



Traditional assessment procedures, and performance and portfolio assessment procedures: An in-depth comparison

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Abstract

Assessment is quintessential for classroom instruction and for this reason, classroom teachers have an obligation to assess their students' learning outcomes in order to check students' learning progress. As part of students' assessment, traditional assessment, and performance and portfolio assessment procedures are key in measuring students' learning outcomes. Classroom teachers must therefore have a good knowledge on the key purposes of these assessment procedures to achieve a holistic impression on the strength and weaknesses of their students. It is in this regard that the paper compares traditional assessment procedures, and performance and portfolio assessment procedures, and makes implication for practice.

Keywords: Traditional assessment, performance and portfolio assessment, assessment

Introduction

Assessment involves the gathering and use of empirical data on the student to refine programs and improve learning. It is in this regard that Allen (2004) ^[1] points that assessment involves a variety of procedures which is used to obtain information about the student, curricula, programs and policies, among others, for decision making. In order to obtain meaningful information for the purposes of assessment, careful attention should be given to the assessment procedures to be employed. Prominent among these assessment procedures are objective and essay tests which can take the form of paper-and-pencil test, assignments, projects, observations and interviews. Most importantly, the assessment procedures selected should be relevant to the characteristics or performance to be assessed and thus, one needs to be particular and careful about the procedures to be used when assessing students.

It is quintessential to note that, traditional assessment procedures such as multiple choice and essay; and performance and portfolio assessment are some of the procedures that are used in assessing students. Dikli (2003) ^[3] opines that traditional assessment procedures refer to conventional methods of testing, usually standardized, and use pen and paper with multiple choice and essay items. Although some essays can be performance assessment, Dikli (2003) ^[3] adds that, traditional assessment procedures as part of assessing students, programs, curricula and policies for decision making have been very dominant in our educational enterprise. In essence, traditional assessment focuses on what the student knows and does not necessarily reflect students' experience.

From the views of Miller, Linn and Gronlund (2009) ^[4], performance assessment is also sometimes referred to as authentic assessment or alternative assessment, however, the terms are not interchangeable. Alternative assessment emphasizes the contrast to traditional paper-and-pencil tests whereas authentic assessment stresses the practical application of the task in real world settings. Performance assessment is

therefore preferred because it is more descriptive than alternative assessment and less pretentious than authentic assessment (Miller *et al.*, 2009) ^[4]. This means that performance assessment procedures allow students to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of what they have learned. Performance assessment therefore requires students to demonstrate skills by actually performing or doing. This assessment procedure involves doing rather than just knowing about concepts because there are sometimes important differences between knowing and doing (Miller *et al.*, 2009) ^[4]. Miller *et al.* (2009) ^[4], note that a student's portfolio is a purposeful collection of pieces of the student's work. Portfolio assessment is the systematic and longitudinal collection of students' work created in response to specific known instructional objectives and evaluated in relation to the same criteria (Dikli, 2003) ^[3]. It is obvious that these traditional assessment procedures have been dominant in assessing students, and essay tests, which can be an example of performance-based and portfolios assessment is of no exception. With reference to the aforementioned background, there is the particular need to compare traditional assessment procedures with performance and portfolio assessments.

Traditional assessment procedures, and performance and portfolio assessments compared

A lot of comparisons can be made regarding traditional assessment procedures, and performance and portfolio assessments procedures. The first comparison to be stressed regarding traditional assessment procedures, and performance and portfolio assessments is based on the purpose of the assessment procedures. Notably, the purpose of traditional assessment procedures is to carefully evaluate if students have learned the content and to determine whether or not the students are successful in acquiring knowledge. This kind of assessment procedures is aimed at ascribing a grade to students, rank and

compare the students against the standards set for the students. On the other hand, the purpose of performance and portfolio assessment is to measure students' proficiency by asking them to perform real-life tasks and to provide students with many avenues to learn and demonstrate best what they have learned (Miller *et al.*, 2009) ^[4]. In furtherance, performance and portfolio assessment is aimed at guiding instruction, providing feedback, helping students to manage their own learning and evaluating students' competency.

Another comparison to be made regarding traditional assessment procedures, and performance and portfolio assessment procedures is that, traditional assessment procedures are geared toward testing and strengthening students' ability to recall, reorganize and comprehend content, but these assessment procedures do not reveal students' true progress of what they can do with the knowledge they have acquired. Taking a critical look at traditional assessment procedures, only the lower level thinking skills (comprehension and knowledge) are tapped. Conversely, performance and portfolio assessment procedures test and strengths the students' ability to reason and analyze, synthesize, and apply the knowledge acquired. For this type of assessment procedures, students' higher levels of cognitive skills and abilities (from knowledge and comprehension to application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation are measured in multiple ways, Miller *et al.*, 2009) ^[4].

