Assessment for Learning Grammar versus Assessment of Learning Grammar for Preparatory Year Male Students

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Abstract: This study dealt with the assessment for learning English grammar versus learning English grammar assessment. Recently, assessment for learning English grammar is considered one of the alternatives used to develop better language skills. The current study used a formative assessment in order to learn English grammar, which means, weekly conducting short quizzes on the English grammar tasks that students are learning. On the other hand, the control group did not receive a formative assessment. The study concluded that planning for the assessment for learning English grammar leads well to better results in student learning, particularly, the English grammar skills.

Keywords: The assessment for learning, learning assessment, English grammar, alternative assessments, formative assessment.

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التقويم من أجل تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية مقابل تقويم تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب السنة التحضيرية

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أستاذ مساعد تدريس المناهج وطرق التدريس، كليات القصيم الأهلية

المستخلص: تناولت هذه الدراسة التقويم من أجل تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية مقابل تقويم تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، ويعد التقويم من أجل تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية أحد التقويمات البديلة المستخدم في هذه الآونة لتنمية مهارات اللغة بصورة أفضل، واستخدمت الدراسة الحالية التقويم من أجل تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية في شكل تقويم تكويني، بمعنى إجراء اختبارات قصيرة أسبوعية حول مهام قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية التي يتعلمها الطلاب. ومن ناحية أخرى لم تتلق المجموعة الضابطة تقويمًا تكوينيًا. وتوصلت الدراسة إلى أن تخطيط التقويم من أجل تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية تخطيطًا جيدًا يؤدي إلى نتائج أفضل في تعلم الطلاب، وبخاصة مهارات قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التقويم من أجل التعلم، تقويم التعلم، قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، التقويمات البديلة، التقويم التكويني.

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Introduction

The tide is turning in favor of learning-oriented assessment. The tidal wave of interest in assessment for learning has become a global phenomenon. Assessment is of two kinds: formative and summative. The former is done throughout the course of teaching, whereas the latter is done in the form of tests at the end of teaching. Assessment: of learning, and for learning. Another way of expressing the two main 'cultures' of assessment in education is to distinguish between the assessment of learning (external summative) and assessment for learning (formative classroom). A clear distinction should be made between assessment of learning for the purposes of grading and reporting, which has its own well-established procedures, and assessment for learning which call for different priorities, new procedures, and a new commitment. Wiliam and Black (1996) argued that formative assessment is used seemingly interchangeably with others such as 'classroom assessment', 'classroom evaluation', 'curriculum-based assessment', 'feedback', 'formative evaluation', 'assessment for learning.'

The concept of assessment for learning means considering teaching, learning, and assessment as an integrated and interdependent chain of events (Lee, 2007). But making good judgements about the qualities of students' work ('the assessment of learning'), useful in itself albeit providing only part of the picture, is not the same thing as using assessment to support future learning and thus raise achievement ('assessment for learning') (Lambert & Lines, 2000, 195). Following is a discussion of the arguments for and against assessment for learning.

Argument for assessment for learning

Assessment for learning is central to effective teaching and learning. Lambert and Lines (2000, 108) argue that assessment for learning:

- helps teachers plan future work as it is part of effective planning.
- informs students of the standards they have reached.
- shows students what they need to do to improve; and
- is diagnostic of strengths and weaknesses.

One of the most important purposes of assessment for learning is the role it plays in students' motivation. Knowledge and understanding of what is to be achieved is not enough. Students must want to make the necessary steps to achieve the learning objectives. Feedback based on assessment is one of the most powerful issues in teaching and learning. Maximizing the quality, appropriateness, and use of feedback should be a core aim of all assessment procedures. Feedback can drive a loop of continuous change and improvement for both the teacher and student, as both learn from each other (Stiggins, 2002).

