know the range they are in either as a tick in the range column or a Grade. This on-going ‘assessment for learning’ can be carried out at every level, from primary to tertiary. It depends on the teachers’/trainers’ creativity to design a guiding grid that can support the learners’/trainees’ learning process and learning goals.

Conclusion

The advantage of practicing ‘assessment for learning’ as compared to ‘assessment of learning’ is well documented by various researches. Thus, the use of criterion-based assessment grids such as the grid used in this study seems to be a successful approach of supporting effective learning and teaching. This is a simple and practical approach and should be encouraged and promoted in schools and teacher training institutes.

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