



Effects of a Paradigm Shift in Summative Assessment from Individual to Group: Writing in Context

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Abstract

Aim: In most of EFL/ESL situations, summative assessment helps students to have an idea of the formative assessment. The question papers and quizzes portfolios are designed in a peculiar way to reflect the formative assessment patterns. However, despite this practice, learners do not score well in the examination. The researchers have felt the reason behind this is that students do not understand the questions in the question paper which ultimately leads to an incorrect answer. This study is important in the sense as it attempts to modify the established practices of summative assessment which ultimately pave way for the formative assessment. As the primary objective of summative assessment is to provide a model of the final examination, researchers propose that summative

assessments (quizzes and progress tests) must be given in pairs and groups. Learners, contrary to established practices, were allowed to discuss questions with each other and then attempt them. As part of the methodology, researchers formed two groups. One group was given a group summative assessment while the other one was given an individual assessment. At the end of the semester, researchers compared and contrasted the writing samples of both groups after the formative assessment. It was observed that students who were encouraged to form groups and pairs performed better than those who were given summative assessments individually.

Methodology and Approach: Researchers formed two groups. One group was given a group summative assessment while the other one was given an individual assessment. At the end of the semester, researchers compared and contrasted the writing samples of both groups after the formative assessment.

Outcome: It was observed that students who were encouraged to form groups and pairs performed better than those who were given summative assessments individually.

Conclusion and Suggestions: This study modified the established practices of summative assessment with two study groups at PY, Najran University which ultimately paved way for the formative assessment. As the primary objective of summative assessment is to provide a model of the final examination, researchers propose that summative assessments (quizzes and progress tests) must be given in pairs and groups. Learners, contrary to established practices, should be allowed to discuss questions with each other and then attempt them.

Keywords: Summative Assessment, Formative Assessment, Pair and Groups, Grades

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Introduction

It is usually observed that most of the students do not understand the questions in the examination. As a result, they fail to score better grades though they may know the answers to many of the questions. Students are very weak in English at PY Najran University. As students are so weak in English, they cannot understand the questions. In many cases, they might know the answers but they cannot answer them correctly as they do not understand the language of the questions, i.e., instructions. This research emphasizes that students must be provided with sufficient exposure to a variety of question papers. They must be provided with sufficient practice through quizzes, progress tests, portfolios, etc. This way they can have an idea about different types of questions that can be expected in the examination.

Besides this, some modifications have been suggested in the summative assessment practices. As most summative assessments at Najran University aim to provide exposure to a variety of questions, it was suggested that students must be allowed to form pairs and groups while attempting the questions in the summative assessment. It is observed that students are more open to each other than their respective teachers. They learn more from each other in the pair and group. As students were given freedom of movement in the class with proper supervision, they discussed with each other the questions that they could not understand. This way they better understood the instructions of the question paper. As they understood the questions well, they answered them correctly.

Literature Review

The general approach to ‘assessing’ within the PYP is expressed in the statement that a well-designed learning experience will provide data on students’ knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding, and is consequently a vehicle for summative or formative assessment.’ Thus, the quality of assessment is dependent on the nature and quality of the learning experiences, and the ‘criteria for effective assessments’ bring together a range of qualities that apply equally to effective learning experiences for students (OECD 2013; Alexander 2010; Stiggins 2001).

Student assessment in the PYP is identified as a process that involves ‘gathering and analysis of information and identifies ‘what students know, understand, can do, and feel at different stages in the learning process.’ Assessment is described as being ‘wholly internal’ and having the ‘prime objective’ of providing feedback on the learning process (IB 2007).

The concept of formative assessment was first introduced in 1971 by Bloom, Hastings, and Maddaus. They formally introduced the idea that assessment need not be used solely to make summative evaluations of student performance, arguing that teachers should include episodes of formative assessment following phases of teaching. During these episodes, teachers should provide students with feedback and correction as a way to remediate student work. Most experts now consider formative assessment as an ongoing part of the teaching and learning process. Formative assessment thus becomes a central element in teaching and learning.

