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# Assessment Practice and Perception of Social Science Instructors in Afghanistan

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**Assessment Practice and Perception of Social  
Science Instructors in Afghanistan**

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Master's Project

Center for International Education

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## **Abstract**

This thesis has been prepared with three objectives in mind. First, investigating and identifying the problems and challenge of assessment is essential to the quality of education as well as to the reform of education in Afghanistan. Any reforms and the improvement of education are greatly based on the findings of research. Therefore, this project is targeting to facilitate this process.

Second, this research project is aiming to explain the assessment that is practiced in Higher Education of Afghanistan. This is essential to two critical issues. It is useful not just to Afghan instructors to know about the assessment practices in Higher Education entities but it is in greater need of the donor countries who are concerned with educational issues such as assessment and measurement. Furthermore, this project is also concerned to find out about the recent changes and development in the area of assessment in the higher education system of Afghanistan.

Third, this research project will offer some useful literature regarding assessment that will help teachers to reconsider their assessment practices. This is particularly important because some teachers are not aware of the recent changes and development in the field of assessment that is essential to the process of learning and teaching.

This thesis is designed by chapters. The first chapter is introductory chapter that explains the purpose, significance and history of education in Afghanistan. The second chapter is a very coherent review of the literature. This section is mainly explaining and introducing noble

assessment practices that are considered to be effective and useful for student learning. The third chapter is methodology of the research. And the last chapter is the findings of this research. At last, there is a conclusion and suggestion section which contains a very short summary of the result of this research and based on these findings, I have suggested some changes that are essential to the improvement of Higher Education of Afghanistan.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this study is to describe and explore the current state of assessment practices, literacy and perceptions of Kabul Education University teachers about assessments. The results of this study will be used in designing appropriate and cohesive curriculum with comprehensive and valid assessment system.

### **Research questions:**

My specific research questions are

- 1- What type of assessment practices are used to assess student learning in Kabul Education University?
- 2- What do teachers at Kabul Education University know about assessment methods?
- 3- What are the Kabul Education University teachers' perceptions about assessment?

### **Significance of the study**

This small scale research is important in reshaping of education in Afghanistan in several ways. First, identifying the problem it self is a critical component of conducting this research. Usually people debate over, for example what is wrong with their system, project, school, university and so on. But unfortunately, I have not seen such debate over some of educational problems that linger in Afghanistan for decades. One of those problems is assessment. Though assessment is a vital aspect of education, teaching and learning, it is perceived a separated activity that happens at a certain time of an

academic year in Afghanistan. to change this traditional understanding and further investigate the problem, research such this one can contribute in the process of identification of assessment problems.

Second, once the problem is identified, change and reform is the next step that needs to be taken. This means we that there should be another option that can be replaced with. Therefore, this research is aiming to incorporate some ideas and concepts that may be useful in the reform process of assessment in Afghanistan.

Third, this research is aiming to raise awareness and introduce new concepts of assessment that has not been practiced and talked in Afghanistan for the last three decades. These concepts are important not just in the reform process but are important for improving the quality of education in Afghanistan. For example, mostly formative assessment methods are concerned with student learning. Incorporating these kinds of concepts will have a tremendous effect on the quality of teaching and learning, because this is thought as an essential part of teaching that is helpful for enhancing student learning.

### **Education Background and Research Context**

As a faculty member in Baghlan Higher Education Institution, I wanted to explore and discuss a vital issue that has never been considered nor by NGOs neither by Ministry of Higher Education which is assessment. I think assessment is an essential part of instruction and educational programs. Through a thorough, comprehensive and effective assessment we can offer quality education. This means that assessment becomes a tool for measuring the quality of teachers' activity by keeping them accountable for their actions.

Furthermore, assessment is an indispensable part of instruction. Without an assessment system in place, instruction cannot yield positive results. In order to bring about learning and facilitate students' learning process, we need to have an assessment system that can enhance this process. As one of the purposes of assessment is to give useful feedback for students that will help them learn from their mistakes. Therefore, a clear assessment is needed for the teacher education programs throughout the country.

The existence of traditional assessment is not helpful for teacher education because they train teachers for primary and secondary school. Having a sound assessment system in university will have positive impact on school teachers' assessment practices. Therefore, it is necessary to reform assessment in teacher education in order to meet the needs of both university teachers to offer quality services and the needs of school teachers who graduate from teacher education. Though there are a lot of problem that needs to be address in higher education, now is the time to consider new types of assessment methods.

Some of you will wonder how come education and higher education faces problems such as lack of qualified teachers, resources, and infrastructure. The answer is that Afghanistan has been a war zone for more than three decades. In order to understand the cause of war and the educational system of Afghanistan, below is a short background on the development of education and its problems during the last three decades.

### **Education development and its challenges**

Afghanistan has gone through different flourishing, civilized and a destructive arena. Afghanistan was a cross-road of ancient civilization had well known and nurtured scholars in its unfolded history. Samady (2001) explains that in the cities of Hirat, Balkh, and Ghazny the

learning centers were built and presented respected scholars in the field of philosophy, literature, and science not just to the country but to the region. According to Samady (2001) the “medical treatise” which was used in Europe till the end of the 19 century was Ibn-E- Sina Balkhis’ remarkable work. Abu Raihan Albiruni, Hakim Sanaee, Khoja Abdullah Ansari, Mullana Jalaludin Roumi Balkhi, Khoshhal Khan Khatek, Rahman BaBa were some of the Afghan philosopher and poets who shaped the thoughts and civilization of its time. One of the greatest Afghan political philosopher of the nineteenth century named Said Jamaludin Afghani have traveled to different parts of the world explaining the link between Islam, science and progress(Samady, 2001, p. 2).

