

Review

Critical Role of Assessment in Teaching English Literature to Non-Natives

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This paper attempted to explore the existing modes of assessment prevalent in Pakistani context with reference to assessing English Poetry at B.S (graduate) level to the students whose first language was other than that of English. The paper took question papers of poetry as an example and presented a critique on the summative type of assessment and its limitations while assessing literature in general and poetry in particular of non-native English speaker students. It also addressed some reservations and highlighted the importance of assessment in teaching methodology. However it also purposed alternative methods of assessment which not only ensured the quality of assessment techniques but also pertinent for the quality learning of the assesses in ESL context. Results reflected analysis of classroom to, field notes, face-to-face interviews with teachers and administrators, digital photo journaling, and artifacts.

Keywords: Summative Assessment, Authentic Assessment, Non-Native English Language Learners, Teaching-Practicum

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INTRODUCTION

Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, Involve me and I will understand.
(Chinese Proverb)

Assessment has significant process of gathering data. More specifically, assessment is the ways instructors gather data about their teaching and their students' learning (Hanna & Dettmer, 2004). It provides a platform to the learners to display their skills taught by the teacher in class. Assessment 'is the process of firstly gathering evidence, and secondly interpreting that evidence in the light of some defined criterion in order to form a judgment' (Harlen 1994). It is collection of the

information and then processing that information in a categorize way is part of assessment process. This intact route of learning nullifies itself if the assessor does not know how to assess and what to assess in classroom learning strategies. On the other hand the learners' skills and mental abilities can be further furnished and *furberished* if the assessment process is credible, responsive and congenial. However it is liaison in classroom discourse, teaching practicum and learning strategies to ensure the advantageous learning and teaching practices.

Scriven refers 'assessment' as a judgment which can be justified according to specific weighted set goals,

yielding either comparative or numerical ratings. It is necessary to justify (a) the data-gathering instruments or criteria, (b) the weightings and (c) the selection of goals---that of justifying the judgment against the stated goals and criteria.

Rationale for Conducting this Research

The current research is the descriptive study of the existing assessment modes practiced in Pakistani educational institutes in particular with special focus onto assessing English poetry at B.S (undergraduate) level to those students whose first language is other than that of English. It has been believed that the traditional teaching and learning of the most of the English as Second Language (ESL) programmes in Pakistan do not exploit and explore the different modes of assessment (James 2006). This is mainly because the prescribed English exams are not in accordance with the specific content that has been taught. In addition, the teachers are not properly trained to teach the English language nor they are autonomous to design their own syllabus, assessment modes and procedures (James, Black, Carmichael, Drummond, Fox, Honour 2016). As a result, these professional institutions remain inadequate in equipping their students with the required linguistic and critical insight in language learning that is the prerequisite in literature in ESL context (Hanna & Dettmer 2004).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher reviewed the different question papers of "English Poetry Modules" offered to under-graduate students at several institutes and selected two premium educational institutes 'Lahore College for Women University and National University of Modern Languages (NUML) that serves the purpose of this research. The researcher took assessment papers of poetry of one of the institutes as an example and presented a critique on it while considering the needs of non-native speakers of English Language in the light of literature (Eisner, 1991).

The sample papers collected and examined of the institute came under the ambit of summative type of assessment. Summative assessment... 'is assessment which produces a measure which sums up someone's achievement and which has no other real use except as a description of what has been achieved'. (Brown and Knight, 1994, p.15) Mid and final term both of the papers covered two sorts of question patterns; first was "reference to the context" question whereas second question was of essay type regarding poetry and poets' time period (Marshall 2004). Moreover Mid-term papers consisted of that of half marks

of Final-term papers and allocated time was two and three hours respectively.

Mainly the data is analyzed and interpreted in the light of review of literature; this aspect of the research. The researcher omits a separate heading of literature review in this paper.

Research Objectives

The deep-seated aim of the research is to propose varied modes of assessment while assessing poetic understanding of the ESL/EFL students and to present a critique on the present mode of assessment.

