

Chapter 2: Revolutionizing Saudi Education: Lessons from New Zealand's Performance, Assessment, and Supervision Models

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Abstract: In 2008, the Ministry of Education of New Zealand implemented the National Standards that were focused on equalizing the students' learning outcomes in reading, writing and maths. Other school subjects were blatantly downplayed and neglected. Such approach could result in lowering students' motivation to study because the education processes became more formalized and boring. Teachers also complained they could not influence the education process with their creative ideas on how to improve the learning outcomes of every student. In 2017, the National Standards were scrapped, and the summative assessment at schools had been replaced with the formative assessment that took the form of the 'real-time' observations over the students' performance. Formative assessment is much more likely to meet the requirements of the modern labour market that needs a workforce with creative thinking skills. Nurturing creativity must be the foremost priority of the education system of both New Zealand and Saudi Arabia because this is what the modern labour market expects from the school graduates.

Introduction

New Zealand had implemented the National Standards to assess the primary schools in 2008-2017, but the project has been terminated. One of the major drawbacks of the project was the allegedly biased assessment of children's abilities by the teachers. The cause of this drawback could have been the lack of the instructions on how to interpret certain descriptors. Consequently, teachers across the country started interpreting descriptors the way they saw them. The National Standards relied solely on the teachers' judgements, but not some sort of the standardized testing like in the secondary school, high school or college. Hence, the rationale of the research is an attempt to understand why the National Standards had been implemented in the first place. At the moment of the National Standards launch in 2008, the government obviously needed such a nationwide assessment of the children's abilities, but later the project had been closed. It is important to understand the drawbacks of the National Standards of 2008-2017 and based on this knowledge, the new project can be launched in the future with considering mistakes being made in 2008-2017 within the National Standards project. The analysis of the causes of the National Standards termination can also be complemented by the organizational analysis of the parties involved in the process such as the organizations, teams, and departments, both public and private.

Connection with Saudi Arabia

Abdullah Saleh Al Sadaawi (2010) from King Saud University mentioned New Zealand's National Standards in 2010 within his research of the Saudi Arabia's education assessment efforts (p. 10). By the end of the article Al Sadaawi (2010) called on the intensification of the efforts to establish a nationwide education assessment program as in New Zealand, but back in 2010, little was known about the effectiveness and shortcomings of New Zealand's National Standards. Al Sadaawi (2010) raised concerns over the effectiveness of similar efforts to assess

the nationwide education in Saudi Arabia. He put it the following way, “the extensive resources and policy commitment placed by the government on its educators has not resulted in adequate returns” (Al Sadaawi, 2010, p. 11). He also reported “an absence of checks and balances in the Saudi education system” (Al Sadaawi, 2010, p. 11). All in all, Al Sadaawi (2010) was rather pessimistic and sceptical about the effectiveness of the Saudi education system assessment, and he looked up to the U.S. NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress) and New Zealand’s National Standards. In the light of the National Standards’ termination,

more research is required to assess the outcome of the National Standards and possible conclusions that could be further used in other countries including Saudi Arabia.

The Assessment Types

Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Mr Robert Stake explained the difference between the formative and summative assessment of education. He said, “When the cook tastes the soup, that’s formative; when the guests taste the soup, that’s summative” (Kaplinsky, 2018).

Formative assessment is also called educational assessment. Formative assessment is represented by the regular reports throughout the course either by a teacher or a student (Taras, 2005). Such reports do not necessarily affect the grading process. Apart from the reports, formative assessment also implies various kinds of draft work, oral questions, quizzes, and standardized tests. Right before asking students to participate in the summative assessment, they are asked to get familiar with the corresponding instructions. ☑

Unlike formative assessment, summative assessment takes place at the end of the course (formative assessment takes place throughout the course). Unlike formative assessment, summative assessment aims primarily to grade a student. The word “summative” means the summative assessment is about summarizing the academic achievements of a student at the end of the course (Taras, 2009). The summative assessment takes the form of either 100-point scale or just pass-fail binary assessment. Other forms of the summative assessment might be also projects, exams or tests. Summative assessment helps to understand and conclude whether a student has effectively passed a course or not. The major drawback of the summative assessment is that it leaves no time for students to embrace their true level of academic performance, and they have no time to fix the situation if the summative assessment at the end of the course reveals a student falls behind his or her peers. ☑

Internal assessment simply means the school performs it independently of any outside actors such as the Ministry of Education (Nevo, 2001). The students are graded and informed of their grades.