In this regard, Assessment Reform Group (2002, 2) laid down ten principles for assessment for learning as follows:

- It is part of effective planning
- It focuses on how students learn

- It is central to classroom practice
- It is a key professional skill
- It is sensitive and constructive
- It fosters motivation
- It promotes understanding of goals and criteria
- It helps learners know how to improve
- It develops the capacity for peer and self-assessment
- It recognises all educational achievement

Argument against assessment for learning

Assessment for learning occupies an ambiguous and uncertain position in the world of education (Sutton, 1995). This opinion is not well-established as it is not based on empirical studies. On the other hand, Tan (2011) examined the meanings and impact of "Assessment for Learning" initiatives in schools against the backdrop of assessment reform in Singapore since 1997 and argued that "Assessment for Learning" is understood in different ways, and these different meanings do not always benefit students' learning. Davies et al (2014) mentioned that many schools and school systems have been deliberately working towards full implementation of Assessment for Learning for more than a decade, and yet success has been elusive.

Some of the problems with assessment for learning are especially related to the feasibility of the approach. Critics recognise this aspect requires further rigorous research, due to the frequency with which contextual aspects have emerged as obstacles in different studies (Tierney & Charland, 2007).

After all, assessment for learning should be designed well according to the subject matter and students' level so as to pay off.

The aim of the Assessment for Learning

The general aim is to make assessment for learning more widespread, systematic, and consistent, in such a way that all stakeholders are involved in the educational process as follows:

- **Students** know what they are doing and understand what they need to do to improve and how to get there.
- **Teachers/ Instructors** are well-equipped to make well-founded judgments about students' attainment and use these judgments to forward plans, particularly for students who are not fulfilling their potential.
- **Educational institutions** have structured assessment for making regular and accurate assessments of students.
- **Parents** know how their students are doing and how they can support them.

Washback

Washback is an important concept in assessment. Washback is generally defined as "the influence of testing on teaching and learning" (Bailey, 1996, 259). Furthermore, Messick (1996, 241) argues that washback refers to the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and

learners to do things that they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning. Therefore, the notion of washback bolsters assessment for learning versus assessment of learning.

Assessment for learning and Constructivism

Assessment for learning is closely associated with constructivist theories of learning. Constructivism is a key concept regarding assessment for learning. It views learning as something that happens inside the heads of learners. Gardner (2009) argues that there is a gap between learning and teaching that learners have to settle in order to construct new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Knowledge of individual learners' needs and quality teacher–pupil relationships is essential in this regard. Hence the gap between learning and teaching may be more successfully bridged. As a result, learners have to understand that they are responsible for their own learning.

Considering the importance of constructivist approach in assessment for learning, Hodgson, and Pyle (2010, 1) did a literature review on assessment for Learning and they came up with key findings, among which:

> *Classroom climate is particularly important. It is crucial that a constructivist, non-threatening environment is established in order for pupils to feel able to express their ideas and allow the teacher to establish what the pupils know, what they don't know and what they partly know – their misconceptions – and to develop teaching that will move their understanding on.*

So, it is clear that assessment for learning is greatly linked to constructivism and has to benefit by it

Previous Studies

Reviewing the available literature on assessment for learning indicates that much of the research regarding the effectiveness of alternative assessment methods has been carried out in ESL contexts and these studies have focused on reading and writing skills. The application of alternative assessment methods, however, has grown rapidly beyond the ESL context to many varied situations, specifically in EFL contexts. To date, the effectiveness of alternative assessment methods, incorporating principles of assessment for learning has not been fully investigated in the EFL learning. Therefore, more empirical research is required to examine the impact of assessment for learning techniques on language learners' grammar skills in particular. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the efficacy of "assessment for learning grammar versus assessment of learning grammar."

On the other hand, Lambert, and Lines (2000) go to say that assessment for learning occupies an ambiguous position in education. It is not well understood, and partly as a result, practice is found, by inspectors and researchers alike, to be

patchy. For example, OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education/Teacher Training Agency) (1996) concluded that day-to-day assessment is weak and the use of assessment to help planning of future work is unsatisfactory in one in five schools. What is particularly lacking is marking which clearly informs pupils about the standards they have achieved in a piece of work, and what they need to do to improve; whilst marking needs to be supportive of efforts made, it also needs to be constructively critical, and diagnostic of both strengths and weaknesses.