Research Question/s

This paper aims to answer the following questions and sub-questions:

1. What is role and relationship of poetry with that of assessment modes while dealing with those students whose first language is not English?
2. How far summative assessment type exhibits reliability and validity in assessing learners' understanding of poetic texts in ESL/EFL contexts?
3. What are some of the proposed assessments modes while teaching and subsequently assessing students in ESL/EFL contexts?

Critique on the Selected Question Paper/s

As Marie Baehr (2001) has said in *Self Development: Assessment as a Foundation for Growth* that: "Assessment provides feedback on knowledge, skills, attitudes, and work product for the purpose of elevating future performances and learning outcomes. Evaluation determines the level of quality of a performance or outcome and enables decision making based on the level of quality demonstrated". The process of evaluation and assessment according to Marie Baehr are complementary and necessary in education. Therefore summative type of assessment has certain shortcomings in its approach and applicability. The designed assessment paper is too summative in its nature that it leaves little room for the feedback for the students to improve on their weaknesses during the module and even after the module. As Rowntree (1987) points out, summative assessments such as end of course examinations may incidentally lead the learner to recognize weakness and strengths and therefore to the

modification of learning. However there is little scope of day to day or formative feedback. This type of assessment generally focuses more on the use of results for external purposes (Harris & Bell, 1994). It is clear that summative is better applicable for external assessments and not really fulfills the criterion for internal assessments purposes.

The results of the assessment are communicated as percentages and grades and not in terms of their holistic understanding of the pretext and context. There tends, therefore, to be an emphasis on their reliability on ensuring that "any assessment results describe the phenomenon being assessed". (Brown & Knight, 1994, p.14) and is therefore able to produce consistent results when repeated (Schwartz & Webb, 2002). The high scorer would remain the high scorer and the low scorer would be remaining so regardless of their poetic prudence throughout this module and eventually the low scorer would feel de-motivated during this whole process of assessment (Dweck, 2000).

Rubrics for the assessment are neither mentioned clearly nor the assesses have been taken onboard onto it. The mid-term is of thirty marks and final term is of thirty-five marks appendix A. These marks are divided amongst different section unevenly. Time allocation is totally inappropriate. Time allocated of the mid-term is two hours whereas for final term, it is of three hours. A paper whose total marks are thirty-five and time allocated is an hour bench of three hours sounds equivocal.

This type of assessment would never let students to think independently as the critics of poetry and literature in general. In poetry, if a student attempts to appreciate poetic devices and interprets it within his framework then it is considered that he can comprehend as well as make connections. Thus summative assessment is so far unable to do justice with this particular aspect of assessment.

Poetry is closely associated with aesthetics which cannot be evaluated in summative type of assessment. Stylistics and linguistics analysis of the poetry passage is essential to blend literature and language as the department caters to both of the disciplines. Thus these summative assessment modes lack this aspect exceedingly. Summative type of assessment is usually practiced to multiple choice questions, matching items, true/false and binary-choice item because of the objective and obvious answers. Thus it is very difficult to assess the subjective learning of the students especially in case of poetry via an objective mode of assessment. Therefore the term summative relates to the purposes and intentions of the assessor, rather than the method of assessment (Brown & Knight, 1994; Rowntree, 1987).

Assessments are taken for granted in Pakistan instead worldwide it is observed that quality of teaching is directly related to quality of learning of the students. Eventually teaching methodology and learning go hand in hand. It is

unfortunate that this means of assessment techniques does not let to appreciate poetry in its complete form and manner as it should be because English is a second language for all the students and leads to rote memorization of the entire syllabus instead of developing their conceptual understanding of the text. Secondly, students are handicapped to comprehend Victorian poetry without knowing the characteristic background knowledge of that age. It is difficult to appreciate poetry unless one knows the cultural and social ways of the poet's age and political influences over him which is not evident in the assessment paper that the teacher has ever touched upon such details or not (Hammersley 1999).

