A Comparative Study: Verbal Versus Printed Guiding Grid

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is a crucial part of education as it provides information to be used as feedback to support the teaching and learning process. Oral assessment is conducted at both primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. Previous researches highlight that students are unable to score well in their oral assessment. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of sharing assessment criteria, the Guiding Grid (GG), with students to improve oral performance among them. This study was conducted with Form Four students from an urban school. The students' oral assessments were conducted three times and their scores were recorded. The first assessment was done without sharing the GG with the students. Before the second assessment the researchers shared the GG verbally. Finally, 12 students who scored below the satisfactory level were given the printed GG and were assessed for the third time. The findings show a marked improvement in students' oral performance after the sharing of GG, orally as well as in print form. There is a significant improvement on the 12 selected students' oral performance when the printed GG was shared with them. This study also explores students' opinions on sharing the GG with them.

Keywords: Oral assessment, guiding grid, motivation, flexibility, designing guiding grid

INTRODUCTION

Assessment in learning can take place in many forms. Some of the modes used by teachers in assessing their students' achievement are conducted through examinations, tests, quizzes, assignments, special projects or doing portfolios. These

modes of assessment are conducted either individually, in pairs or in small groups. For example, in the teaching of the English Language, all the four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing are assessed according to the requirement of the individual institutions. Generally, in formative or summative assessments, students are assessed throughout the semesterthroughcontinuous assessment or at the end of the semester respectively, so that they can be given grades.

Assessment is "… all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves which provides information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (Black, P. and William, D., 1998). It should provide information on the current state of students' achievements in order to provide students with information that will help them to improve their learning in future. Assessment requires imparting results that conveys sufficient, understandable details to guide the students' actions.It can also be defined as "the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to go there" (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). In this way, both the students and the teacher will be able to distinguish not only the students' current level of achievement, but also how much the students'ability have improved, which is a great booster for confidence and motivation.

This study involves assessing students' oral achievement in an urban school in Malaysia. It is the Education Ministry's requirement that English Language teachers assess their students' oral achievement twice a year in Form Four and once in Form Five. In Form Four, the first assessment is carried out individually in the first semester and the second assessment is conducted in pairs in the second semester. In Form Five, this oral assessment is conducted in small groups of 4 to 6 students. The researcher used the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) Oral English Assessment Criteria which is called the Guiding Grid (GG) in this study. The SPM in Malaysia is a public examination for Form Five students which is equivalent to the O Level Examination. The GG (Appendix A) has five constructs or tasks and the score for each construct ranges from 1 to 6. The 5 constructs are: "To converse effectively on a topic with appropriate response", "To speak fluently using correct and acceptable pronunciation", "To speak coherently", "To speak the language using a wide range of appropriate vocabulary within contexts", and " To speak using correct grammar" (MOE, 2010). 1 mark is awarded for very weak performance, 2 marks areawarded for weak performance, 3 marks when students' performance is satisfactory, 4 or 5 marks are awarded if students' performance is good and 6marksareawarded to students who are excellent in their oral performance. Each construct or task in the GG is given with clear explanation on how many marks are awarded to students who accomplish the

task. For the purpose of this study, the marks 4 and 5 are labelled as "Good" and "Very good" respectively.

