Why Continuous Assessment Is Redefining Global Education

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A global learning crisis

Assessments have been causing a stir during this pandemic. Teachers, parents and students have faced the brunt of a failing assessment system. As students return to the classroom after a challenging period of remote learning, some educators, like John Hattie, are suggesting a total assessment overhaul. Hattie will be pioneering the ‘world’s largest student survey about learning’ in the United Kingdom to reframe our approaches to assessment, turning the focus to measuring learners’ knowledge retention, rather than the learning that has taken place.

“Concern for the poor quality of education is nothing new. What is unprecedented is the scale at which education systems are failing” – UNESCO, 2013

As this approach is experimental and is currently in a trial period (Lock 2021), steps toward reinventing the wheel for an entire country of students, especially those who need consistency and structure should be taken cautiously. Now more than ever, we need to dig deeper into why our current processes are failing.

By understanding the limitations of our current methods we can rework and reframe them, using the extensive research already conducted to help us do better for each of our learners.

This paper looks into why continuous assessment is central to delivering quality education at scale and how technology can accelerate learning. It will address the current manual and time-consuming, methods, which are putting untold pressures on teachers and risking the well-being of our learners.
Why assessment is vital for a quality education

"Acquiring skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that are critical to securing basic socio-economic needs which will allow the sustainable development of their societies" - UNESCO

When UNESCO declared a ‘global learning crisis’ in 2013, it led to the questioning of worldwide systemic process failures and brought together a Global Alliance, led by top-down organisations such as the OECD, UNICEF, the World Bank and UNHCR. These organisations have been working tirelessly to address the issue of assessment which is undoubtedly limiting the provisions of a quality education.

Assessment is a vital component of a quality education; it is the engine that drives student learning. A student undertaking any form of study will be subject to assessment in one form or another. Similarly, any member of the teaching staff will be engaged in assessment-related work. Assessments take up a considerable proportion of teacher workload, and for students, it can be a significant determinant of what, when and how they learn. Getting assessment 'right' is therefore essential in delivering a quality education at scale.

In further pursuit of a commitment to quality education - through a robust and fair assessment process - in 2015, the Republic of Korea hosted one of the largest educational global events - the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030. This event aimed to address the global learning crisis by searching for effective innovations. As a result, innovation to deliver quality education is at the heart of the Alliance. For any innovation to be a success, it has to be scaled to provide the biggest visible impact at the lowest cost, particularly if any improvement in learning is to be seen globally.

However, first, we need to understand the importance of assessments in providing a quality education that can be delivered to learners and measured at a global scale.
The challenges with assessment

‘Assessment...’ The word itself renders either interest, passion or dread in everyone who finds themselves in a learning environment.

In order to innovate and redefine assessments, we must first understand more about the current assessment methods and why they are putting untold pressures on teachers due to systemic failures.

The merits of formative assessments are well documented for their success. The way these assessments work is very much based on on-going evidenced feedback for both teacher and learner.

When formative assessments were first introduced in the 90’s they were made popular by two British researchers, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. They used meta-analysis techniques to track the extent of learning and concluded that learner gains in outcomes, triggered by formative assessments, are "amongst the largest ever reported for educational interventions". (Black & Wiliam, 1998)

For clarity, gathering data information during formative assessments is ‘for’ learning, which may be misleading when formative assessment is being interpreted as an assessment ‘of’ learning. As shown by Black & Wiliam, this could result in learners being ‘tested’ as if it was a summative assessment. As such, this could be one reason why failure is recorded.

"Why hasn't it worked and how can we make it better in the classroom?" – Booth, 2017

The interpretation of formative assessment is very much to do with the processes taking place during learning in the classroom, and in particular the on-going feedback to both teachers and learners.

However, we can see that this is not always happening. To ensure reflective teaching is occurring, a teacher should focus on interpreting the meaning correctly and continually reflecting on their own practice processes.
Furthermore, in the article, “Impact 2017, What Is Formative Assessments, Why Hasn’t It Worked And How Can We Make It Better In The Classroom?” Nikki Booth reflects on Black and Wiliam’s research to deep-dive into additional reasons for why formative assessments aren’t having the impact they should. Alongside the pressure to produce high-levels of attainment, Booth pointed out the following key points on your right.

It is clear that formative assessment is not making the positive changes that the education system expected (Booth, 2017) and therefore key changes must be adopted if we are to solve the education crisis we find ourselves in across the globe.

The challenges with assessment

- The term ‘assessments’ is associated with tests and therefore the given terminology is misleading.

- The pressure on senior leaders to achieve better grades is passed on to teachers. This pressure is leading to mixing formative with summative outcomes.

- It may be formative in helping the teacher identify areas where more explanation or practice is needed. But for the pupils, the marks or remarks in their work may tell them about their successes or failures, but not how to make progress towards future learning.
The Theory Of Planned Behaviour model (Ajzen, 2002) shines a light on the oversimplifying of such complex emotions and their causes - causes that cannot be addressed by a gold sticker or bonus credit on an Edtech app.

If a learner is constantly praised but never shown their weak areas or opportunities to improve, how can you encourage life-long learning? Instead, we need to move towards an approach that values a continuous learning journey and a partnership between student and teacher.” The approach to assessments has to be changed.