Proposed Assessment Modes

The researcher considering the learners' needs and context proposes a blend of authentic and performance based assessment that incorporate with real life related projects because these methods are best applied for analyzing subjective learning especially in literary modules (Dewey 1966) (Torrance & Pryor 1998). Authentic assessment involves direct examination of student's ability to use knowledge to perform a task that is like what is encountered in real world. Similarly, in performance based assessment the teacher observes and makes a judgment about the student's demonstration of a skill in creating a product which can be a presentation, construction of a response, or composing a piece of literature or enactment of a part of a play (Engeström 1999).

Both of these techniques encourage students and teachers to set assessment which are based on real life context (Broad foot, 2007). These techniques are suitable to the B.S level students because this is how they can learn poetry as the most integrated means of communication and expressions in the world (Brown 1997). Moreover they will be able to master up a skill which would be helpful for them in their practical lives (Vygotsky 1978). It would take their understanding beyond rote learners and they would start appreciating poetry in their own, provided they will be equipped with all the relevant poetic devices and references used by the poet. This type of assessment has to be skill based where the students are able to apply their knowledge beyond theory and rote memorization (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre 2004). The diagnosis should be less formal and leave more scope to judge students' abilities. Similarly, authentic assessment also encourages students to relate English poetry in their own context. Through close and cloze readings of the text, students start theorizing the literature and eventually it helps them develop their critical thinking and conceptual understanding. Students would able to appreciate and

identify stylistic devices and thematic norms of the text (Fullan 1991).

This type of assessment would encourage adopting different performativity tasks and modes (Black, McCormick, James, & Pedder, 2006). For example organizing poetry recitation competition among class-fellows or this task can also be performed during class participation. Background knowledge and context of that age and poet and poetry is essential for deep understanding for understanding the poetic forms. Draws on all the inter-textual and intra-textual references would also help students to connect and relate to the poetic text (Hart 1992). They can also work on preparing a portfolio. Classroom based discussions and debates would inculcate a culture for exchanging ideas. Presentations can be assigned to the students on any poem and other students can also interact and participate in this process.

There are different forms of poetry, though they have a number of scope for the students and teachers to explore new methods of assessment such as on Robert Browning's dramatic monologue has margin for enactment of poetry. Thus students can learn to translate poetry through their gestures and performances. Moreover, by the end of a module, students can be asked to write a term paper on any topic regarding Victorian poetry which helps them to sharpen their research skills and it would further be beneficial for their higher education as well. Through this activity, they can easily contextualize their understanding it and they can also able to relate it to their real life too in formative assessment mode (Sadler 1989).

Ways to ensure validity and reliability mechanism in these assessment modes

The quality of the authentic and performance based assessments can be ensured by considering various aspects.

I. It would be an inclusive assessment. So that individual differences and group activities can be organizes and accommodated respectively.

I. Feedback and help from the colleagues and peer group can play a productive role for ensuring its quality. (Black, P. & Wiliam, D. 1998)

II. Students can help the teacher in giving an immediate feedback

III. At the B.S program, students come from a background where they are the byproduct of summative means of assessment. Therefore a teacher cannot expect them to be perfect. This assessment process should be an enjoyable able activity rather than a threatening process.

IV. A teacher himself can analyze its quality by minding it well that whether he has measured what he

intends to measure.

V. Interrogate this assessment instruments and processes from assessment committee and take their comments and feedback to improve further.

VI. Many of the problems traditionally associated with assessment in the arts have arisen from objectives that are vague, ill-defined, or extravagant and, consequently, are sometimes incomprehensible to students, parents, and teachers. Assessment of learning, particularly in the arts, is sometimes difficult and time-consuming, but it can be done. If instruction is effective, then the student will in some way change as a result (Bredo 1997).

Rationalization on the proposed assessment modes

These techniques help students to improve learning in a holistic manner and it would manage to accommodate both textual understanding and its practical application. During presentations they would be observed on their confidence and on speech delivering. Originality of the opinion and independent judgment on the poetic discourse would be appreciated as it would enable them to interpret poetry independently. They can also learn to contend with any critic and can form their independent opinion. Eye-contact, intonation, pause, voice quality body language and gestures during an enactment would enable them to train themselves in performing arts. How well they have collaborated in a group tasks. While writing a term paper, novelty of their ideas, research methodology and writing skills would be of considerable importance. Thus learning targets can be achieved if the instructor clearly defines his objectives to the students and after assessments give proper feedback to them (Black, P. & Wiliam, D. 1998). Assessment should be based on explicit objectives that identify clearly the skills and knowledge expected from students. Though it improves learning and it is embedded in student-centered teaching practice.