Research also highlights the importance of focusing students’ attention on mastering tasks, rather than on competition with peers, and developing emotional competencies. Emotional competencies, such as self-awareness, self-control, compassion, cooperation, flexibility, and the ability to make judgments on the value of information serve students well in school and throughout their lives

(OECD, 2002, p. 58). Emotions also affect the student's self-esteem, motivation, and ability to regulate his or her learning.

International research supports the idea that tracking a student's progress toward objective learning goals is more effective than the comparison with peers' progress (Cameron and Pierce, 1994; Kluger and DeNisi, 1996; Heckhausen, 1989; and Rheinberg and Krug, 1999). In situations of comparison, weaker students absorb the idea that they lack ability, and thus lose motivation and confidence. Ames (1992) notes that teachers' beliefs about the importance of effort, rather than ability, also play an important role in students' beliefs about themselves. Appropriate reference to an individual student's progress and opportunities to improve work based on feedback can help counter the negative impact of social comparisons. Mischo and Rheinberg (1995) also found positive effects in several experimental and field studies where teachers referred to student progress over time. Positive effects were identified for students: Intrinsic motivation. Self-esteem. Academic self-concept. Causal attributions. Learning [see particularly Krampen (1987)].

Summative results, when embedded in the wider teaching and learning environment, are more likely to be used formatively. They also help to lower the stress of tests, which can hurt the self-esteem of lower achieving students (See, for example, a study conducted by the EPPI – Centre at the Institute of Education, University of London, June 2002).

In their review of the English-language literature, Black and William (1998) identified several studies, conducted under ecologically valid circumstances (that is, controlled experiments conducted in the student's usual classroom setting and with their usual teacher) to support this point of view. For example, "ego-involving" feedback (even in the form of praise) rather than feedback on the task at hand appears to hurt performance (Boulet et al., 1990). Students also obtain better results when they are working toward process goals

rather than product goals, and when tracking progress toward overall goals of learning (Schunk, 1996). Grades may undermine the positive help of specific feedback on tasks (Butler, 1995).

As with the previous “What Works” study (Formative Assessment: Improving Learning in Secondary Classrooms, CERI/OECD, 2005), this study includes reviews of research from different linguistic traditions. The reviews provide insight into different conceptual approaches to common challenges and make accessible a broader range of empirical research. This approach has been particularly important for the understudied area of adult foundation skill learning. The combined reviews provide a clearer picture of the state of the art in this sector, and directions for future research and development.

Assessment, as used in this report, is distinguished from evaluation and appraisal in the same manner as set out by the OECD: The term “assessment” is used to refer to judgments on individual student performance and achievement of learning goals. It covers classroom-based assessment as well as large-scale, external tests and examinations. The term “appraisal” is used to refer to judgments on the performance of school-level professionals, e.g., teachers and principals. Finally, the term “evaluation” is used to refer to judgments on the effectiveness of schools, school systems, and policies. (Nusche et al 2012: 24)

The above review details the importance of assessment. There has been researching about assessment worldwide. Of course, one cannot deny the importance of assessment in academic circles. However, PYP unit of Najran University does not witness a good deal of research on assessment. Moreover, there has been almost no research on the current practices of formative and summative assessment at PY unit of Najran University. The present research not only focuses on current assessment practices but also modifies its practices for the betterment of students.

Objectives

To compare and contrast the performance of individual and group assessment

To recommend the implementation of a group summative assessment

The rationale of the study

The purpose of this study is to modify the practices of summative assessment so that students can be benefitted from it and be better prepared for formative assessment. Writing skill has been deliberately selected as most of the students make grave mistakes in writing examination.

Methodology

The study is divided into two parts with two groups.

First Group

In the first group, 30 students were given a summative assessment in pairs and groups. Students participated in ten sessions throughout the semester. Students were allowed to discuss the questions in pairs and groups while answering the questions in the examination.