On the other hand, Popham (2006) affirmed that recent reviews of more than 4,000 research investigations show clearly that when formative assessment is well implemented in the classroom, it can essentially double the speed of student learning. It is clear that the process works; it can produce whopping gains in students' achievement; and it is sufficiently robust so that different teachers can use it in diverse ways, yet still get great results with their students. Hence, teachers should know enough about the understanding of their pupils to be able to help them and adjust their teaching accordingly. So, the problem is with how to implement and not the idea itself. The problem of the study can be formulated as follows: there is a weakness in the grammar subskills of the preparatory year students (level 2: 0012). Furthermore, they are not acquainted with their level during the course of study, so they have to wait until the end of the final examination. Consequently, they often get low scores on their grammar tasks.

Questions of the Study

There is a weakness in the grammar subskills of the first-year preparatory stage students. They often get low scores on their grammar tasks.

The problem of the study is stated in the following questions:

1. What are the grammar subskills that preparatory year students (level 2: 0012) have to acquire?
2. What are the proposed strategies of "assessment of learning grammar and assessment for learning grammar"?
3. What is the effectiveness of using "assessment of learning grammar and assessment for learning grammar" on preparatory year students' grammar subskills?

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to:

1. identify the effectiveness of assessment for learning grammar, via t-test for independent samples, in developing the grammar subskills.

Significance of the Study

This study gains its significance from the following:

– Helping fill a gap in the field of assessment for learning grammar.

‒ Highlighting the use of alternative assessment, especially assessment for learning.
‒ Directing the attention of TEFL researchers, teachers, course designers, curriculum developers and learners to the importance of using alternative assessment, especially assessment for learning.
‒ Design "assessment for learning grammar" activities.

Participants and Research Setting

Participants in the present study are preparatory year male students (level 2: 002). Two classes were randomly selected from Qassim Private Colleges in the 2014-2015 academic year at the beginning of the second term.

The experimental group consisted of 35 preparatory years from Qassim Private Colleges. The control group consisted of 35 first year secondary stage students from Qassim Private Colleges. Students' age in both groups ranged from 18 to 20 years old. All the students have started learning EFL in the preparatory year (level one: 001) at Qassim Private Colleges and Arabic is their native language. The sample of the study was, therefore, homogeneous to a great extent as they came from almost the same sociocultural background.

The researcher taught the experimental group grammar through the proposed "assessment for learning grammar" in order to develop grammar subskills. On the other hand, the control group was taught grammar through the traditional method "assessment of learning grammar" by their regular instructor. Both groups have three hours a week for grammar. The traditional method of "assessment of learning grammar" includes the following steps:

1. The instructor explains the grammar point.
2. The instructor provides some examples
3. The instructor gives students the opportunity to answer question on the grammar point.
4. There is a midterm test and a final test.

The researcher taught the experimental group mainly for the following considerations:

‒ To have better control over the study variables.
‒ To make sure that the suggested "assessment for learning grammar" is taught properly.
‒ The regular classroom teacher may have little or no knowledge of the suggested assessment for learning grammar technique.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to:
1. A sample of preparatory year students (level 2: 0012).
2. The second term of the 2014/2015 academic year.

Hypothesis of the study

There is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group students and that of the control group students on the grammar post-test favoring the experimental group.

Instrument of the Study

The following instrument, prepared by the researcher, was used:

A Grammar Test to measure grammar skills.

- **Test Item Difficulty**

To determine the difficulty level of test items, a measure called the *Difficulty Index* is used. This measure calculates the proportion of students who answered the test item accurately. By looking at each alternative for multiple choices, we can also find out if there are answer choices that should be replaced. We can compute the difficulty of the item by dividing the number of students who choose the correct answer by the number of total students. A rough "rule-of-thumb" is that if the item difficulty is more than .75, it is an easy item; if the difficulty is below .25, it is a difficult item. Given these parameters, difficulty of the Grammar Test items ranges from .75 to .25.

- **Test Item Discrimination**

Discrimination Index refers to how well an assessment differentiates between high and low scorers. Then the assessment is said to have a *positive discrimination index* (between 0 and 1) indicating that students who received a high total score chose the correct answer for a specific item more often than the students who had a lower overall score. If, however, you find that more of the low-performing students got a specific item correct, then the item has a *negative discrimination index* (between -1 and 0). Discrimination Index is determined by subtracting the number of students in the lower group who got the item correct from the number of students in the upper group who got the item correct. Then, divide by the number of students in each group. Given these parameters, discrimination of the Grammar Test items ranges from 0 to 1.