The practice of using scoring rubrics has been researched extensively and researchers have documented support for its use at schools, colleges as well as at universities (State of Colorado, 1999; Schrock, 2000; Moskal, 2000; Knecht, Moskal & Pavelich, 2000). Scoring rubrics are descriptive scoring schemes that are developed by teachers to guide the analysis of students' work (Brookhart, 1999). However, recent studies have shown that scoring rubrics as a Guiding Grid (GG) can support students' performance and also guide the teaching and learning processes (Karthiyaini.D, 2009). This study focuses on the difference in students' performance when sharing the GG verbally as compared to the printed forms.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Generally, the teachers do not share their teaching goals with their students which would ideally be their learning goals. These teaching and learning goals are the basis of the designing of the GGShulman's Table of Learning supports the fact that engagement and motivation enhances increase in knowledge and understanding of what is learnt. Thus, the sharing of the GG with the students is the point of engagement and motivation that occurs in the teaching and learning process. However, teachers in the identified school do not use the GG for the oral assessments. Students are informed that they have to prepare a topic of their choice for the oral assessment.They are also told that the first assessment will be done individually and the second assessment in pairs. Students are not provided with the GG to show them what they should do to qualify for the highest score. As such students do not have an opportunity to read the rubrics for each construct so that they can attempt their oral assessment to thebest of their ability. Students' performance is inhibited due to lack of understanding and this reversely affects theiractions. Some teachers provide the information or rubrics in the GG verbally. This practice does not seem to bring about positive learning experiences because students do not get the opportunity to reflect on their own performance and are unable to critique their own learning as supported by Shulman's Table of Learning. The students' inability to reflect and critic their own learning process impairs their ability to make sound judgements and design positive actions for future learning. The lack of the above learning skills in the students prevent them from being committed to the learning that happens which should ideally create an identity and instil values in them.

OBJECTIVES

The study aims to explore the use of the GG provided by the Ministry of Education (MOE) as a link between teaching, learning and assessment as championed by Shulman's Table of Learning. The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the effectiveness of using GG as an instrument to guide students to enhance their oral performance and the learning process.

2. To explore students' views on the implementation of GG for their oral assessment, which is an attempt to support reflection, critical thinking, making judgements, designing future actions and being committed to their identity as learners.

3. To assess students' oral achievement after the implementation of GG.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In view of the objectives mentioned above, this study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. What is the difference in the students' English Language oral performance before and after the GG is given verbally?

2. What is the difference in the students' English Language oral performance when the GG is given verbally and in the printed form?

3. What are the students' views in implementing the GG for their English Language oral assessment?

4. What are the teachers' views on the use of the GG for the English Language oral assessment?

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The population of this study is from a semi-urban school and is focused on Form Four secondary school students. There are fifteen Form Four classes in this school and the classes are divided into three different proficiency levels. Each proficiency level

has five classes and the researcher was given the high proficiency level Science streamed class. The researcher used all the students in her class to conduct this research. This method of subject selection is known as convenience sampling (Creswell, 2005).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is adapted from Shulman's Table of Learning (Carnegie Foundation, 2005). The introduction of the Guiding Grid supports the engagement and motivation of students with the task given. This engagement has a positive effect as it leads to understanding and supports the depth of knowledge gained. The sharing of the teaching and learning goals motivates students and improves performance and action by the students.

Students' views on the effectiveness of using the Guiding Grid encourage judgement making skills, whichencourage students to be able to use knowledge gained in various other situations. Eventually, this ability to judge and apply knowledge builds confidence in students. They are able to be more committed to their own learning process and this commitment in return creates a strong individual identity. This is a cyclic process where students complete one cycle of learning and move on to another cycle of learning. The above framework manifests itself positively in the methodology used in this study.

FLEXIBILITY OF THE GG

Traditionally the scoring rubrics are used for assessing various students' activities.

This includes language skills and group as well as individual activities (Chicago Public Schools, 1999; Danielson, 1997a; 1997b; Schrock, 2000; Moskal, 2000; Karthiyaini.D, 2009). Students' writing and oral work can also be assessed using the scoring rubrics.

The scoring rubrics can also be used for various subjects such as Language, Mathematics and Science (e.g., ChicagoPublic Schools, 1999; State of Colorado, 1999; Danielson, 1997a; 1997b; Danielson & Marquez, 1998; Schrock, 2000). Each task given to students can be supported with a specially designed scoring rubric.

The use of the scoring rubrics as GG is dual-pronged. It guides the students to move on to the next level of improved performance because the detailed description in the rubrics guides the students to know where they are in the learning process and what they need to do to move on to the next level.