Second Group

In the second group, 30 students were given summative assessments individually. The proper distance was maintained and they were not allowed to talk to each other while answering the questions in the examination.

Writing Samples of the First Group

Duration: 2 Hours 141 WRITING-2 FE (B) FIRST SEMESTER 19-20 MM: 50
 Q7. Write a paragraph on ONE of the following topics: 5 marks

Your favorite season OR Classroom customs in Saudi Arabia

9.5 + .5 + 1 = 11

Your favorite season

I like to summer for many reasons. First, I play foot ball and tennis outside. The sun usually all day. also, I eat healthy food the summer. finally, I go bike riding, and swimming. I like the summer.

Figure 1

Duration: 2 Hours 141 WRITING-2 FE (A) FIRST SEMESTER 19-20 MM: 50
 Q7. Write a paragraph on ONE of the following topics: 5 marks

Your favorite season OR Classroom customs in Saudi Arabia

My Favorite Season

My favorite season is Summer. It is a nice weather to do more things. For example, I play football and tennis. Also, I do my happy for instance, I go to swim and I go to the gym. I watch match sports. In fact, it is a nice season for me.

Figure 2

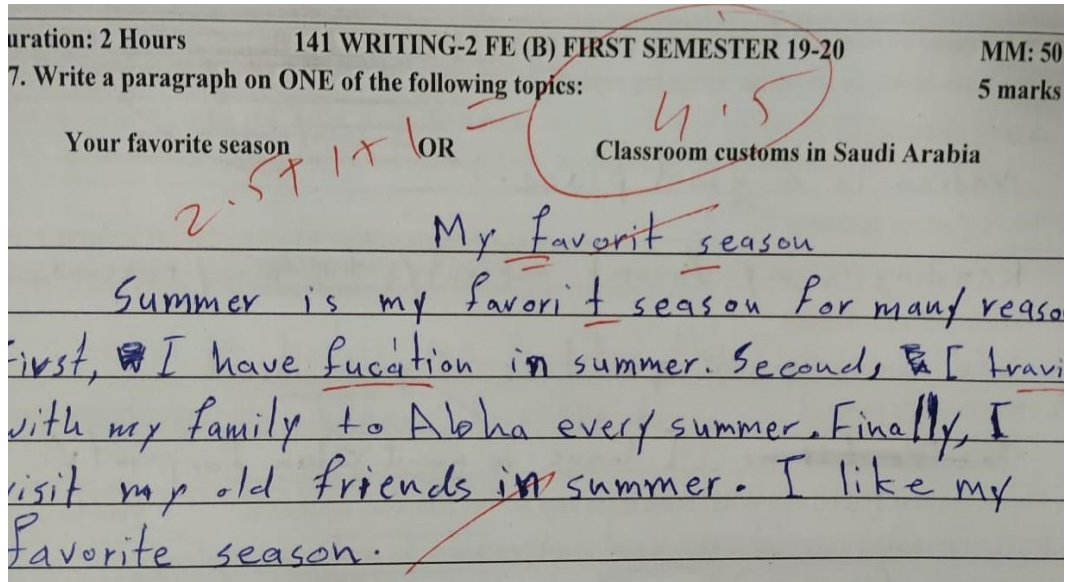


Figure 3

Writing Samples of the Second Group

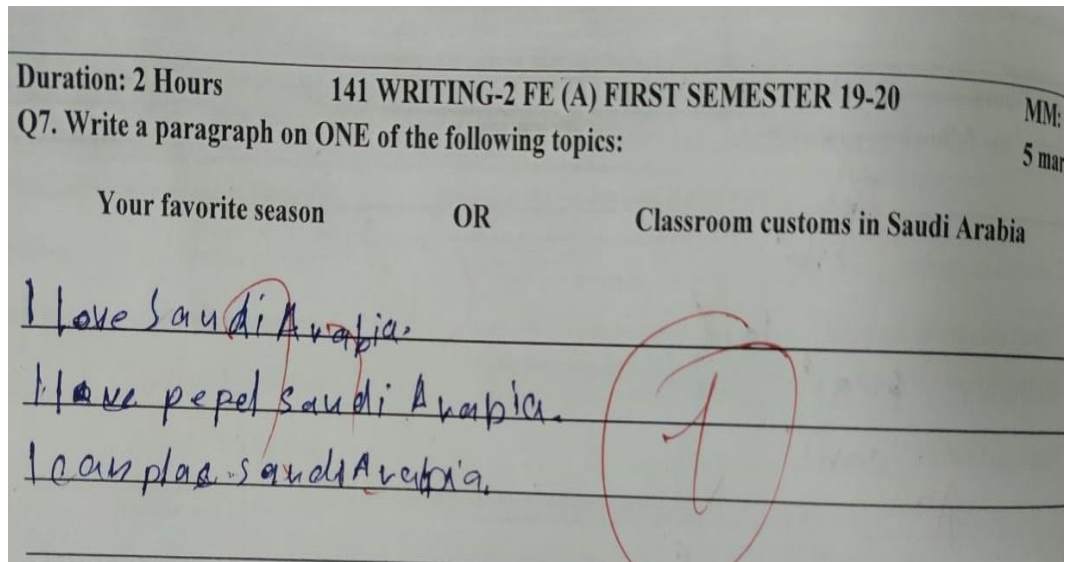


Figure 4

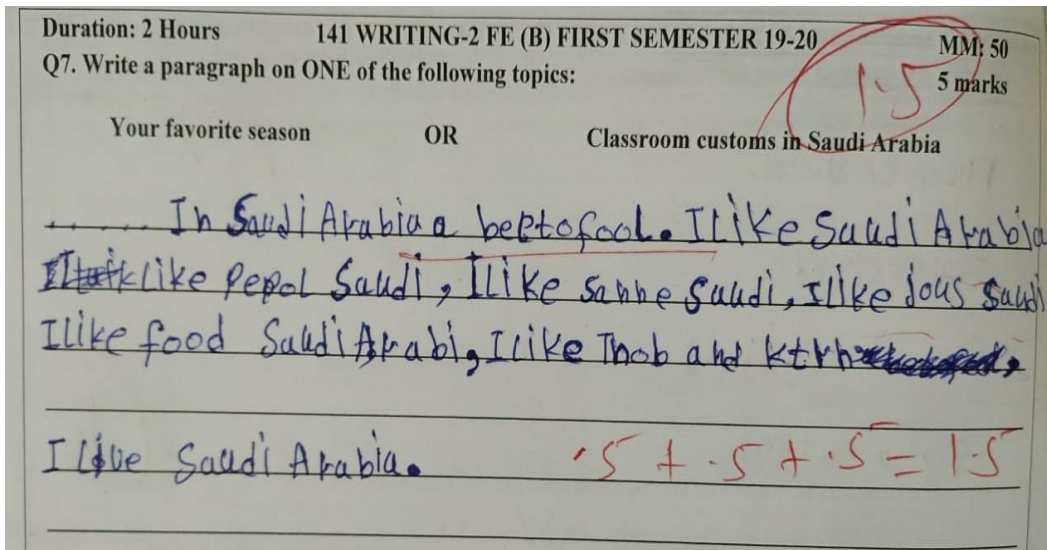


Figure 5

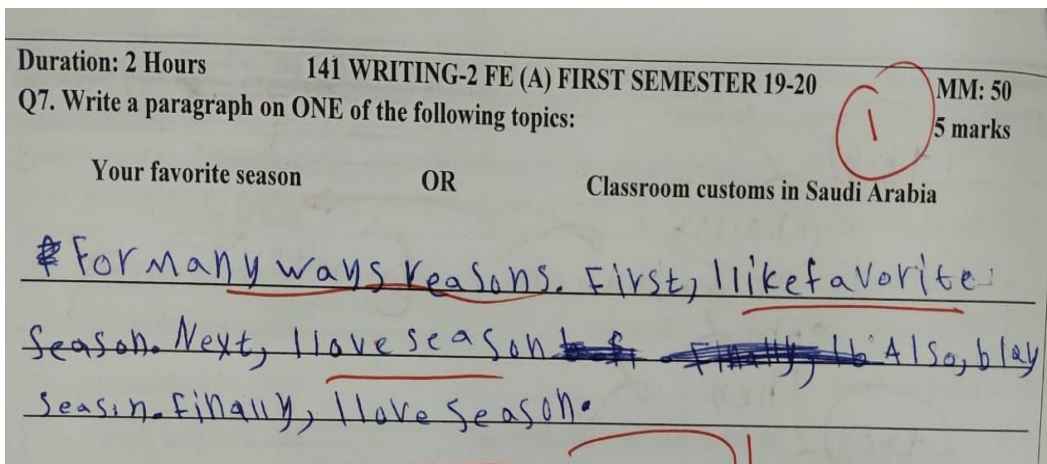


Figure 6

Analysis of First Group's Sample Papers

The first group's sample papers show that students have not only understood the instructions of the question paper but also written well-structured answers. There may be grammatical issues but students understood the question well. In figure 1, students have made some mistakes related to the verb like "The sun usually all

day”. Here the verb “shines” is missing. However, students have made good progress while writing the paragraph.