Education services were delivered in informal forms through Mosques, scholarly circles, at homes and in Madrassas at beginning of the twentieth century. The mosques and Madrassas were the guiding institutions which were supported by parents, communities and religious and tribal leaders. Madrassas were the core entity which provided the community with general knowledge and theological studies. The small private sector offered writing, poetry, literature, history, science and traditional medicine in a non-formal fashion. This type of educational opportunity educated men in the area of art, farming and commerce (Samady, 2001). The development of modern education gradually extended and traditional education was slowly replaced with modern education system.

The modern education arena flourished in Afghanistan by building the first high school named Habibia in 1903 in Kabul. The professional cadres of the school were Afghan and Indian in order to train personnel for civil services. The building of the Habibia high school was followed by several primary and teacher training institution. King Amanulla Khan who got the independence in 1919 favored modern education. The development of modern education was at the high



priority of King Amanulla Khan and he, for the first time, appointed a minister of education. in the 1920 several primary schools (Istiqlal, Amani, Ghazi) and a secondary school for girls and a center for adult learning including vocational schools (Agriculture, art, craft, administration were opened in Kabul. during the development of the modern education, for the first time, number of students, boys and girls were sent to study abroad. and the diplomatic ties with foreign countries strengthened the development of modern education in Afghanistan (Samadi, 2001).

In 1929 once again the modern schools were closed during the anarchy due to the absence of King Amanullah Khan which “followed by nine months of civil strife and anarchy” under the power of Habibullah Kalakani (Samady, 2001, P. 27). At the end of that year Nader Shah became the king and he reopened the school and gave the same special attention to the modern education as King Amanulla Khan. The year 1930 witnessed the development and extension of modern education. During this time Afghanistan had thirteen primary and secondary school run by 53 teachers and had 1,590 students. in the new constitution of 1931 chapter 20 and 22 made primary education compulsory and made the government responsible to control and supervise all educational entities( USAID, 2008).

In 1933, after the assassination of Nadershah Khan, Zaher Shah became the King which in this period the development process of education slowed down. But in this period the establishment of school from Kabul expanded to provinces. Several secondary schools were built in other provinces and few religious schools were restructured and became part of the modern schools. Moreover, a secondary school was build for girls and followed by the establishment of two vocational schools and a medical school for training assistant doctors and pharmacists in Kabul. In order to keep the universities open and extend the higher education, Afghanistan government sent 20 students to study abroad (Samady, 2001).

As a part of the higher education development process, in 1946 the University of Kabul was established and the already functioning faculty and fields were incorporated into the university. Between 1948 and 1955, 25 students from the faculty of medicine, law, and science were given governmental scholarships to study abroad. And those who returned from their studies were hired in Kabul University and some other in other ministries.

After the Second World War, international community had a significant role the systematic and developmental process. In the post-Second World War, besides France, and Germany, Afghanistan had educational projects with USA, and USSR. Moreover, UNESCO which was politically an accepted agency, and provide expertise and resource to Afghanistan, the commission surveyed the status of the education level in Afghanistan by the invitation of Afghan Government (Samady, 2001).

The development process became systematic which raised the issue of quality of education. In 1954 USAID was cooperating to assist the “qualitative improvement of teacher education”. The main objective of the first five year plan was to promote primary education. And to meet the needs of the government and the society, the second developmental plan focused on secondary, vocational, and higher education. The third developmental plan (1968-1973) covered all levels of education with a focus on quality of the services. Systematic development according to the plan precisely applied in the primary education; however, the strengthening of the secondary education was faster and that is because of the needs of the public in provincial level (Samadi, 2001).

For the first time, in 1973 Afghanistan was announced a Republican state, headed by Mohammad Dawoud Khan a former prime minister. He decided to bring change and to improve

the broken economy, and modernize agriculture; Dawoud Khan gave special attention to education by developing a seven year developmental plan. In this plan the priority was given to “human resources, technical and vocational education” (Samadi, 2001, p, 27). According to Sadat, (2004) the seven years developmental plan was not put into action because the Republic of Afghanistan was thrown out in 1978.

The weakened government, the bad economy, and the newly born education system were once again disrupted. After 1978, the soviet invasion has set the stage for three decades of internal war that still fuels the conflict in the country. According to USAID (2008) about 80% of school buildings were destroyed. Almost all qualified teachers were killed a small portion left the country and life in neighboring countries (Iran, Pakistan). From 1978 to 1992 two types of educational services were provided to Afghan children: one type of education was provided, mostly in cities, by the communist regime. And the second type of educational services were delivered “by Mujahedin with western backing” (USAID, 2008, P. 3,).

The main objective of the soviet dominated educational system was to motivate and familiarize to a larger extent the public with pro-Marxist ideology. Authorized and policy making departments of education was advised by the soviet advisers and pro-communist teachers and members of the party were sent to teach in urban and rural area. Moreover, the soviet attempted sending thousands of Afghans to study in Russia for further education (USAID, 2008).

The soviet’s greater challenge came from the rural communities of Afghans. They did not accept the soviet ideological dominated educational system. Though at the beginning of the soviet invasion this resistance movement was slow, it became worst when the Mujahedin were recruited to fight the soviet by the support of USA in Pakistan. However, the main problem occurred when

people realized that the soviet type of education contradicts our religious and social values. The issue of threatening religious and Islamic values was further exaggerated and propagandized by Mujahidin and its ally countries (USA& Pakistan) in order to block the pro-soviet ideology and get the support of public (Lemar, 2004).