As for the teachers, the grid guides them to plan their teaching to meet the students' needs. The students' weaknesses in a subject or certain areas in a subject are easily identified based on the students' performance and the rubrics given in the GG. Thus, the teachers get to address weaknesses of the students in the next lessons.

DESIGNING THE GG

The GG should ideally be designed before (Assessment Rubrics, 2001) the teaching of the subject begins.This allows the teacher to plan the teaching to meet the skills that will be assessed in a particular subject and to match the teaching to achieve the subject's learning outcomes by the end of the term or semester(Klenowski, 2003). Brookhart asserts that the first step in designing a scoring rubric is to clearly identify the qualities that need to be displayed in a
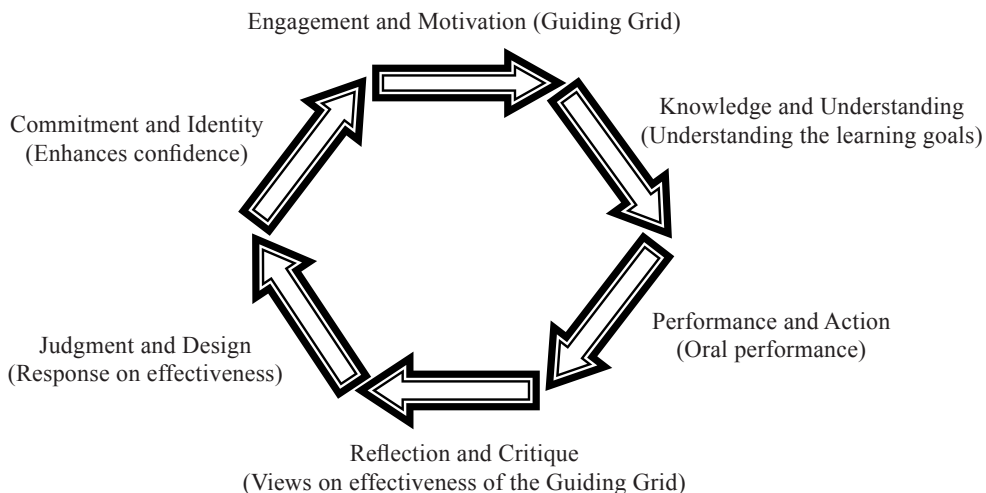

Fig.1: Conceptual Framework
(Adapted from Shulman's Table of Learning - Carnegie Foundation, 2005)

student's work to demonstrate proficient performance (Brookhart, 1999).

Hence, the programme learning outcomes and the subject learning outcomes are carefully matched based on the syllabus provided for the subjects. The rubrics in the GG closely support the subject learning outcomes at the end of the term or year. Each task designed for a particular subject should closely shadow the learning outcomes for the subject.

The designing of the GG also enables different teachers teaching the same subject to assess students in an objective manner. This is to maintain inter-rater and intra-rater reliability. The descriptive rubrics in the GG follow a systematic improvement in performance from a weak student to the best student. The highest marks are allotted to work which display the best qualities and the lowest marks for work that has the least qualities. The levels in-between depends on the teacher who is designing the GG. For example, the best student can be graded as "Excellent" and the weakest as "Weak" and the in-between level can be "Good" and "Satisfactory". The mark for each level is a range and students can be given a grade for the range rather than a rigid digit (mark) for their performance. It is the description provided in the GG that is crucial to support learning than the grade or the mark given.

The qualities to be displayed in the work at every level must be distinct and easily differentiated from the level before and after it. If meaningful distinctions between the levels cannot be made, then additional levels should not be created (Brookhart, 1999).

This is because assessment should evaluate what has been taught in the classroom and not on levels that have not been taught by the teacher. However, a GG designed by one teacher can be adapted and improved to cater for evaluating work in other sub-areas in the subject. Even the same teacher who designed the GG might want to make slight changes or improvements to the grid according to requirements of the same task when used for another round of assessment. These improvements will support and enhance the teaching and learning process.