Assessment the education:

it determines much of the work Assessment in education is sui generis that undertake their approach to learning. An innovative assessment method not only ensures proper feedback to the students from teachers but also enhances the learning process. It also helps to engage students in a holistic fashion. Thus it becomes a mutually beneficial approach for both the assessor and the assesses.

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APPENDIXES**Appendix A:**

LAHORE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN UNIVERSITY, LAHORE

MID-TERM EXAMINATION 2010

Class: B.S

Subject: English Literature

Term: Mid

Semester: V

Max. Marks: 30

Time allowed: 2 Hours

Note: attempt all questions.

Question No. 1

Explain the following extracts with reference to the context:

- a) I was ever a fighter, so-one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past. (05)
- b) Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blench'd land,
Listen! You hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling. (05)

QUESTION No. 2

Browning's poetry is full of symbols of hope, courage and faith. Discuss with reference to the poems that you have read. (10)

QUESTION No. 3

What argument does the lover in The Last Ride Together offer to justify his feelings of contentment? Does he convince you? (10)

Appendix B:

LAHORE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN UNIVERSITY, LAHORE FINAL TERM EXAMINATION 2011

Class: B.S 3rd

Subject: English Literature

Semester: V

Term: Final Paper

Title: Victorian Poetry

Max Marks: 50

Time Allowed: 3 Hours

Note: Attempt all Questions.

Question No.1

Explain with reference to the context:

- a) And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle
Where ignorant arms clash by night. (05)

- b) Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried (05)

Question No. 2

Browning's poetry is "the poetry of situations". In each monologue, the speaker is placed in a critical situation, his reactions to it are dissected, and the real worth of his character is brought out. Discuss. (08)

Question No. 3

The charm of Arnold's poetry is a deep and melancholy reflectiveness, a serious criticism of life and the application of great ideas of life. Discuss. (07)

Question No. 4

"The increasing threat posed to religion by science does not worry Tennyson. He believes that our increasing knowledge of universe can be reconciled with faith." Discuss with reference to the prologue of in memoriam. (10)

Appendix C:**SAMPLE PAPER****LAHORE COLLEGE for WOMEN UNIVERSITY, LAHORE****ASSESSMENT FOR THE MODULE (100 marks)****B.S HONORS(V Semester)****ENGLISH LITERATURE-VICTORIAN POETRY**

PRESENTATION (pair): 40 MARKS (mid-term)

Time allocation: 15 minutes each pair

GROUP DISCUSSION/PARTICIPATION : 10 MARKS

POETRY PORTFOLIO: 10 MARKS

RESEARCH PAPER: 40 MARKS (final project)

PRESENTATION SKILLS: 40 marks

1. Organization of content: 10 marks
2. Confidence level: 10 marks
3. Eye contact/gestures/body language: 10 marks
4. Presentation skills: 10 marks

GROUP DISCUSSION: 10 marks

CRITERIA: confidence, power of argumentation & negotiation, flexibility to listen to opponent's views.

POETRY PORTFOLIO: 10 marks

Sample and collection of poetry (various artists/poets, different eras): 5 marks

Self- written poetry: 5 marks

TERM PAPER: 40 marks

Write a term paper on any topic or aspect which covers those Victorian poets which we have studied during the whole module.

CRITERIA:

Marks will be awarded on the basis of organization of the content and writing abilities. It should not be more than 1200 words and give proper citation as well. Take any poem and discuss it thematic and linguistic levels, draw on all inter-textual and intra-textual references and state your own independent opinion in the light of available literature (whether you agree with the critics or not). Support your opinion with relevant evidence. Plagiarism is strictly prohibited as per university rules.