According to USAID (2008) as a result of the soviet anti-Islamic ideology, there was an enormous decrease in the enrolment rate in rural areas. The estimated damage of schools is about 80% which resulted in a reduction of schools, staffs, and teachers and caused an increase in the size and number of students in the classes.

Parallel to the soviet educational system, Mujahidin education system meant for “countering the Marxist influence and preserving traditional culture”. Educational advisers of the main seven Mujahidin parties structured the Education Council of Afghanistan (ECA) to offer educational services for the refugees in the camps in Pakistan. It is vital to point out that the main technical and professional provider of the educational activities were provided mostly by NGOs that functioned as a “quasi-government”. In carrying educational activities, 28 NGOs and three UN agencies were responsible in both side of the border. By 1990, NGOs were responsible for the provision of teacher salaries, students’ supplies, and textbooks for about 70% of the school in Afghanistan (USAID, 2008, p. 6).

Regardless of the great resistance made by Mujahidin and backed by international community, the defeat of the Soviet in 1989 did not bring any positive changes to the life of Afghans and to the education system of the country. It is unfortunate that the defeat of the Soviet did not bring any good but an internal civil war that destroyed schools, roads, universities, and killed more

then 200,000 people just in Kabul city and injured uncounted civilians. This civil war continued until 1995 when a new group of people emerged called Taliban.

Before the emergence of the Taliban, NGOs and international community provided educational opportunities for more than a million primary children in Afghanistan. Similarly, NGOs provided educational services for about 90,000 children in refugee camps in neighboring country Pakistan. But unfortunately, during the Taliban government, 100 of girls' schools and home based schools were shutdown which was mainly supported by NGOs. In 2000 EFA announced that the enrollment rate of girls decreased from 32 to 6.4 during the Taliban government. As girls were forbidden from educational opportunities, according to USAID (2008) the international community funding decreased into the lowest level during the Taliban Government (USAID, 2008).

The five years of Mujahedin and Taliban have driven the educational system into an unexpected devastating destiny. After the collapse of the Taliban government in 2001, there has been a dramatical increase in the number of students, both girls and boys. The expectation, demand, hopes for a brighter future, excitement, and smiles can be seen in the faces of people after a long dark period. According to the ministry of Education, the number of students reaches to five million. But the problems are still ahead. According to USAID (2008), about 50% of all school age students are out of school because they have neither school nor teachers. However, the recent report by the Human Right Research and Advocacy Consortium announced that there is a big gap between girls' and boys' in rural and urban area enrollment rate. The estimated enrollment rate in southern provinces is about 50% in general.

The NGOs are closely working with the Ministry of Education to meet some of the demands especially in rural areas especially girl's education. Moreover, the NGOs closely work with the Ministry of Education to meet some of the challenges such training professional teachers and to build capacity within the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2006).

Similar to primary and secondary education, the infrastructure of higher education suffered as well. A recent assessment report prepared by International Development Association, notified the hindering problems of higher education in Afghanistan. This assessment report found several problems that are the result of three decades of war and conflict. First of all, there is the lack of qualified teachers in higher education. Most if not all teachers, left the country and some were killed during the soviet occupation and during the civil war. And a few who continued teaching were disabled accessing the recent development in the area of teaching and research. Afghanistan was totally disconnected with the out side world especially in the area of education.

Second, Afghan teachers disparity needs professional development. According to the International Development Association (IDA) (2005) Afghan "faculty lack credentials and expertise for their critical" role in the educational system (IDA, 2005, p. 2). The tertiary education teachers only 7% hold PhDs and 41% master the rest holds bachelors. Moreover, the higher education institutions' curricula, the teaching material and the textbooks are out of date. There is also scarce of textbooks in all fields and teachers are still using the traditional methods of teaching (notation & memorization).

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

Looking to the importance of education and its vital role in the development of a society, there is a general agreement over the need for professional and qualified teachers in training and educating the up growing generation. The new era is a golden opportunity for Afghanistan to shape its educational system with minimum quality in short terms. But for long term, there should be a benchmark for competency assessment of students during their study period in university.

An area that I feel is concerning the current educational system is assessment. Teachers in Afghanistan follow the traditional assessment system that nothing more then exams. Exams can be a part of summative assessment that stands for grading and scoring students. However, assessment should be used for more then just grading. Besides summative assessment we need to incorporate formative assessment in to educational system through which students are helped and given a chance to rethink about their activities. This will enable students to benefit from their time being in the class. Formative assessment is also good for students to make them active learners who are involved in class activities. Therefore, it is essential to introduce an assessment system that can keep teachers accountable and at the same time improve student learning. I believe that we can achieve this goal by adapting a mixed method (summative and formative) assessment.

Among other concerning issues, assessment is an essential one because there has not been that much change in the assessment methods of teachers. Teacher education with a little change by adapting a sort of student centered instruction is still assessed by traditional assessment forms

(paper and pencil test). Mainly the purpose of assessment is just to assign grade to students. Furthermore, there is no system in place that can be fair in terms of gender, ethnicity to all students. In order to solve this problem, there should be a fair, valid and reliable assessment system that treats every body based on their intelligence, activity, performance and understand.

### **What is Assessment?**

I think education itself is a complex field, because it is still in exploration and developmental phase. Assessment, instruction and learning as part of educational activity, is still in the spanning motion. Phye (1997) argues that theories of learning are changing quickly that affects the discourse of instruction. He argues that it is a vital era for the educators, policy makers, theorists, teachers, and measurement people to be aware of the change in these areas. the change is significant and essential in the rhetoric of scholars about theories of learning. For example, the constructivists definition to learning is that knowledge is neither passively received nor mechanically reinforced”; rather learning happens by being active in the process of sense making (Shepard, p, 16, 2000). However, in traditional approaches to learning, students were perceived to be the receiver of information narrated by teachers which is discharged by constructivist theory of learning.