- **Test Validity**

To achieve test validity, the test was submitted to a specialized jury in TEFL to respond to some criteria for validating the test. The jury recommended making some modifications to the test and the researcher carried them out. Hence, the test is valid after introducing the jury's suggested modifications.

- **Test Reliability**

To measure test reliability, a three-week test-retest method was followed. So, the test was administered to a group of 33 students at preparatory year (level 2:002), other than the sample of the study, at the end of the first term in the 2011/2012 academic year.

Using Pearson's correlation to measure test reliability, the correlation coefficient was found to be 0.789, indicating a high value of the test reliability. This correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- **Test administration**

The grammar test was administered to both the experimental and control groups at the start of the second term of the academic year 2014/2015, on 8th February 2015. The grammar test was administered to the two groups after 10 weeks of teaching "assessment for learning grammar" and "assessment of learning grammar" on 16th April 2015.

- **Assessing the Test**

There are answer keys to the questions. Each question has one answer. Scoring the test is objective. (*See Appendix 3*)

Grammar Pre-test Scores of the Control Group and the Experimental Group

To control variables and determine the suitable statistical method before implementing "assessment for learning grammar" and "assessment of learning grammar", the results of the grammar pre-test of both experimental and control groups were subjected to statistical treatment to find whether there are statistically significant differences between the two groups. Consequently, t-test for independent samples was used to compare the mean scores of the two groups, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

T-test results of the grammar pre-test comparing both control and experimental groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-test for Equality of Means		
					t value	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Control	35	35.23	5.87	.99	.340	68	.735
Experimental	35	34.74	6.09	1.03			

Table 3 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on the grammar pre-test since t value (.340) is not statistically significant at (.05) level. As a result, the two groups are homogenous at the beginning of the experiment with reference to the grammar pre-test.

- **Design of the Study**

The present study followed the quasi-experimental design in terms of using one experimental group and another control group. Two intact classes were randomly selected to represent the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group received instruction on grammar through the suggested assessment for learning grammar. On the other hand, the control group got instruction on through assessment of learning grammar. A pre-post grammar test was administered to the two groups before and after the experiment.

- **Procedures**
1. Reviewing the literature related to learning grammar to design the "assessment of learning grammar and assessment for learning grammar."
2. Selecting the sample and dividing it into two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group will be instructed grammar through assessment for learning grammar" and the control group will be taught in the traditional way of "assessment of learning grammar."
3. Preparing a grammar pre-post test to measure grammar subskills.
4. Submitting the grammar pre-post test to a group of jurors for validity.
5. Measuring the reliability of the grammar test.
6. Submitting the test to a group of jurors for validity.
7. Administering the grammar pre-test to the two groups: experimental and control.
8. The researcher will teach the experimental group using assessment for learning grammar whereas the control group will be taught through assessment of learning grammar by their regular instructor.
9. Administering the grammar post-test to measure the effectiveness of the suggested assessment for learning grammar.
10. Analyzing the data statistically using SPSS programme, version 16.
11. Reporting results, conclusions and suggesting recommendations.

- **Definition of Terms**

Based upon the review of related literature, the following terms could be defined:

Assessment for learning

The Assessment Reform Group (2002, 2) has defined assessment for learning in two different ways:

- – The process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.
- – The process by which assessment information is used by teachers to adjust their teaching strategies, and by students to adjust their learning strategies. Based on this view, assessment, teaching, and learning are interdependently linked, as each one imposes its own effect on the others.

The researcher adopts the second definition as it is suitable for the present study.

- ● **Intervention**

Students have three hours a week of grammar: two hours on one day and an hour on another day. So, on the day of the two hours, the instructor gives explanation of the grammar point(s) and provides students the opportunity to do exercises on the grammar point(s). On the day of the one hour, he gives students a quiz (*example quizzes are in Appendix 5*) on the grammar point explained before. At the next the lecture, the instructor briefs students on the quiz results and discusses with them the strengths and weakness of their grammar skills in order to do two actions: for the teacher to adjust teaching strategies; for the students to adjust their learning strategies.

