

Equipping Teacher Trainees for Formative Assessment: Training of Formative Assessment in the practices of Teacher Education programme in Kerala

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Abstract

Teacher training programmes play a significant role in developing competencies and skills which is required for effective teaching. The success of teaching in so far is determined by how far teachers are oriented towards the assessment system which makes learning in school systematic and progressive. This study aims to examine how well the student teachers are equipped towards formative assessment in the practices of teacher education programmes. Qualitative approach was used for data collection and analysis of data. The participants of the study are persons who have completed teacher training programme at master level in any of the universities in Kerala. An interview guide included question to seek the opinion of participants relating to training of formative assessment in the practices of teacher education programme during their teacher training studies. Participants are conveniently selected. The participants viewed that the present practices of training programme is not adequately equip them with theoretical and practical knowledge of formative assessment. The major finding of the study is that there is neither a full-fledged conceptual framework nor an operational system for preparing the trainees towards formative assessment. The researchers recommend that teacher training programme must be elaborative by including formative assessment as a major area in its curriculum.

1. Introduction

Assessment is a key constitutive element that makes learning in school systematic. Formative assessment is an active and intentional learning process that partners, the teacher and the students, to continuously and systematically gather evidence of learning with the express goal of improving student achievement (Bereiter&Scardamalia, 1989). The learning in classroom is primarily depends on the effectiveness of instructional strategies and the instrument assist in instructional process. The success of instrument and instructional process depends on how far these two are incorporated with socio-cultural circumstances (Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective highlights the need to consider the tools used, who participates, the nature of that participation (student and teacher roles), and the rules and norms that guide participation in explaining how the social context of the classroom influences and is influenced by formative assessment practice (Moss, 2008).

In this study Formative assessment is defined as ‘an instrument of learning and teaching which is adaptive according to the learning needs of children and to adjust teaching appropriately.’ Whatever the tools and equipment administered in classroom should have the capacity to reach out all learners and enhance the learning capacity of learner according to their learning needs. So the assessment process should be guided by defined parameters and trained faculties.

There are different theories of formative assessment which defines the concept in different perspectives. The practitioners of formative assessment should be well versed towards the attributes of formative assessment and its main effects on teaching and learning. ‘Attributes’ signifies a feature or a property that is regarded as characteristics to someone or something. In this study attributes of formative assessment refers to the main characteristics features that makes an assessment practice formative.

Classroom assessment in general and formative assessment in particular must be guided and carried out with teachers who have theoretical and practical knowledge about the concept of formative assessment. Where should they be trained towards the practices of assessment? The teacher training programme, in India, is organized at three levels.

1. Diploma in Elementary Education
2. Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)
3. Mater of Education (M.Ed.)

Assessment is a major subject area in these teacher education programmes.

The theory and practice of formative assessment seems to be at a crossroads (Harry Torrance, 2012). One of the major constitute that undermines the significance of assessment practices is the lack of trained faculties. There is significant difference among teachers when they reported their understanding of formative assessment (Prema, 2014). The teachers need to be systematically trained on formative assessment and they must be equipped with the parameters of formative assessment. Teachers must be equipped with the tools and techniques of assessment which makes leaning supportive and learner enabled. In this context the presentresearchwas carried out with the aim ofcritically examinethe training of formative assessment in the practices of teacher education programmes.

2. Formative assessment underpinning in theories

The concept formative assessment is not anorigin of twenty first century. Even though the term formative has been originated and used decades back, it is a concept not fully conceptualized even by the teacher educators. Understandings towards socio-cultural theories really help to define formative assessment and to frame critical attributes of formative assessment. According to Vygotsky (1978) learning is occurred within a social plane which is assisted by a cultural mediator to achieve the target which is often termed to be zone of proximal development. According to him formative assessment is the tool or instrument which is acted as a cultural mediator in instructional process. Each learner’s capacity are crucially depends on the practices and artifacts (Vygotsky, 1978) which have been developed over time within particular cultures (wells, 1991).Harlen (2007) said,

“Formative assessment has a single clear purpose: that of helping learning and teaching. If it does not serve this purpose it is not, by definition, formative. Advancement in student’s learning is the criterion to check the effectiveness of assessment process. If formative assessment is effectively instrumented in learning process it cause to substantial progress in students’ achievement in learning. Researchers claim that the use of formative assessment has a positive effect on student’s achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Other than instrumenting the learning process the formative assessment modifies teaching and learning activities. These theories really emphasized the need for effective formative assessment in classroom.

There are reference for unpreparedness and planning towards assessment practices (Young, 2008). Studies revealed that there is significant difference among teachers when they reported their understanding of formative assessment (Prema, 2014). So the teachers must be well trained towards the theories and practices of formative assessment and teacher training programme must meet these requirements at higher degree.

3. Objectives of the study

This study aims to examine how well the student teachers are equipped towards formative assessment in the practices of teacher education programmes.

4. Methodology of the study

The study adopted qualitative method regarding data collection and procedure. The method used for data collection was semi structured interview. The interview guide (protocol) included question to seek the opinion of participants relating to training of formative assessment in the practices of teacher education programme during their teacher training studies. The main dimensions of the interview guide (interview protocol) are

- i. Learning of formative assessment constitutes
- ii. Engineering of formative assessment
- iii. Preparedness towards assessment
- iv. Use of tools and equipment of assessment
- v. Preparation of documents regarding formative assessment
- vi. Learning the concept of formative assessment.