The constructivist theory of learning has not just brought change how learning or learner was perceived but it also changed the way educators designed instruction and assessment. Now days, educators tend to use ways where students are challenged to think critically, analyze issues; compare, contrast, infer, interpret and evaluate it, instead of testing some concrete facts(Phye, 1997).



We can see such a change in the area of assessment by looking at some definitions that are given by scholars in the field. For example, Walvoord (2004), Phye (1997) and Linn & Gronlund (1995) give different definitions of assessment:

Assessment is a kind of action research intended not so much to generate theories as to inform local action.

Educational situations contain too many variables to make proof possible. Therefore, assessment gathers indicators that will be useful for decision making.

Assessment means basing decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, advising and students support upon the best possible data about students learning and factors that affect.

Assessment does not limit itself only to learning that can be objectively tested. It needs not to be reductive exercise it. Rather, a department states its highest goal including student's ethical development and understanding of diversity and the like (Walwood, 2004).

Assessment is an integrated process for determining the nature and extent of student learning and development Gronlund (1995).

Assessment has been used to refer to a new process, often with medical or psychological connotations, as in the gathering and synthesizing of information about a person that physician or counselor would conduct as part of diagnosing and treating the person's conditions (Phye, 1997).

As more and more educators and scholars are getting concerned with students learning, there has been a distinction and shift toward formative assessment. Phye (1997) points out that "assessment should serve, as opposed to drive, instruction would be preferable" (Phye, p, 9, 1997). Ainswrth and Viegut (2006) believe that assessment is used to identify to what extent students have mastered and achieved learning goals. In order to fully understand that which type of assessment is inferred and meant by these scholars, below I will be discussing it in greater details.

## **Types of Assessment**

Generally there are several types of assessment methods such as Formative, and Summative assessments are largely used and practiced throughout the educational cycle. Gardner (2006) make a distinction between summative and formative assessment by calling summative assessment as assessment of learning and formative assessment as a assessment for learning. He

lays a very clear explanation of the both type of assessment. He defines formative assessment that “promotes learning” by gathering evidence about student and in relation to the goal in order to decide the next step in their learning. However, summative assessment is defined as providing summary of student achievement in specific point in the semester.

There are scholars favoring one or the other but those who are concerned about students’ learning, tend to favor formative assessment. For example, Tuttle (2009) defines assessment as a process of giving feedback that enhance and improves student learning. He adds that the concepts of formative assessment refers to activities of giving information back to the students that results in better understanding of the issues and enables students to be reflective and to be critical of their work. He states that summative assessment as “state tests, final exam, quarterly quizzes and unit tests” are useful in revealing where students are but are not intended to improve student learning (Tuttle, 2009, p, 4).

Furthermore, Ainwrth and Viegut (2006) note that formative assessment means pre-assessment that happens before a formal instruction. Pre-assessment can also be used to measure students’ growth. Formative assessment cannot be used to assign grade because formative assessment is used to facilitate learning and use the results to inform decisions regarding students learning.

However, summative assessment is concerned with assigning grades and score to the students’ achievement. This form of assessment mainly happens at certain times; at the end, middle, quarter of a school year or semester. As Summative assessment happens at certain times, it cannot be used to give students feedback that can be used for correction and adjustment. Through summative assessment, teachers report the results of students learning to different entities such as school administration, to the teachers, to students, and to the parents. One purpose of summative

assessment is to measure students level of proficiency in a particular subject, unite and in a course. Furthermore, summative assessment is used as a mirror for teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and to see the effectiveness and weaknesses of their instruction.

Throughout our discussion in the next section, the focus will be to explore and analyze formative assessment concept further. As mentioned above, and I think that there is an emphasis on formative assessment because it improves students learning. In order to better understand what is formative assessment and how to incorporate and adapt it in our classrooms, it is essential discuss it in greater details.

### **Formative Assessment**

Alastair Iron (2008) defines formative assessment as the activities that happens throughout the semester and is meant to guide students' thoughts and give feedback that will results in improving student learning. According to Mantz Yorke (2003) formative assessment is a way of providing feedback to students that will contribute to the enhancement of students' learning. It is important to note that formative assessment can be formal and informal. And the distinction between formative and summative is that formative assessment is a continuous process and the goal is to give students information about their performance. Furthermore, Miller, Imrie & Cox (1998) in their book *Student Assessment in Higher Education* introduces formative assessment as activity that happens throughout an academic year aiming to help students receive information to judge their learning effectiveness and strategies. Moreover, formative assessment is also helpful for teachers to review their approaches to instruction. And a critical component of formative assessment is that does not assign any score or grade to the students' activity. For example,

giving feedback on students' paper, projects, and activity in the middle of semester is part of formative assessment.

The literature I reviewed found that each of these assessments forms is used for a purpose. However, as teachers and students are concerned in bringing about learning, the use and importance of formative assessment is considered vital. Therefore, there are arguments that lay the ground for shifting from summative assessment to formative assessment. The first argument is that traditional system of assessment which is mainly testing sees students as passive receiver of information. In this kind of instruction the purpose of learning is just memorization of the content that is taught by teacher. And this kind of instruction is assessed through testing of the basic knowledge that might or might not be obtain through repetitive teaching method ( Filip, 2001). Scholars like Katrien Struyven, Filip Dochy, Steven Janssens, Wouter Schelfhout, and Sarah Gielen (2006) points out the fact that educators still practice traditional models of assessment such as paper and pencil and timed examinations. Most importantly, in traditional assessment models, it is very hard to achieve educational goals; crafting students with meaningful learning ability, developing problem-solving, communicational and constructional skills.