THE GG AS A MOTIVATION FOR STUDENTS

Recent studies have shown that the use of the GG has improved students' performance. "Educative Assessment" (Wiggins, 1998) is a term used to describe techniques and issues that should be considered when designing and using assessments. The assessment designed should be educative. Students at a teacher training institute were given a GG with their English Language semester assignment. This study compared the grades achieved by students before and after the GG. The grades achieved by the students improved after being given the GG (Karthiyaini.D, 2009).Wiggins (1998) supports the idea that the nature of the assessment procedure influences the learning process and students' involvement in the process. He also supports the practice of assessment for learning as compared to assessment of learning. He contends that assessment should provide feedback to encourage revision to improve learning.

Black & Wiliam (1998) show that student's self-assessment skills, learned and applied as part of formative assessment, enhances student achievement.

The use of the GG as an assessment instrument guides and motivates the students to improve their performance as well as the teachers' performance. The GG functions as an analysis to survey students' needs and using these findings the teacher is able to plan future lessons to address their needs (Shepard, 2000). The fact that teachers get to address the students' needs, functions as a motivation to encourage students' learning.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This study is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research which has qualitative data (interview) and quantitative data (oral scores and questionnaire). The quantitative approach involves data collected from the scores of the students' oral assessments and the questionnaire answered by the teachers. The oral assessment for the respondents of this study is conducted prior to sharing the GG with them. Respondents are tested individually with the topic of their choice. The researcher listens carefully and assesses them.

The second assessment is conducted after the researcher shares the rubrics in the GG with them verbally. The researcher explains each rubric and the scores which start from 1 being the lowest and 6 the highest score. Respondents are assessed again after two weeks and their scores are

recorded. The researcher selects twelve respondents whose scores are below 4 marks. The researcher gives the selected twelve respondents the GG in the printed form and explains how they can move to the next level. The twelve respondents are tested again after two weeks and their scores are recorded.

Apart from the 44 respondents, seven English Language teachers in this selected school are given a questionnaire to find out their perceptions of the GG. Their answers are tabulated and counted in percentages. The qualitative approach involves the detail analysis of structured interviews carried out with the twelve respondents who are given the printed GG.

Students' Performance

The students' performance shows an improvement after the introduction of the GG. Table 1 charts the students' performance for the first two oral assessments where Assessment 1 is conducted without sharing the GG while Assessment 2 is conducted after sharing the GG verbally. After sharing the GG, the students are given two weeks to prepare for their oral assessment. The constructs given in Table 1 are based on the documents provided by the Ministry of Education.

The respondents performance is graded in 6 levels which is 6 – Excellent, 5 and 4 – Good, 3 – Satisfactory, 2 – Weak and 1 – Very Weak. There is a marked difference in the respondents' performance from Assessment 1 to Assessment 2. In Assessment 2, 20 respondents (45.4%)

obtained 5 marks as compared to 4 marks (9.1%) in Assessment 1 for Construct 1. There was also an improvement in the respondents' performance for Construct 2 where in Assessment 1 only 2 (4.5%) respondents obtained 6 marks as compared to 8 (18.1%) in Assessment 2. Likewise, the difference in respondents who obtained 5 marks for Construct 2 improved from 3 (6.8%) in Assessment 1 to 17 (38.6%) in Assessment 2. For Construct 3, a total of 40 (90.9%) respondents obtained marks in the range of 4-6 in Assessment 2 as compared to 26 (59%) respondents in Assessment 1. The improvement for marks in the range of 4-5 is from 11 (25%) respondents for Assessment 1 to 32 (72.7%) respondents in Assessment 2 for Construct 4. As for Construct 5, the performance improved from 5 respondents (11.3%) in the range of 5-6 marks to 23 respondents (52.2%).

The above analysis shows an improvement in respondents' performance for they obtain higher marks for each construct after they are given the GG verbally. These findings answer Research Question 1. The students' performance in the various levels for the first two assessments is shown in the Fig.2 to Fig.4.