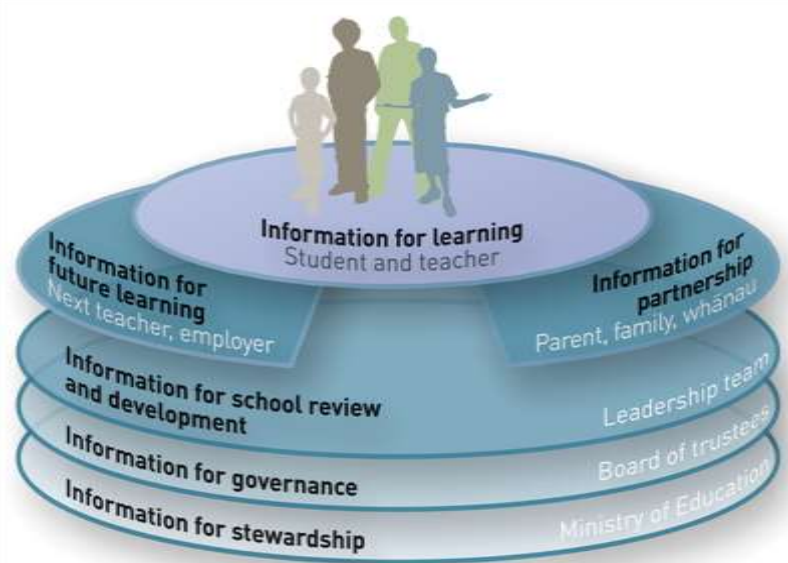


Fig. 1. Use of Assessment Information. Retrieved June 28, 2020, from <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum#assessment> diagram

External assessment, correspondingly, is carried out by the representatives of the Ministry of Education, not the school itself. Hence, the local teachers cannot affect the outcomes of the assessment, although they know the students much better than the representatives of the ministry of education. This circumstance, however, might serve as a guarantee of impartial assessment of the students by the assessors who are not familiar with the students. The major drawback of the external assessment is the limited feedback to the students. Nevertheless, the Australian NAPLAN external assessment implies detailed feedback to the students and their teachers to let them make a plan on how to fix the problems in the future (Wood, 2009).

The new way of assessment after the National Standards were scrapped in 2017 -- the National Curriculum states in its vision it expects the NZ students to be “creative, energetic, and enterprising” (p. 8). Students’ creativity has been identified as the foremost feature that the Ministry of Education expects the students possess. Figure 1 shows a student-oriented approach when the whole structure of governance starts from the interests of the students and their teachers. Whereas the National Standards rather imposed the government view on how the education should look like, the diagram (Fig. 1.) at the website of the New Zealand Curriculum shows the opposite to the former National Standards student-centered approach, where a student works out as the starting point of the education effectiveness analysis. The students are the foremost stakeholders of the education process, but not the Ministry of Education. The New Zealand Curriculum is more likely to reflect this way of thinking than the abolished National Standards. The new way of assessment encompasses a much wider range of subjects with much better focus on creative subjects such as the Arts, Foreign languages, Science, Social Sciences and Technology (The New Zealand Curriculum, 2007, 3). If considering the interview of Megan Figgist, teacher of Drama and English at St Mary Secondary School for girls of year 7 to year 13, she had identified that the former National Standards made teachers refrain from taking “creative risks” as she put it. After the National Standards have been scrapped, the teachers have more freedom in taking such “creative risks” and thus polishing their own senses on how to tune the education process for the sake of the best possible learning outcomes. When discussing “the best possible learning outcomes,” it is important to keep students healthy and motivated to study, but not just train them to pass some standardized tests. The final goal of a school teacher should be the education of the strong personalities that would be ready for the changeable labour market after they graduate.