Second, according to Dochy and McDowell (1997) in traditional system of assessment, there is a distinction between instruction and testing. Teachers are just responsible for instruction, and psychometrics is considered to be responsible for testing and analyzing of the tests as well. However, the new tradition of assessment focuses on the mutual role of assessment and instruction that completes each other. In this kind of assessment students are perceived as active learners who also have responsibility in evaluating their progress. This form of assessment

includes; “observation, text tests, interview, performance assessment, writing samples, exhibitions, portfolio assessment and project assessment” ( Dochy and McDowell, p, 282, 1997). The other argument is grounded in psychological disputes. There is a large amount of literature, research and debate about the anxiety resulted from the test. Casbarro (2003) asserts that “like guilt, anxiety is a man-made emotion”. He adds that in 21 century we still put pressure on children is “ridiculous” (Casbarro, 1998, p.1). similarly, Zeidner (1998) argue that research has proven that people who give test demonstrate cognitive expression (self-focused attention and cognitive preoccupation with failure, lack of confidence and feeling inadequate in test situation, and negative performance expectations) are the vivid characteristics of test anxiety (Ziedner, 2005). Zeidne (1998) argue that we should not be using tests in judging students skills, knowledge, and performance that is a strong source of anxiety. People are tested for purposes such as college admission, math test, language test or standardized test and so on. He adds that many of the children in the current societies “become test-oriented or test-anxious”. Casbarro (2003) the author of Test Anxiety and what You Can Do About it, talks about his own daughter’s test anxiety who could not sleep the whole night because she had a test and she was worried whether she can pass it or not. Ziedne (1998) argues that “test anxiety is among the factors at play in determining a wide array of unfavorable outcomes and causes poor cognitive performance and scholastic underachievement” (Ziedne, p, 4, 1998). He acknowledges the fact that there are students who can do well in exams but they do poor due the amount of anxiety. Very seriously, the result of test anxiety may end up poor grade that influences the entrance of students to educational programs. Finally, in the long run anxiety can cause the loss of capability and potential in students because of the “anxiety-related underachievement failure that constitutes an important mental health problem in education” (Ziedne, p, 5, 1998).

Moreover, there is also a fear exist in the use of tests related to students perception of self-worthiness. The research has found out that there is a link between students' score and their perception about their academic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance and behavioral conduct (Phye, 1997). The criticism is also raised regarding the issue of validity and reliability. Black (1998) argue that the individuals' results that might have affected by examines' judgment and by variables such as the format of test and the way an item is written, is problematic and questionable because it cannot truly tells us about students level of understanding, achievement and ability.

However, there is the counter argument in support of test, and exams. For example, in the book called *Beyond Test and Quizzes* by Richard Mezeske and Barbara (2007) notes that students "tend to learn what is inspected but not what is expected" from them(Mezeske & Barbara, p.71, 2007).

### **The Importance of Feedback**

There are different ways of assessing students' learning. As the purpose of education remains to be concerned with students' learning, the focus is given to the approaches that are most useful in bringing about learning. Though there are different arguments; some in favor of summative others in favor of formative, it is recognized that students should be helped throughout the class period by giving information and feedback about their learning and activities. The literature puts a lot of focus on the importance of feedback to students because it improves students learning.

And there are different ways through which teachers can give feedback on student learning.

Essay, papers, research project, portfolio, journal, and class-discussion are some of the tools used in assessing students. Through each of these tools, teachers can give students information and feedback to students that will help them guide thinking and to reflect on it. Even some are

concerned by the fact that most educational institutions don't have formative assessment system that can give students feedback on their learning (Miller, Lmrie & Cox, (1998). The concept of feedback has given high priority and importance by Knight (1995) that "learning depends upon feedback to the learner" Knight, p, 157, 1995). Knight defines this concept as below:

The term feedback was originally coined by Norbert Weiner in 1948, and introduced into social sciences by Lewin. It has been formally defined as signifying verbal and nonverbal responses from others to a unit of behavior provided as close in time to the behavior as possible, and capable of being perceived and utilized by the individual initiating the behavior. In other words, feedback to students should be provided quickly and be useful and accessible to them.

Knight (1995) point out that feedback is an essential part of learning experiences of students because positive feedback can be used as re-inforcer that will enhance the desirable behavior of students. Tuttle (2009) make distinction between formative assessments from summative by saying that any feedback that doe not help students to improve their learning is not formative. He adds that feedback should clearly state to the student what they have done well and what they should do next.

The ways through which students receive feedback that contributes to the students' learning is through papers, projects, essays, and portfolios. These are very powerful and essential ways that can give a clue to the teacher that where are the students in their educational progress.

Furthermore, students also can benefit from these activities by receiving feedback and comments from their teachers through out the course. A very powerful argument is set by Filip, Dochy and Liz (1997) in their article called Assessment as a Learning Tool. They argue that there has been a significant change in the notion of assessment. Previously, assessment was just understood as summative but now it is used for guiding students' thoughts by giving feedback. Portfolio assessment, Peer assessment, and self assessment are some the kind that are used to improve students' learning. In the current days feedback is extremely important to the student learning.

According to Jeffrey, Lisa, and Richard, (2001) feedback is very powerful activity that helps students' intellectually.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Methodology**

##### **Research Site**

Kabul Education University (KEU) is the main and biggest university of teacher education in Afghanistan. Previously, KEU functioned as a teacher training institute. But after the collapse of the Taliban government in 2001 and an increase in the number of students demanding higher education, teacher training institute was promoted to Education University in 2003.