Statistically, the paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the students' performance in Assessment 1 without the use of the GG and Assessment 2 with the use of the GG. There was a significant difference in the scores for the Assessment 1 (M=3.69, SD=0.705) and Assessment 2 (M=4.59, SD=0.775) conditions; t(-12.879), p=0.000. This is shown in Table 2.

After the second assessment, there werestill respondents' who did not meet the desired grade of "Good" which carried total marks of 20 for the 5 constructs. Out of the 44 respondents, 12 did not meet the above desired grade. These 12 respondents wereprovided with the printed form of the GG and rubrics wasexplained to them again. These respondents werealso given two weeks to prepare for their next oral

TABLE 1
Students' performance in the first two oral assessments (N=44)

Assessment/ Constructs	Assessment 1 Marks						Assessment 2 Marks					
	6	5	4	3	2	1	6	5	4	3	2	1
1. Converse on a topic effectively with appropriate responses	2	4	24	14	0	0	9	20	10	4	1	0
2. Speak fluently using correct and acceptable pronunciation	2	3	15	24	0	0	8	17	18	1	0	0
3. Speak coherently	1	5	21	15	2	0	5	20	15	4	0	0
4. Speak the language using a wide range of appropriate vocabulary within context	0	5	6	23	0	0	3	21	11	9	0	0
5. Speak using correct grammar	0	5	20	18	1	0	1	22	9	12	0	0

assessment. The comparison of the weak students' performance before sharing the GG (Assessment 1), after introducing the GG verbally (Assessment 2) and after giving the printed GG (Assessment 3) are charted in the Table 3.

A repeated- measure ANOVA, with Greenhouse-Giesser correction, was conducted to assess whether there were differences between the average ratings of the three assessments. Results indicated that the participants did rate the three
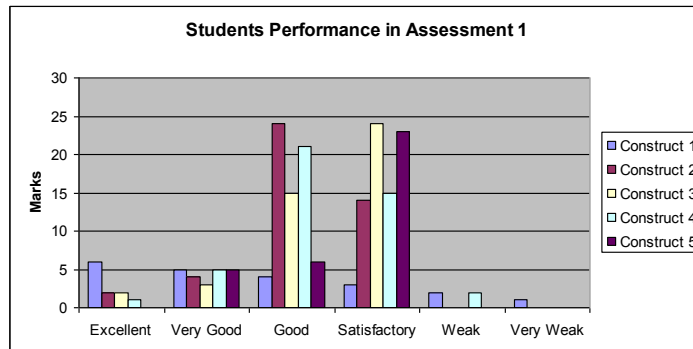

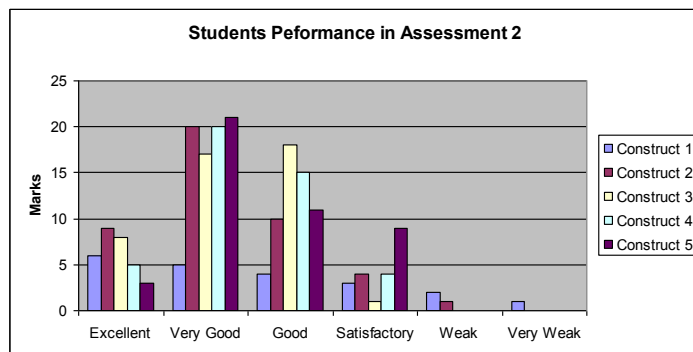Fig.2: Students' performance in Assessment 1
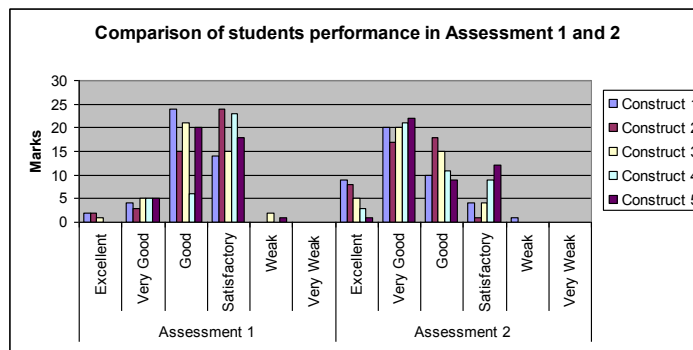