_____ Evidence from the School (Research Method)

- **Interview and Observation**

1. Northland Primary School

Northland primary school was founded in 1906 in the suburb of Wellington called Northland. The school deals with the students of 1-8 years of education, which are distributed among 4 teams that in their turns comprise 3 or 4 classes. The current principal is Jeremy Edwards. Other two teachers, Emma Chapman and Katie McGrath have also agreed to give an interview.

2. St Mary Secondary School

St Mary Secondary School is a Catholic school for girls of age 7-13. As of March 2020, the total number of students was 1,078 (“Ministry of Education,” 2020). The school has been represented by teachers Megan Figgist and Helen Hardwick.

2 Discussions of the Findings

Megan Figgist, teacher of Drama and English at St Mary Secondary School identified the obvious washback effect caused by the National Standards. Simply put, the washback effect means the teachers and students focus primarily or solely on the school subjects necessary for passing the final exams instead of providing more universal education to the students (Mizutani et al., 2011). As a result, the students will have a narrower world outlook and thus narrower ability to choose a profession in the future because the National Standards made them focus solely on reading, writing and maths instead of a much wider range of subjects that will be useful for the students later. Megan Figgist was more discreet when explaining the negative impact of the National Standards of the process of teaching. She put it this way, “they [the National Standards] don’t always allow students and teachers to take creative risks in their learning for fear of not meeting a particular criterion.” Such a discreet explanation of the negative impact of the washback effect on students reveals how the National Standards potentially could make students less competitive in the future when they grow up into young adults and get ready for choosing their profession. Modern labour market requires tremendous flexibility of mind and ability to acquire new skills and knowledge as demand for labour in the market is changeable and unstable.

If synthesizing the fact the National Standards were scrapped in 2018 and the reflections of Megan Figgist, it is possible to sketch the following recommendation for Saudi Arabia: the teachers should strive to provide more universal knowledge to their students to make the very process of education more interesting and creative because the modern labour market requires much more than just reading, writing and maths. Modern labour market require a creative way of thinking, thinking outside the box. Nurturing creativity is possible when the assessment of education is less formalized and thus wrapped up in the form of some standardized tests. After all, a teacher in the classroom must have the right to have a live communication with the students, offering some creative tasks and assessing creativity correspondingly. Saudi Arabia can learn a lesson from the National Standards having been scrapped in New Zealand. Education assessment must be more personalized and more focused on nurturing creativity. If extrapolating the findings from the education at the primary and secondary schools onto further education, the university students have to be, or at least they are expected to be creative in the end of their education path by writing theses -- creative activity.

Helen Hardwick has agreed the formative assessment works out better than the summative assessment, previously rejected by the Ministry of Education because the formative assessment allows students and teachers better understand on what should be done to improve the learning outcomes of the students. Summative assessment turned out to be more about evaluating students instead of making sure they get an effective education. In other words, formative assessment provides better feedback between the students and their teachers in the course of the year instead of just checking the learning outcomes at the very end of each year.

Emma Chapman from the Northland Primary School has reported that “real time reporting is far more useful for parents, teachers and students. Using Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs) provide parents with far more information than a standard test or a tick box. We are able to work in small steps and fill gaps in students learning, it’s far more individualized to that student.”