Currently KEU has six faculties such as Social Science, Natural Science, Language & Literature, physical Training, Special Education and Vocational Education. All the faculties are training teachers in different fields such as Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Mathematics, Literature, physical education, Vocational Education, English literature, Geography, History, theology, Sociology, Special Education and so on. KEU has 170 teachers in two shifts, in-service and pre-service which most hold a bachelor degree. It has also the highest number of students compare to other teacher training universities. The number of students enrolled in KEU is more about 5200. It is estimated that 40% are female which is very high in compare to females in other entities of higher education. Students are enrolled in two shifts, the first shift from 8:00AM to 12:00PM and the second shift from 1:00PM to 4:00PM. Mostly the in-services students come from 1:00PM to the 4:00PM shift because they teach in the Morning shifts in primary and secondary schools.

KEU is a central university that almost 15 other teacher training universities and institutions follow almost the same curriculum that is developed and designed mostly by KEU. The faculty



members also help teachers in provincial institutions in terms of lecture notes, material and resources. Moreover, in the recent years almost a 40% of KEU graduate students are hired in other provincial universities as teachers which demonstrate the advancement and domination of KEU. Furthermore, as most of the provincial universities don't have an academic board, some of administrative work like hiring process is done through KEU which also indicates its vital role in the country. And these are all considered to be important indications for generalizing and adapting the findings of this research.

The participants of my research were from Kabul Education University (KEU) social science teachers, particularly the geography department teachers. KEU is one of the biggest and well known universities in Afghanistan. KEU has six different faculties such as Social Science, Natural Science, Literature, Physical Training, Special Education and Vocational Education. The five thousands students which less than have is female are taught by two hundreds of teachers in two shifts, morning and afternoon. Most of the teachers are above 50 years. Most these teachers either studied in Russia or were taught by Russians in Afghanistan during the 1970 and 1980.

Before, KEU was just called pedagogy of teacher training and it is not promoted to university. At the beginning of the new government of Karzia, the teacher training pedagogy was promoted to university in 2003. The main reason behind this promotion was to give students a university degree of bachelor and to attract students to teacher education programs.

I as graduate of KEU, decided to conduct my research in this university. There are several reasons for conducting my research in KEU. First, as I noticed above that KEU is the biggest university that most of provincial teacher training universities and insinuations implement the same curriculum, therefore; the finding from this university can be applied to all other teacher

training universities. Second, the location of KEU was convenience for me. I live in a close by district of Kabul; I commute easily to the site. It was also helpful in terms of controlling my budget. Furthermore, security was one of the most important issues in conducting my research. I felt that security is much better compare to other provinces of even north part of Afghanistan. Fourthly, accessibility of the university and my participants was important for me. As I am a graduate of the social science faculty, I thought it would be easily conducting my research in KEU compare to other university where I don't know any body.

Lastly, the diversity of teachers was a main issue. I wanted to conduct my research in Kabul because to include people from different ethnicity in the research. Though it does not have any relation or affects to my research but just to include people from different ethnicity.

### **Participants**

Mainly my research participants were geography teacher of social science faculty of KEU. The number teacher participated in the research is 6, two female four male. Four of the teachers were experienced and taught for more than 20 years. Two of the others were newly hired. I had also balanced the participation of my participants in terms of their ethnicity. Two of the participants were Pashtons, one Hazara and four Tajik. Three of the participants hold master degree earned in Russia and Kabul. Two other earned their bachelor from KEU and one from Iran.

Before begging my research, I have talked with dean of the faculty and suggested me to bring an official letter either from the Ministry of Higher Education or from the president of the university. After I submitted the letter of permission, I was allowed to talk to the teachers. The dean promised me that he will let the teachers know about my research formally not to ask me for any further permission letter.

The process of selecting participants was random. I have suggested all teachers to participant in the research, and six of them agreed to be my participants. I explained my research project and its purpose for each individual. It took few days meeting each teacher and explaining my research and its purpose. The only fear that teachers had was the issue of confidentiality and anonymity. I explained for each one that the anonymity their name, position, and any information related to them will not be disclosed.

Though I have received the semester schedule of all the teachers, I talked with them to specify the time and even the location of the interview. I explained for each one the amount of time I would spent with them observing one of their classes and interviewing them.

### **Instruments**

All the instruments were originally written in English and I translate the observation questions, interview, and questionnaire to Dari before I started my first observation. During the translation, I had some difficulty finding the right match in Dari language. For some words such as portfolio I could not find the word that could give the same meaning, but I explained it what portfolio mean. All the Dari visions of the instruments were first discussed with few of the teachers, it meaning were confirmed with them in terms of its Dari language. At the same time, I have practiced the interview questions with a teacher of mine. After all, some justifications were made in terms of the technicality of the questions. This means that some technical words were changed and written in simple understandable words.

In collecting the data, I had observation, interview and questionnaire. I have designed the observation question for that had 14 items and two sections. Each section was targeted to generate information that could explain and explore the assessment system of the social science faculty and teachers assessment literacy level. The questions in the observation form all were

closed-ended. During my observation besides checking the observation items, I also took notes on issues that were either not included in the observation form or were interesting and related to my research purpose.

The purpose of the observation was to see how teachers assess their students and also to understand the complexity the implementing any type of assessment. Furthermore, through observation, I wanted to see whether teachers follow the formal required assessment or have some self-created assessment methods. In addition to that, I also was interested to find out about the existing of formative assessment. I wanted to know whether students are assessed to let them know about their learning gaps or not.