Fig.3: Students' performance in Assessment 2

Fig.4: Comparison of improvement in performance before and after introducing the GG verbally

assessments differently, F (1.204, 13.245) =78.566, p < 0.001, eta =.877. The mean and standard deviations for the assessments are represented in Table 4. Examination of these means suggest that respondentshave improved in their oral assessment after the use of GG. The mean of Assessment 2 is higher than that of Assessment 1 and the mean of Assessment 3 is higher than that of Assessment 2.

The selected students' performances in the three assessments are shown in Fig.5 to Fig.8.

The respondents' performance for Construct 1 shows a progressive improvement from Assessments 1 to 3 where the majority of the respondents obtained 3 marks (75%) in Assessment 1, 4 marks (91.6%) in Assessment 2 and 5 marks (91.6%) in Assessment 3. The sharing

TABLE 2
Mean and Standard Deviation of Assessment 1 and Assessment 2

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1	Assessment 1- Before GG	3.6955	44	.70545
	Assessment 2 – After GG	4.5955	44	.77578

Significance level p < 0.001

TABLE 3
The selected students' performance in all the three oral assessments (N=12)

Assessment/ Constructs	Assessment 1						Assessment 2						Assessment 3					
	6	5	4	3	2	1	6	5	4	3	2	1	6	5	4	3	2	1
1. Converse on a topic effectively with appropriate responses	0	0	3	9	0	0	0	0	11	1	0	0	0	11	1	0	0	0
2. Speak fluently using correct and acceptable pronunciation	0	0	1	11	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	10	2	0	0	0
3. Speak coherently	0	0	1	10	1	0	0	0	9	3	0	0	0	10	2	0	0	0
4. Speak the language using a wide range of appropriate vocabulary within context	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	3	9	0	0	4	8	0	0	0
5. Speak using correct grammar	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	2	10	0	0	0

A repeated- measure ANOVA, with Greenhouse-Giesser correction, was conducted to assess

TABLE 4
Mean and Standard Deviation Comparison of the 3 Assessments

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Assessment 1- Before GG	3.0667	12	.19695
Assessment 2 – With verbal GG	3.5833	12	.13371
Assessment 3 – With print GG	4.5833	12	.43029

of the printed GG improved respondents' performance.

As for Construct 2, the majority of the respondents gradually improved from obtaining 3 marks (91.6%) in Assessment 1, 4 marks (100%) in Assessment 2 to 5 marks (83.3%) in Assessment 3. The same pattern of improvement is observed for Construct 3 and 4 where respondents gradually improved from obtaining 3 marks (83.3%) in Assessment 1, 4 marks (75%) in Assessment 2 to 5 marks (83.3%) and 3 marks (100%) in Assessment 1, 4 marks (75%) in Assessment 2 to 5 marks (66.6%) in Assessment 3 respectively.

In Assessment 1, respondents obtained 3 marks which is "Satisfactory" for Construct 5 (100%). In Assessment 2, there was no improvement. However, the respondents' performance improved in Assessment 3 where all 12 (100%) were able to obtain "Good" with 4 and 5 marks.