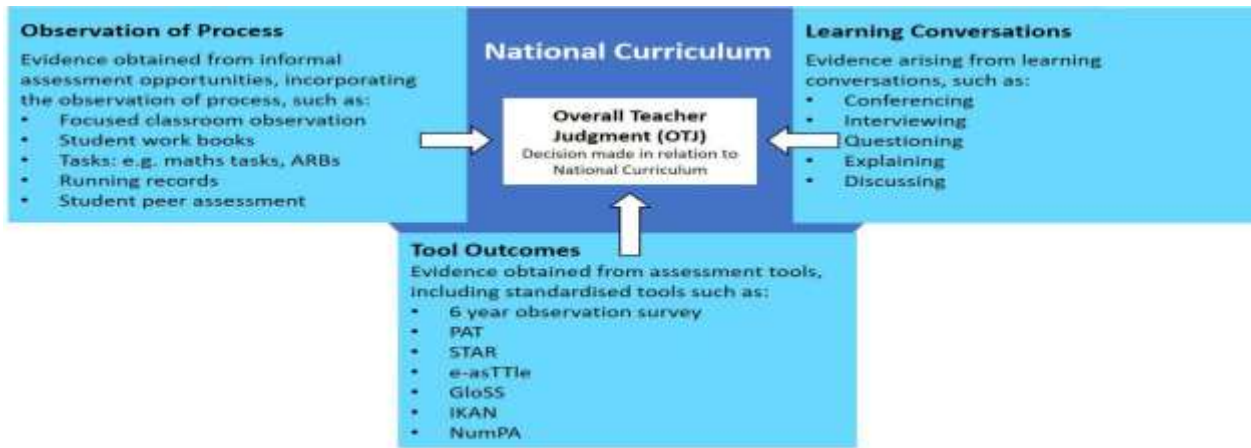


Fig. 2. Effectiveness of Overall Teacher Judgement (OTJ). Retrieved June 29, 2020, from <https://assessment.tki.org.nz/var/tki-assess/storage/images/media/images/triangulation-national-curriculum/61087-1-eng-NZ/Triangulation-National-Curriculum.jpg>

Emma Chapman confirmed the Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs) provide much more personalized evaluation of the students' learning outcomes for the parents. OTJs are much better than any "standard test or a tick box" as Emma Chapman put it. Moreover, the formative assessment back by the OTJs helps teachers to update the learning process for their students, based on the results of the formative assessment. The findings of Emma Chapman fully correspond to the findings of Kerry Mitchell and Dr Jenny Poskitt (2010) on the Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs). The authors confirm that some interviewed teachers reported the OTJs to be a "gut feeling" from all their professional interactions with students" (Mitchell & Poskitt, 2010, p. 6). However, most teachers, according to Mitchell and Poskitt (2010), still viewed the OTJs not as a "gut feeling" but an "analysis of a combined range of assessment data (Mitchell & Poskitt, 2010, p. 6). Another group of teachers pointed out the students' ability to assess each other either via self-assessment or peer-assessment. Some teachers appreciate the 'best fit' of the OTJs regarding the triangulating data (Fig. 2). Other teachers also tried to fit the OTJs into more standardized frameworks such as matrices or numeracy project framework.

Emma Chapman also favours informal communication with the parents whenever she can meet them. Usually, she can invite the parents for an informal talk when they either drop off or pick up their children on their way home after school. On top of that, the new way of assessment does not prevent the children from going to the next level despite low grades. Students and parents know what should be improved in terms of their academic excellence, and given this, children still go to a new level. From a psychological standpoint, such approach might be beneficial to the children by causing less psychological pressure for students who are struggling to meet the average criteria. All in all, the education system must pursue two strategic goals; the foremost goal is certainly to provide knowledge, but the second strategic goal is to maintain health of the students -- both physical and mental health of the students by avoiding excess pressure on them both in terms of curriculum and attitude on behalf of the teachers and the educational system as a whole.

Katie McGrath confirmed the Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs) were a reliable source of information on the students' progress both for the school and for the parents. In other words, Katie McGrath confirmed the schools did not require standardized tests such as

those implied by the National Standards in order to draw a clear picture of what was going on with the student's academic performance. Katie McGrath also favours the formative assessment as she describes it as the 'real-time' reporting as the teacher observes the situation in the classroom and makes notes on what is worrisome and what should be improved.

Emma Chapman and Katie McGrath both mentioned the Seesaw feedback tool that maintains feedback between teachers and parents. Teachers and parents can provide a two-way feedback in both directions. Parents can inform teachers on their children's progress at home, and certainly teachers inform parents on the children's progress at school.