Moreover, traditional assessment procedures are aimed at measuring students' knowledge of content and emphasizes knowing rather than doing. These procedures most at times require the students to demonstrate knowledge by selecting a response, give correct answers and test students' proficiency through paper and pencil test. Notably, students are asked to choose an answer from a set of questions (true or false, multiple choice, etc.) to test students' knowledge of what has been taught. On the other hand, performance and portfolio assessment procedures measure students' ability to apply knowledge of the content in real life situations and ensure students' ability to use and apply what they have learned in meaningful ways. Performance and portfolio assessment procedures however, require students to demonstrate proficiency by performing relevant tasks and showing application of what has been learned. Traditional assessment procedures specifically demand the students to practice cognitive ability through recall, reorganize and reconstruct a body of knowledge that has been taught. Critically, with regard to traditional assessment procedures, the teachers serve as evaluators and the students being the evaluatees. This therefore renders this kind of assessment procedures and learning teacher-structured. Ironically, performance and portfolio assessment procedures provide students the opportunity to construct meaning or new knowledge out of what has been taught. This type of assessment procedures carefully and systematically involve and engage the students in the teaching and learning, and the assessment process. This therefore to a larger extent, makes the teaching and learning environment student-structured or students' centered.

Another area of attention regarding the comparison of traditional assessment procedure and performance and portfolio assessment is that, in traditional assessment procedures, the concept of standardization, validity and reliability are made easily. This is because, students are given the same assessment content in a documented manner. There is therefore the likelihood of reducing

errors which makes the results obtained from these standardized assessment procedures more likely to be consistent (Miller *et al.*, 2009) ^[4]. This also facilitates the making of informed and appropriate decisions on the student. It should be added that, the rubric for scoring traditional assessment procedure, for example, multiple choice is not too difficult to be prepared and that facilitates scoring. Performance and portfolio assessment procedures on the other hand require effective, efficient and well defined criteria or rubric for scoring and standards to achieve reliability and validity of results (Dekli, 2003). This is because, students can be given the same task, but since students demonstrate their knowledge by doing, there will be differences in the way students may go about the doing. In situations where there is no defined criteria or rubric for scoring, standards to achieve validity and reliability may be lowered.

Additionally, traditional assessment procedures provide indirect evidence of learning (Dekli, 2003). This is because, the assessor may not be present to know the skill and ability adopted by the student in the quest of knowing. This therefore makes traditional assessment procedures rigid and fixed. This assessment procedure therefore provides a limited ways for the students to demonstrate what they have learned. On other hand, performance and portfolio assessment provide a direct evidence of learning or competency. This type of assessment procedure brings to light a direct demonstration and application of knowledge and skills by performing or doing relevant task. These assessment procedures therefore provide multiple avenues for students to demonstrate best what they have learned in diversity (Allen, 2004) ^[1]. Performance and portfolio assessment procedures are also flexible and provide multiple acceptable ways of constructing or crafting a product or performance as an evidence of learning. Doing is emphasized in these types of assessment procedures and it (doing) is differentiated from knowing.

In furtherance, one important comparison that can be drawn from traditional assessment procedures, performance and portfolio assessment procedures can be attributed to the fact that, traditional assessment procedures provide teachers with just a snapshot of what the student knows. This type of assessment procedure always drives the curriculum which is less time consuming, easy to prepare and easy to administer. On other hand, performance and portfolio assessment provide teachers with the true picture of how and where their students are in their learning, give more information about the strengths and weaknesses of the students and also provide the needs and preferences that aid students in adjusting. These type of assessment procedures drive curriculum and instruction. However, Dekli (2003) ^[3] contends that performance and portfolio assessment procedures are time consuming, labor intensive and sometimes the time and effort spent exceed the benefit.

Another comparison to be emphasized regarding traditional assessment procedures, performance and portfolio assessment procedures is their impact on teaching. Traditional assessment procedures force educators to spend time teaching students how to manage test, including the various strategies for selecting correct answers from a listed group. On the other hand, performance and portfolio assessments expose educators to focus on critical reasoning skills, which students will be able to apply naturally to long-form test questions. However, in situation where performance and portfolio assessments procedures replace

traditional assessment procedures, teachers would have to learn new methods of test preparations and schools need to develop performance forms of assessment to their teachers and students. The last comparison on traditional, performance and portfolio assessment procedures stems from the fact that, traditional assessment procedures are most at times separated from teaching and learning. In this sense, test surrounding traditional assessment procedures comes after the instruction to evaluate if the students have efficiently and effectively learned the content. On the other hand, test with respect to performance and portfolio assessment procedures are integrated with instruction. Assessment activities happen all throughout the instruction to aid students improve their learning and thus, help teachers to develop means and strategies to improve teaching.

Conclusions and implication for practice

With reference to classroom teachers' obligation to assess their students, there is the need to better compare and contrast the differences between traditional assessment procedures, and performance and portfolio assessment procedures. Gleaning from the aforementioned distinctions, it has been demonstrated that traditional assessment procedures emphasize what students know and do not reflect students' experiences. Conversely, performance and portfolio assessment procedures lay an emphasis on what the student can do and present a hands-on task which requires student to do an activity that requires applying their knowledge and skills from several learning target. It has been underscored that performance and portfolio assessment procedures use clearly defined criteria to evaluate how well the student has achieved (Nitko, 2004). The implication however is that, for a meaningful classroom assessment, teachers must make efforts and include performance and portfolio assessment procedures to give a holistic impression on students' learning outcomes and progress. The reason is that performance and portfolio assessment procedures gives a valid impression on what the student can do and transforms knowledge to practice. Conclusively, performance and portfolio assessment procedures simply answer the question "How well can students use and apply the knowledge they acquire?"

References

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