This indicates that weaker students benefit from the sharing of the printed form of the GG. It could be because they are able to read and understand the rubrics at their own pace and prepare themselves for better grades. These findings answer Research Question 2.
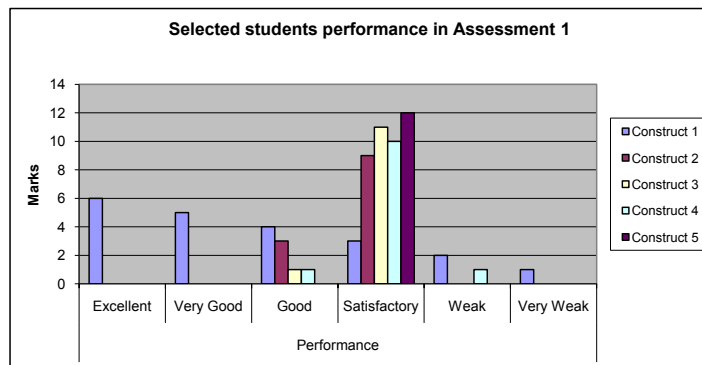

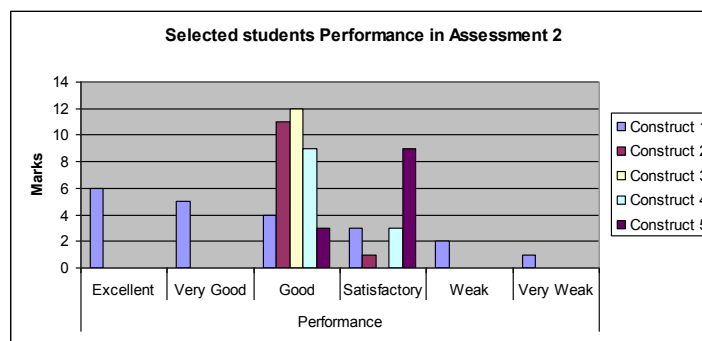Fig.5: Selected Students' Performances in Assessment 1

Fig.6: Selected Students' Performances in Assessment 2

Students' views on the implementation of the GG

Twelve students who werethe weakest respondents were interviewed for their views on the implementation of the GG. All twelve respondents agreed that the rubrics in the GG helped them in their oral assessment. Six students (50%) identified that the GG had improved their performance in various manners such as improved in their oral test, conversation, minor mistakes and grades. Four respondents (33.3%) asserted that the GG helped them improve their performance through scoring better marks or higher marks.

The respondents also confirmed that the GG given verbally improved their grades in the oral assessment. However, they cited various reasons how the printed GG helped them improve their oral performance further. Seven respondents (58.3%) stated that they knew more about marks, how to score better marks in order to improve their performance. Five of the respondents (41.6%) viewed the printed GG as a source of reference for it showed them the mistakes and weaknesses. There werean equal number of responses (33.3%) that identified the printed GG as a memory jolt for it helped them remember and also understand
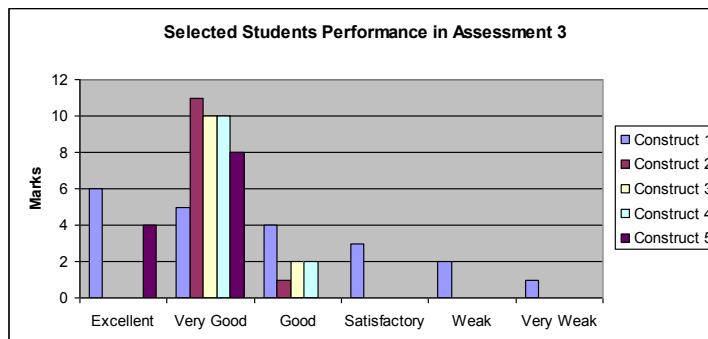

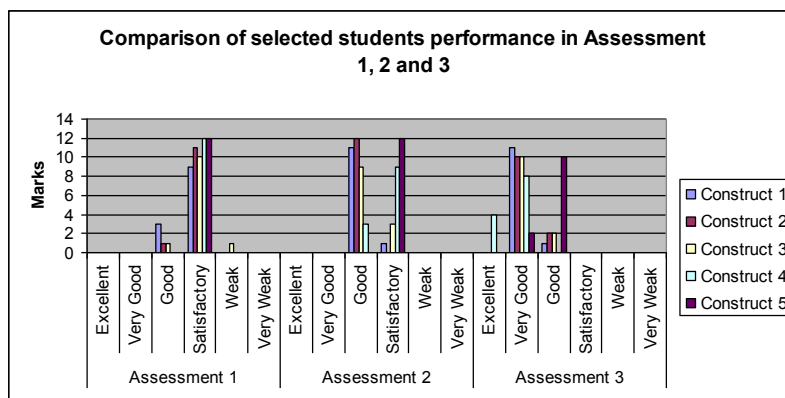Fig.7: Selected Students' Performance in Assessment 3