In figure 2, there are some mistakes related to nouns and verbs. Students do not know the correct spelling of the word “tennis” There is an adjective “happy” which does not make any sense here. The student does not know the correct spelling of the verb “watch”.

In figure 3, the student makes some mistakes related to verbs and nouns. The student does not know the correct spelling of the adjective “favorite”. He also doesn’t write the correct spelling of the word “vacation”. The student also misspelled the verb “travel”.

Analysis of Second Group’s Sample Papers

Figure 4 shows that the student did not understand the question at all. He could not understand the instructions for the questions. His write-up is also off-topic. Figure 5 shows that the student did not understand the question. Though he tried to write a few sentences, these sentences were off-topic. It shows students neither understood the questions nor the instructions. Here too, students made some mistakes related to nouns. However, the student did not make any mistakes in the verb. The sentences show that students know how to write a sentence correctly. Nevertheless, he could not understand the question.

Figure 6 shows that students understood the instructions for the questions. However, he could not generate ideas on the same topic. That is the reason, the student has repeated the noun “season”. However, it did not make any sense and he could not progress with the paragraph.

Findings and recommendations:

The writing samples taken post-semester examination show that there is a remarkable difference in the performance of the first group and second group. The

first group belongs to the students who were given summative assessments (quizzes, progress tests, etc.) in the group while the second group belongs to the students who were given assignments individually. The first group's students were encouraged to discuss the questions and their instructions with each other. However, the second group was not encouraged to discuss the questions with each other. The teacher was very strict in the class and students were not allowed any sort of movement in the classroom.

Some of the writing samples were selected randomly from the answer scripts of the students. The analysis shows that students of the first group performed better than the students of the second group. Students highly benefitted from group and pair learning. They understood the instructions of the questions and answered the questions correctly. The second group could not perform well as students were not encouraged to discuss the questions with each other. It proves that students learn better with each other as they do not have any sort of barrier. They are more open to each other. As some of the students were poor in English, the group also relied on their mother tongue to better explain the questions to each other. As students improved their performance in formative assessment, it is strongly recommended that certain modifications are mandatory in the practices of summative assessment. Instead of strict supervision, students must be allowed freedom during the summative assessment. Besides this, students must also be engaged in peer correction so that they could learn from the structure-related mistakes each other and improve them. As many of the students made spelling mistakes in verbs and nouns, peer correction will certainly help them learn from each other's mistakes. It also stresses the urgency of another research on peer correction to impart confidence to students to learn from each other and improve their mistakes.

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