The second part of my research was in-depth interview with the participants. Though I have specified the time and place of the interview with each individual, before going to the site, I had to confirm with each one, because sometimes it happens that they would forget that they have interview. Sometime it happened that even the participant did not come from home. Therefore, I had call to check on them whether they are coming to university or ready to be interviewed or not.

The amount of time spent interviewing each participant differs. Some of the participants took about 40 minutes some 30 and the least one is 25 minutes. It is important to note that I conducted my interview with two of my participants in the present of their friend teacher. I told them that if you want we can talk some where else but they said that it does not matter.

The purpose of interview was two important things. First, I wanted to know about teachers' understanding of assessment and their how do they define assessment. Second, I wanted to find out about the current system of assessment, like how do they assess students. Do they have just summative assessment or have formative as well.

The third instrument in the research was questionnaire. I have developed the questions to generate information from the social science faculty teachers about their understanding of assessment and their assessment practices. The questionnaire was distributed in one day and collected few days latter. I have given enough time to the teachers to go through each question and think about and check mark it. Few of the teachers check the questions in the presence of me and give it back. The questions were design from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to see the commonality of assessment practices through out the social science faculty. This is important that tells me about the literacy level, assessment method and their perception about the current system was the focus of the questionnaire.

### **Design and Procedure**

At the first step, I consulted the dean and chair of the social science and geography department and submitted the Official Permission Letter. Through the dean and the department chair as well as through my own connection to some of the teachers, I had the chance to meet each one individually. After explaining my research project and its purpose, each volunteered to participate in the research project.

I had six teachers from geography department. Firstly, I talked with them and specified the observation time and date. After talking with each teacher, I talked with the dean and the chair of department and kind of give the report when I am observing what class and which teacher.

At the beginning of each class, the teacher introduced me to students and the reason of my coming to their class. And I was with the teacher up to the end of the class time which was 1 hour. I observed each teacher in the same class twice. I had the observation protocol and I also took notes.

It is important to point out that for one class which I was observing; the chair of the department was there for supervision of the class and the teacher. We were both sat in the back of the class; I in one corner and the chair of the geography department in the other corner of the class.

The second part was the interview. I had to have a flexible schedule because was told and knew that teacher schedule can be changed due to field trip and libratory work. The field trip happened while I was scheduled for the same class the class teacher to interview. I did not do the interview on the day, it postponed to the next week because it was end of the week.

All of the interviews happened in the teachers' department or their study rooms. The interview length varies from 17 minutes to 40 minutes. The discussion was always ended with the question that do you feel think that an assessment subject should be included into the curriculum? And all the responses were positive.

After finishing both the observation and interview, I distributed the questionnaire protocol to the social science faculty teachers. From 30 sheets of the distributed protocol, I received 16 of them. While distributing the questionnaire, some teachers did not wanted to fell because the exam time was approaching and they just said that they don't have time. Therefore, I decided to give all the questionnaire protocol to those teachers who I knew and asked them to distribute the questionnaire to the teachers. I also asked them to collect the protocols.

I missed some of the protocols because the teachers were not either in the university and some even did not fell them due to their busy schedule. The teacher who distributed the protocols repeatedly checked on them if they were finished felling, but there was not response from some of them.

### **Analyzing the data**

As the data was collected through qualitative and quantitative method, SPSS was used for analyzing the quantitative data, the questionnaire and observation. Khalid was consulted in analyzing the data running SPSS.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Findings**

Data analysis yielded four three themes. Each theme represents teachers' perception about assessment, their assessment literacy, and their assessment methods

#### **1- Theme**

##### **The Current Assessment System**

One purpose of this research is to explore what is the current assessment system that functions at KEU. Through observation, interview and questions, it can be said that there is a formal mostly summative assessment. One of my interviewee describes assessment that “we have two main exams one at the middle of the semester and the other at the end of a semester. The mid term exam covers 20 points of students score and the final exam covers 60 points. 10 points are for writing a small paper including its presentation. The rest 10 points are for students' attendance”. I have received the same response as this one from all of my interviewees about the current assessment system. I have observed some classes as well, in one class students had to present their papers and they had presentation. I have sat the whole hour and after ward I had a discussion with the teacher the presentation of students. The purpose of my discussion the was to find out how he grade students papers and presentations, because in one point I saw him in the class he was giving score on his note book to each students right away. I asked him if he has a

rubric or any thing based on which he grade. His response was “I don’t know rubric and my standards for a good paper is the format of the paper, clearness of the writing and good writing (readable). In presentation I look at the way students dress up, how they speak, how they present the topic and how much they can answer the questions that other students ask”.

My follow up question was whether he returns the papers with some feedback to students, because when I was teacher I did not give the paper and no feedback. He simple replied “we don’t give papers back and students never receive feedback. I did not do that but I feel like it will take too much time to go through each paper and make comments on it. He continued talking why he or other teachers don’t give papers and feedback to students. One reason he brought up was lack of teachers that cause increase work load on other teachers. However, though I agree that lack of teachers is a factor, teachers are just not exposed to concepts like feedback or they are not asked by administration to do so. As the system centralized, every body looks to the top one to tell them what to do. One other interviewee said that “there are very good ideas, but it is difficult to convince every body to agree with you over it. So, people don’t want to bother themselves.” One other interviewee said “there is no leadership where we can trust and honestly work with them, it is too difficult for one or two people to stand for change”.