Implications for Practice or Policy in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia should not pursue the implementation of the nationwide standardized tests that would be similar to the National Standards of New Zealand of 2008-2017. The negative experience and negative feedback of both teachers and students of New Zealand identify a solution for the educational system of Saudi Arabia -- more focus on nurturing students' creativity and thinking outside the box. The analysis of the National Standards of New Zealand and their abolition in 2017 can be complemented by the analysis of the modern labour market and university education. The new way of assessment in New Zealand is much more appropriate for the adoption in Saudi Arabia because the new way of assessment pays much more attention to nurturing students' creativity and trusting teachers in terms of how they personally can improve the students' progress in the classroom. Within the new way of assessment, teachers again received more freedom to evaluate students "on the go," that is to say, teachers observe the students' performance on the everyday basis, observing students and probably making notes if they wish to. The New Zealand's teachers use the Seesaw feedback tool that allows online communication between parents and teachers. Not only teachers report to the parents on the students' progress, but also parents share some thoughts and observations over their children at home. At this point, Seesaw feedback tool works out as a facilitating factor that helps to apply collective efforts to provide the best possible learning outcomes for the students. The New Zealand's teachers favour the Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs) because they allow to provide a personalized assessment of each student, unlike the standard tests where the students have to answer standard questions.

Brenda Weal and Selena Hinchco (2011) confirmed that the OTJs within the framework the former National Standards made teachers to downplay all the subjects but reading, writing and maths (p. 8). Afterward, the teachers had to analyse what measures could be taken to improve reading, writing and maths. Again, all other subjects were downplayed because of the National Standards. John Hattie (2014) confirmed that such approach in the elementary education would inevitably cause changes in higher education (p. 259). New Zealand Productivity Commission has issued a report on the labour market trends. The authors of the New Zealand Productivity Commission on the labour market trends, Tim Maddock and Terry Genet (2019) indeed confirmed the New Zealand's labour market trend on the "large growth for jobs involving non-routine and service-based tasks that tend to require higher-level qualifications (e.g., professionals, managers, technicians). It is widely thought that this trend will continue" (p. 3). The text excerpt from the New Zealand's Productivity Commission report on the labour market trends confirms the statement on the necessity of reforming the education system of Saudi Arabia to provide the best possible environment in the classroom to nurture students' creativity. The teachers should be granted more freedom and decision-making based on personalized observations over each student. The teachers must focus on

developing creative skills of the students since the labour market requires more creative jobs or jobs that imply critical thinking and creative thinking (thinking outside the box). Teacher Emma Chapman described Seesaw feedback tool that maintained the two-way communication channel between teachers and parents. Similar feedback technique has been described by John Hattie (2019). Feedback plays an important role on all levels of education. The only difference is that adult students can provide feedback on their own. In case of the elementary and secondary schools, parents have to provide feedback instead of students themselves. Although teachers prefer formative assessment to summative assessment Dylan William and Paul Black (1996) raised concerns that if “teachers completely disconnected from all summative assessment or required to administer two separate assessment systems,” the consequences would be “disastrous” as William and Black (1996) put it (p. 546). Again, the formative assessment is preferred among teachers, and the assessment must be less formalized and thus more informal because the global labour market requires more creative jobs that would be filled with the adults that would have the developed critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills (thinking outside the box). Modern labour market needs more managers, technicians and professionals that would do non-routine work.

Conclusion

The National Standards in New Zealand had been scrapped in 2017 because of the mass negative feedback from teachers and students from all over the country. The teachers prefer formative assessment to summative assessment. From a strategic standpoint, the former National Standards were much more likely to make overall education process boring and difficult for most students. The National Standards largely ignored nurturing creativity. After the National Standards had been scrapped, the teachers got back to the formative assessment, using Seesaw feedback tool and paying more attention to nurturing creativity. Saudi Arabia can learn a lot from the experience of the National Standards and their aftermath -- the teachers must focus on more personalized and often informal communication with students and their parents. Less standardized approach could have been shifted into the educational environment that would nurture creativity.

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