The type of interview conducted was one-on-one interview as it is popular approach in educational research (Creswell, 2012). The mode of one-one-one interview was phoning interview. The questions included in one-on-one interview were open ended. There were fifteen one-on-one interview were organized with participants who have completed their teacher education programme at master level. The one-one-one interview was planned according to the check list adapted from Gay, Mills and Airasian (Gay.2005). One-one-one interview last for two weeks, only one participant was interview at a time. A single interview last between 45 to 60 minutes.

4.1 Participants

The participants of this study were fifteen persons who have completed their teacher education programme at master level. The participants who were opted to participate in this study have completed at least two programmes on teacher education that is B.Ed. and M.Ed. They were purposefully and conveniently selected as samples from three universities, University of Kannur, Kerala, University of Calicut, Kerala, and Mahatma Gandhi university Kottayam, Kerala`

4.2 Research Question

The entire procedure of the study aims to answer the following research question.

How student teachers are trained on formative assessment practices?

4.3 Trustworthiness

The participants who were opted in the study were fully aware of the nature and purpose of the interview. They were informed in advance that the participation is voluntary and optional and they have exercised control over the information they supplied. The voices of the participants were recorded while the interview was going on, and a prior permission was obtained from the participants regarding this.

5. Analysis and discussions

The data collected for the study was qualitatively analyzed. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis procedure in this study. First the researchers transcribe the field notes and audios (voices) in to codes and then themes. The major themes identified are:

- i. Lack of instructional strategies
- ii. Engineering of formative assessment
- iii. Accepted theories and principles of formative assessment
- iv. Evidencing of formative assessment
- v. Miss conceptualization of formative assessment

Table 1 reveals the views of respondents on each theme. It also details the percentage of participants agree or dis agree against the questions included in the interview protocol in turn it is termed as themes then.

Major number of participants viewed that the prime purpose of teacher education programme is to enable the student teachers to conceptualize the theories of teaching and learning. They must be trained enough to have knowledge about various aspects of teaching. Assessment is an important area which requires it actors trained and practically oriented. Since teachers are the major actor in assessment process the must be adequately trained towards this. But unfortunately the present teacher training programs not well succeed against these requirements, a participant added.

A well planned and organized teacher education programme can prepare a teacher sound in selecting and developing instructional strategies. However this can be achieved only when the teacher education programme provide a practical experience to student teachers in preparing and developing

instructional strategies. The interview with participants explored that the present practices of training programme is not so far instrumented in terms of these parameters.

There are many theories and principles, which are well accepted, on formative assessment. A teacher conceptualizing the theories of formative assessment can significantly play as an enabler of students' learning and can be act as an instrument in learning progress. An overwhelming majority of the respondents viewed that the present state of training programme is not adequately orient trainees towards these purpose and in fact it doesn't meet its functional requirements.

Thirteen out of fifteen respondents viewed that they were not oriented towards the operational procedure of formative assessment. The success of teaching is mostly determined by how far the classroom activities are guided and how students learning process is instrumented by the teacher. Lack of knowledge on these aspects may cause to ineffective teaching. So the teacher trainees must be well oriented about how the classroom activities are organized particularly the assessment practices.

Evidencing the learning is an important aspect in teaching. The teachers must be well trained about how students' progress and the level of performance of students on each activity are reported. During teacher training programme student teachers must be given awareness and practical experience towards this aspect, respondents viewed.

Table 1. Training of formative assessment in the practice of teacher education programmes: Participants response

Themes	Description	Percentage of participants contributing to the theme
Lack of instructional strategies	Training on formative assessment is not guided by well-defined policies and instructional strategies.	12/15
Engineering of formative assessment	Teacher education programmees failed to provide adequate knowledge and experience regarding the administration of formative assessment in classrooms	31/15
Accepted theories and principles of formative assessment	Training of formative assessment is not adequately become an enabler which helps to conceptualize the theoretical aspects of formative assessment in its real sense	9/15
Evidencing the formative assessment	Training on formative assessment is not sufficiently provide knowledge about the preparation of documents relating to formative assessment	11/15

Miss conceptualization of formative assessment	The inadequate training programme may cause to miss conceptualize the formative assessment	9/15
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6. Finding of the study

On the basis of the interview with participants, the researchers formulate the following finds:

- ❖ Teacher training programmes in Kerala, does not serve its purpose as an enabler of student teachers towards instrumenting them on formative assessment
- ❖ There is neither a full-fledged conceptual framework nor an operational system for preparing the trainees towards formative assessment
- ❖ Teacher trainees are left unaware or under informed about formative assessment practices
- ❖ Teacher training programme doesn't adequately include the nature and scope of assessment in its curriculum

7. Conclusions

The present study reveals the need for effective revision on teacher training programme regarding equipping the student teachers towards the assessment system. The system should be readjusted by providing in-depth knowledge about formative assessment and its theories and by including practical exercises on formative assessment. This requires strong policy initiatives and executive measures to construct a conceptual framework which in deed provide a well operational system which ensures a regular training on formative assessment.

Assessment is the most important concept inbuilt in education, but we often miss judged its importance. Therefore it is imperative that the teachers should be sensitized to the possibilities of formative assessment an enabler of learning. This in turn requires institutionally guided and trained faculties. The teacher training programme at B.Ed. and M.Ed. level must address training on formative assessment as a key issue and make adjustment in curriculum. The researchers recommend that teacher training programme must be elaborative by including formative assessment as a major area in its curriculum. Hopefully, the new education policy will do better this respect.

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