However, the literature put a lot of emphasize on giving student sound feedback. A very powerful argument is set by Filip, Dochy & Liz (1997) in their article called Assessment as a Learning Tool. They argue that there has been a significant change in the notion of assessment. Previously, assessment was just understood as summative but now it is used for guiding students’ thoughts by giving feedback. Knight (1995) point out that feedback is an essential part of learning experiences of students because positive feedback can be used as re-inforcer that will enhance the desirable behavior of students.



In order to implement and familiarize afghan faculty members to notions like formative assessment and giving feedback, they should be exposed to these ideas. Once we exposed them, then it will be easy for them to implement it and no will argue with them once it is proven helpful and essential.

## **2- Theme**

### **Teacher Assessment literacy**

As assessment is a vital part of instruction, it is similarly vital for teachers to understand the fundamentals of assessment. The assessment literacy is defined as the potential and skills to understand the main purpose and different types of assessment in order to apply the right one to meet the students' need (Ainwrth and Viegut, 2006). Both of these authors emphasize the fact the teachers should understand the sound assessment principles. Teacher literacy of assessment is the main focus of my research due to the realization of the fact that teachers should know the principle in order to help the learning process of students.

Before conducting this research, my assumption was that the level of teachers' literacy would not be sufficient. My assumption was based on the fact that they follow traditional assessment methods. Though they still follow traditional assessment methods, they define and believe that assessment should not be the way they are doing it.

Based on some evidence, to me teachers understand the fundamental of assessment. Below are some of the definitions that I believe are the evidence of teachers' assessment literacy. Teachers defined assessment based on their own understanding of assessment.

Assessment is a tool through which we categorize students and a tool for measuring students' learning quality. Through assessment we can find out how much learning has happened and how successful we as teacher are.

Assessment means measurement of students' knowledge and understanding. Assessment tells us whether learning happened and how much.

Assessment is an activity that teachers' measures them selves based on the students level of achievement.

The purpose of assessment should be to understand students, determine the curriculum, our method, grade students and document students' achievement.

These definitions are a clear demonstration of teachers understanding of assessment. And these are enough evidence that convinces me to believe that they understand fundamental of assessment.

However, now the question becomes why teachers don't apply what they believe that assessment should be used for? My own interpretation is that either they don't have the authority, as it is a centralized system, or they don't have the resources. Furthermore, there is also beurucracy and very little coordination among teachers themselves and with administration. Such a situation make I believe make teachers pessimistic. This can also be partly related to the fact that there is no incentive for teachers to be proactive or to be creative to practice new methods and concepts. All of these are factors that results in poor teaching, traditional assessment and teaching.

### **3- Theme**

#### **Lack of Formative assessment**

A very essential argument that is considered in education to day is the shift from assessment of learning to assessment for learning. This concept is increasingly getting the attention of educators, policy makers, psychologists, and scholars as they are concerned how to bring about learning. To make this happen, scholars point out that formative assessment can be used to achieve this goal. One reason that formative assessment considered vital to student is that it

happens throughout the semester aiming to improve student learning (Miller, Imrie & Cox, 1998). Yorke (2003) defines formative assessment as the contribution to the students learning by providing feedback about their performance.

However, in my research I failed to observe a formal and regular formative assessment practice in KEU. There is evidence that teachers are just administering summative assessment for the purpose of assigning grade and score to students. The participants noted that “there are just two exams; one in middle of semester and the other at end of the semester including a paper. Beyond that, we don’t have any thing else. Similarly, the results from questionnaire indicate that 96% said strongly agreed to the question that “Assessment is used to assign students’ grade and score”. I have talked in details with some of my participants about formative assessment. And I could not see any type of formative assessment that meant to be helping students as I was observing a class where students were presenting their projects. Students had to submit their papers at the same day as they present their projects and I observed that the teacher graded (give score) to performance (presentation) and paper of students right away. He even did not read the paper to see what did the student write.

Here are some of the responses of my participants about assessment.

“In one semester we have two exams; mid term and final. And students are required to write a paper as well”. “Here in university we use mix method; summative and formative. Summative is formal but formative is more of the act of individual. And I try my best to use some of formative assessment tools to give students a chance to such as re-reading the homework”. I also observed during my observation as well that she asked some of the students who could not answer and did not participate in the discussion was told to read the readings again and if they have questions let the teachers knows. Another teacher said “there are different ways of assessing students that a

teacher can use but I personally use analytical questions in every day discussion that unfolds realities such as students' knowledge, skills, and understanding". I interviewed a teacher who just came out of class and when I asked him that what type of assessment are you familiar with. He said "I do daily assessment such as asking them about the pervious lesson, and the readings. It tells me whether they have read the readings are not. I ask series of questions at the beginning of each class and if they did not understand the reading or misunderstood, I try to solve that problem".

My understanding is that teachers do things like asking about pervious lesson and asking them questions is based on the fact and assumption that students do not read if we don't ask them. This is how I was treated during my school period and I had the same concept when I was teacher. Though they don't have any research evidence to prove this point, they strongly believe it. However, there are scholars like Richard Mezeske & Barbara (2007) notes that students "tend to learn what is inspected but not what is expected" from them (Mezeske & Barbara, p.71, 2007). Similar argument can be made how teachers do some sort of formative assessment. for example, they ask students questions to make them do the reading, but it turns out that this questioning becomes part of formative assessment because students receive information on their understanding of the reading from teachers. In observing classes, I noticed that teachers are correcting students when they make mistake and the teachers tells the students how they performed and how they can get better. Such information can help student learning, but this is not done regularly and understandably. As teachers are not exposed and aware of this concept, its underlying purpose and its benefit, they don't do it seriously and regularly.

To make teachers apply and practice formative assessment methods, first it is important to introduce them to the very concept of formative assessment. Once they are familiar, I believe they will implement it in their classes.

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