Results

The *t*-test for independent samples was used to compare the mean scores of the two groups on the grammar post-test according to the results of the test. Results of the *t*-test confirmed hypothesis of the study as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

T-test results of the grammar post-test comparing control and experimental groups

Dimensions	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	*t*-test for Equality of means		
						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total	Experimental	35	45.62	5.57	.94	7.79	68	.000
	Control	35	34.74	6.09	1.03			

For the test as a whole, as shown in Table 1, the estimated *t* value (7.79) for the test as a whole is statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq .05$) level. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and

the control group on the translation post-test in favour of the experimental group. This result can be ascribed to subjecting the experimental group assessment for learning grammar.

This result is in line with the following studies:

Popham (2006) that when formative assessment is well implemented in the classroom, it can essentially double the speed of student learning. Hill (2011) that there is clear evidence that using classroom assessment for learning can improve learning significantly. Rose Martin (2013) that there appears to be a need to shift toward assessment for learning practices. This focus begins with an examination of the negative effects of using high-stakes assessments as the main accountability system for schools. Mcdowell et al's (2011) study results indicate that the overall student experience is more positive in modules where assessment for learning approaches are used and students are more likely to take a deep approach to learning. It also demonstrates that the student experience is centered on staff support and module design, feedback, active engagement and peer learning.

In some detail, the experimental group students' progress in learning grammar may be attributed to the following contributory factors:

- The use of formative assessment as part of assessment for learning.
- Students get feedback periodically after taking part in the weekly grammar quizzes.
- Students' responsibility for their learning.
- Students' awareness of their current grammar level along the semester.
- Students' possibility of dealing with their grammar problems before it is too late at the end of the semester.
- Students' feeling happy that they progress well, even slightly.

- **Discussion of results**

The study results may be attributed to the following reasons:

Grammar feedback based on assessment is one of the most important aspects in teaching and learning grammar. Maximizing the quality, appropriateness, and use of grammar feedback is highly crucial. In this way grammar teaching, learning and assessment are linked together. The feedback based on assessment makes students take responsibility for their own grammar learning; because they might do self-assessment and reflection, reset objectives and change their strategies of learning grammar. Consequently, they are in a better position to recognize the importance of personal learning. This helps them identify their own strengths and needs and discover how to make better instructional decisions.

One benefit of assessment for grammar learning is to encourage independence in learners by making them capable of controlling their own grammar learning. Arguably, participating in alternative assessments, assessment for grammar

learning, can assist learners in becoming skilled judges of their own strengths and weaknesses. Thus, they are involved in not only in the learning process, but also in the assessment process. They are kept into the picture. Moreover, providing learners with a set of clearly defined grammar learning goals facilitate learning grammar points. So, it clear for students from the very beginning what objective they should fulfill. The roadmap is obvious before them.

Assessment without communication is useless, hence communication between the instructor and the learner is an essential part of the learning process and should be on a regular basis. This communication done through assessment benefit both the instructor and the student. Information obtained from assessment helped the instructor support, guide, monitor, and teach the students more effectively.

In order to implement assessment for learning, teachers should explain clearly to students what they are to learn, by what criteria they will be assessed and how they will know when they have been successful so that they are increasingly involved and responsible for their learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of assessment for learning technique on grammar learning of preparatory year students (level 2: 002). The overall emergent picture drawn from this study suggests that assessment for learning has a positive impact on EFL students' grammar learning. Using alternative assessment procedures like assessment for learning grammar can provide ample opportunities for both instructors and students to communicate with each other. Hence, teachers can facilitate learning by providing students with appropriate descriptive feedback in their learning process and help them identify their problems. In this way, students and teachers can work as assessment partners who have clear-cut learning goals and specific assessment tasks. This process can lead students to take control of their own success and to accept responsibility for their own learning. It should be emphasized that assessment should not be considered as something independent of instruction. To be more authentic, assessment should be based on the learners' behaviors exhibited during formative and students must be aware of the expected outcomes of instruction and assessment, the processes involved, and the criteria on which they will be assessed.

Recommendations

Following are some recommendations based on this study. In order to enhance the effectiveness of assessment for learning, certain points have to be made:

- – Ensure that teachers understand assessment for learning well and implement it properly (So & Lee, 2011).

– Make sure that assessment for learning is done according to the subject matter and the students' level.
– Promote the idea of alternative assessment versus traditional assessment.
– Implement alternative assessment beyond English, including other participants.

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