"Continuous assessment can be central to determinations about a child’s school progress" - Miskin, 2017

As previously mentioned, the purpose of assessments needs to be clearly identified and it appears that assessing 'for' learning has become a reward and punishment ‘behaviourism’ pedagogy.

We know from evidence that behaviourism is flawed in the classroom. Chalmers, (1996) found that behaviourism does not take into account key factors such as ‘self-awareness’.

Continuous assessment is central to progress

The Gibbs Reflective Cycle (2020) illustrates the importance of understanding feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan in a continuous learning process.
In the current COVID-19 situation, where summative assessments have been questioned for their efficacy on a global scale, we need a system that is formative in nature yet takes into account final grading and allows all stakeholders to benefit and provide opportunities to intervene during ongoing learners’ engagements; this is continuous assessment.

Assessments require preparation, organising, marking, evaluation and analysis. Continuous assessment requires all of these areas throughout the entire learning process.

As summarised by Gibbs (1988) "It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience, it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost".

Therefore frequent chances to assess, reflect and intervene with learning are integral to developing a skills-based learning approach and using the continuous learning process.

Continuous assessments are conducted when students are engaged in learning and are based on reflective teaching cycles, where data is collected on each student’s (or group of students’) learning journey continuously.

This continuity allows teachers to make on the spot decisions to improve their practice and looks a lot like formative assessments. Summative assessments are conducted at key points in the educational journey, and students are given a grade (that aims to) reflect the achievements they have made.

Continuous assessment is central to progress
Continuous assessment is central to progress

Supporting this approach, Miskin’s (2017) paper for UNESCO revealed that 'continuous assessment can be central to determinations about a child’s school progress'. This is further evidenced when we turn to countries that are already getting it right. Countries like Finland, Sweden and Estonia all rank in the top 10 of the PISA ratings (2018) for successful, quality education and positive wellbeing in their students and teachers.

In these countries, continuous assessments are the norm. Hendrickson (2012) found that in Finland they are using both formative assessments and summative assessments successfully, putting them high on the PISA rankings.

In addition, one in-depth review by SQA (2020) found that students in Finland are assessed continuously by their teachers in both comprehensive and upper secondary school, showing the benefit of embedding continuous assessment into every classroom.
It is clear that continuous assessment is key. However, if continuous data is collated manually, can it account for the many variables that can challenge the learner to raise their potential?

With deep learning outcomes, such a system should support and address the personalised feedback reporting process to both teacher and learner in real-time. For a redefined assessment process to be successful at scale, technological innovation and the collection of comprehensive learning data must be realised and implemented effectively.

For successful implementation, the main education recommendations that we want to explore when considering assessment as a resource in the classroom, and one which impacts an evidence-based teaching system, is "The School Of Tomorrow’ by CERI (2006). They identify 3 main recommendations:

- **Personalised Learning**
- **Use of diverse resources**
- **Addressing emotion in learning**
Innovation is needed

Although these recommendations look easy to implement, in reality, a classroom teacher setting up and delivering a high-quality education, based on a competency learning environment, knows how tough these recommendations can be when you have a classroom of 30 to 40 learners who all require differentiated learning.

By using Machine Learning, underpinned by well-evidenced pedagogy, 21st Century Skills (OECD 2010) can be enhanced at scale, solving the limitations of a manual approach. If we can innovate a resource for teachers that is accurate and valid for a wide range of learning outcomes, we can correct systemic failures and embed a full set of assessments for learning, including initial, formative and summative, in the form of ‘continuous assessments’, seamlessly providing a wealth of data to support and inform.

Pedagogical model that addresses emotion in learning

Curriculum with learning objectives – personalised (for understanding, knowledge and skills) with use of diverse resources

Assessments for learning...
Assessment of learning...
“Evidence of good practice”
It is clear how important continuous assessment is to a successful, positive and engaging learning journey. This white paper has outlined the success of such a method but as we have seen it comes at a price - copious amounts of time to collect high level granular data.

GoLearn has developed an effective AI based technology platform that takes away the hard work and provides the teacher with all the data they need to support their students, enhance well-being and provide each student with a personalised learning experience.
GoLearn's solution

GoLearn Education is here to establish effective change.

We’ve got the solution, the conviction, and the passion, and we won’t stop until literacy is a fundamental, inalienable, human right worldwide. All children, no matter their background should have the right to maximise their life chances.

GoLearn is an AI-based English literacy and language learning technology with continuous embedded assessment technology that teachers can use in class or remotely to raise class and individual outcomes.

As an English literacy EdTech solution, we have been able to fully comply with UNESCO and the Global Alliance by developing an evidenced-based reflective teaching and learning Innovation that meets the highest standards for continuous assessments with low-cost and high-impact to scale and accelerate learning globally.

Our platform works on the following three key principles for OECD/CERI’s 'School of Tomorrow' and Skills-based teaching and learning:

- **Personalisation** — Unique AI Technology ensures that each student receives a fully personalised journey to ensure rapid progress while providing instant marking and feedback to other teachers and students.

- **Use of Diverse Resources** — We combine text, audio and video stimulus with 12 different task types to keep students engaged and cater for all learning styles.

- **Address Emotion in Learning** — we use a range of evidenced pedagogies to support and lift pupil wellbeing.

For more information visit golearn.guru
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