Fig.8: Selected Students' Performance in Assessment 3

the oral assessment as well as how the teachers awarded marks.

The twelve respondents agreed that every student should be given the GG before the oral assessment. The reasons they cited included the following: ten of the respondents (83.3%) claimed that students can get better marks by rectifying their mistakes; six respondents (50%) supported that sharing of the GG prepared them better for the oral assessment and gave them more practice. There were also two respondents who stated that other students "deserve" to know the GG. Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that students benefit from the sharing of the GG especially in the printed form because it functions as a memory jolt as well as a reference point for them to improve their performance in the oral assessment. These findings answered Research Question 3.

Teachers' views on the implementation of the GG

A questionnaire was administered to gather views from teachers on the implementation of the GG in the classroom for the English language oral assessment. Seven teachers were involved in this study. All seven respondents carried out oral assessments twice a year. They claimed that students were given a general explanation about the requirements for the oral assessment and they also guided the students with the topics.

Three out of the seven teachers showed the oral assessment form to the students and explained to them about the scores. This oral assessment form carries the simplified version of the assessment rubrics provided in the GG by the Ministry of Education. However, all the seven respondents confessed that they do not use the GG provided by the Ministry of Education. Various reasons were cited for not using the GG. Five out of the seven respondents claimed that they were "not aware" and "didn't know" that the GG existed while three of them claimed that the GG was not provided to them. This reflects a situation where an effective system can be introduced but implementation can be faulty due to lack of support at grass root levels. At the institutional level, there must be an alert panel to enforce the practice to support effective teaching and learning.

There were three respondents who reasoned that the assessment evaluation form with the condensed version of the GG rubrics was sufficient as explanation to the students and to evaluate them. There was one respondent who asserted that the rubrics is "too wordy" and students "might be put off" by the details in the grid and this might "affect the spontaneity of their performance". These views seem to reflect a lack of understanding of the effectiveness of using the GG to support teaching and learning. Teachers at various levels should be introduced to the advantages of using the GG as a motivating tool to improve students' performance as well as a guide for teachers to plan for effective teaching. Assessment links teaching and learning through matching assessment goals with learning outcomes.

The introduction of the GG as an assessment tool to support teaching and learning should ideally be done as an

induction to all new staff at schools and other institutions. It can also be introduced during sharing sessions and continuous professional development of teachers (CPD). The implementation of the GG should be monitored regularly to sustain the usage. Besides the above, students' views should also be gathered to gauge the effectiveness of assessment instruments used in educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

The use of the Guiding Grid encourages students' learning through engagement and motivation. This leads to knowledge and understanding which support performance and action. Reflection is an important part of the learning process and leads to higher-order thinking. Students who are able to think critically are able to make judgments and apply the knowledge and skills gained. The ability to make judgements leads to commitment to their own actions and thus the formation of personal identities and values of individual students.

The GG also supports "Educative Assessment" (Grant Wiggins, 1998) because it is an assessment instrument that supports assessment for learning. It is flexible for use in assessing various content subjects as well as languages. Targeted skills as learning outcomes are specified in the GG so that students are aware of what is expected of them. Students are also motivated by the use of GG because they can chart their own learning progress based on the rubrics. The rubrics can also be a guide for teachers in planning their teaching. The students'

performance or lack of performance indicates what the focus of teaching should be in each case. This helps teachers plan their teaching to support effective learning. This study further confirms the versatility of the GG as a tool for effective teaching and learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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