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EXPLORING EXEMPLARY PRACTICES
IN CA FOR POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON
IMPROVING STUDENTS'
ACHIEVEMENTS IN PRIMARY
SCHOOLS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Student Name:

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ACARA - Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Sydney

AITSL - Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, Melbourne

ARG – Assessment Reforms Group, United Kingdom

CA – Continuous Assessment

CCSSO - Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington

DEECD - Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria

DETE - Department of Education, Training & Employment, Queensland

FA – Formative Assessment

IA – Interim Assessment

IBE - International Bureau of Education, Geneva

MOE - Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

MOEP - Ministry of Economy and Planning, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

NAP - National Assessment Program, Australia

NAPLAN - National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy, Australia

NIU - Northern Illinois University, Illinois

NPST - National Professional Standards for Teachers, Australia

OECD - Organisation For Economic Co-Operation And Development

PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment

QCAR - Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting

QCAT - Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks

QSA - Queensland Studies Authority, Queensland

SA – Summative Assessment

TIMSS - Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

USSABC - U.S.-Saudi Arabian Business Council, Riyadh

ABSTRACT

Good quality education is a major contributor to a country's economic growth, and a vital component for general human index. There is strong evidence that the cognitive skills of the population are strongly related to individual earnings, distribution of income, and economic growth. Primary education lays the foundation of a child's future education. In Saudi Arabia, despite high levels of expenditure on education, the investment has not translated into the desired outcomes. Hence, it is important to explore possible methods to improve the quality of education. This study focuses on leveraging one aspect of the education system, namely, assessment system at the primary level, to improve the students' achievements in Saudi Arabia. Assessment is an integral and essential component of effective learning and teaching, and the information received helps in better decision-making by all stakeholders to improve the quality of learning. Thus, it is important to understand the various concepts & perspectives related to assessment, and also find out some exemplary practices in assessment which can be adapted for use at the primary level in Saudi Arabia. For this, the related literature & research papers / journals have been studied to understand the various types of assessments, their nuances, and the current schools of thought. Mainly, concepts related to summative assessment, continuous assessment and formative assessment were analyzed. In formative assessment, the vital importance of a proper feedback mechanism was apparent. Importantly, it is accepted that improving formative assessment has a great effect in raising standards of achievement. The assessment system of Queensland, Australia has been studied to identify exemplary practices. Queensland system has been selected due to its uniqueness, and its alignment with the fundamental concepts of effective assessment. The externally moderated school-based assessment balances the required weight between the teachers' student specific knowledge, and the need for standardization & external moderation required to prevent bias and lack of uniformity. The assessment system being implemented in Saudi Arabia was also studied to understand the status quo. It is hypothesized that the continuous assessment system in Saudi Arabia is more akin to frequent summative assessment or interim assessment rather than formative assessment. This is mainly because, in Saudi Arabia, the critical element of feedback is less pronounced in the continuous assessment practices. It is suggested that the assessment system in Saudi Arabia should involve an effective feedback mechanism to make it formative in nature. This will help

in improving the student achievement. For this, the practices in Queensland can be adapted after suitable modifications.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Primary education is one of the most important foundations for development of a citizen as well as a nation. Primary education shapes a child's physical, intellectual, emotional and social growth; the life skills learned at a critical time enables a child to achieve success throughout the life (Wyse & Torrance, 2009). In recent decades, conforming to the idea that 'every child has the right to education', most developing countries have introduced free and compulsory education. Saudi Arabian education system has also achieved significant success in primary school enrollment and retention that has also made significant contribution in increasing the literacy rate (Barber et al., 2007; Maroun et al., 2008).

However, there is a wide debate among educators and policy makers over an optimal assessment system for primary education that would enhance students' learning outcomes and meet national objectives related to primary education (Wyse & Torrance, 2009). While Summative Assessment (SA) is administered at the end of a term/study period, a Continuous Assessment (CA) involves the application of an on-going process of evaluation (Gardner, 2006; Harlen, 2005; Nitko & Brookhart, 2011). Until the end of the last century, as Al-Sadan (2000) reports, in Saudi Arabian primary schools only 30% of the total mark in a subject was allocated for CA during the term (e.g. periodic tests).

In the new millennium, following the models adopted by Singapore and South Korea, Saudi Arabia has reformed the education system to improve quality in all levels (Akkari, 2004; Barber et al., 2007; Maroun et al., 2008; Yamini, 2006). Accordingly, CA practices have been widely adopted by the Saudi education system to raise the quality of education. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has not been able to achieve the targeted improvement in education, although the country has made huge investment in education (Akkari, 2004; Krieger, 2007; Maroun et al., 2008).

1.1 Aim of the study

The study aims to find the exemplary practices in CA which could be evaluated in order to investigate their possible influence on improving students' learning achievements in Primary schools in Saudi Arabia. This involves investigation and understanding of the current theory on assessment, and examining the policies and practices in terms of what is theorised about the influence of assessment on learning. The research examines the

policy framework, current practices, and the existing implementation mechanisms in Queensland, Australia. Steps being taken by the Queensland Government to achieve their goals have been studied. The difficulties and the constraints have been examined to understand problems and other issues which are more universal in nature.

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1.2 The Problem underlying the Study

Quality education is a major contributor to a country's economic growth and a vital component for general human index. Hanushek & Wößmann (2007) had concluded in their study that there was strong evidence that the cognitive skills of the population (rather than mere school attainment) are powerfully related to individual earnings, to the distribution of income, and to economic growth. They emphasized improvement of quality of schools through structural changes in institutions. It was argued that sporadic or nonexistent assessment of student knowledge was particularly detrimental to quality learning outcomes, and correcting this shortcoming should have the highest priority.

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The proposed research is based on the proposition that despite comparatively high levels of expenditure on education in Saudi Arabia, the investment has not translated into the desired outcomes (Maroun et al. 2008). This is highlighted by the low ranking of Saudi Arabia in Education For All Development Index (UNESCO, 2012). Hence, there is a need to explore possible methods to improve the quality of education. While improving the quality of education will obviously require a multi-pronged approach, this study focuses on one aspect of the education system, namely, CA and FA at the primary level. Assessment is an integral and essential component of effective learning and teaching, and the information received helps in better educational decision-making. Improvements in the quality of assessment information can enhance the effectiveness of the decisions made by teachers and learners, resulting in better learning and better educational outcomes (Masters, 2013). Further, primary level is the foundation which shapes the future development of the child (Wyse & Torrance, 2009). Thus, it is important to understand the theories related to assessment and the current exemplary practices in CA and FA. This requires a detailed study, which has been attempted through the current paper.

1.3 Research questions

1. What are the goals, policies and implementation plans of Queensland (Australia) to improve the assessment system in primary schools?

2. What are the exemplary practices related to assessment systems in primary schools in Queensland, Australia?
3. What are the salient features of the assessment system at primary level in Saudi Arabia? For this, a review and analysis of their policy in terms of what is known about effective assessment will be undertaken.
4. What models of exemplary practices in Continuous Assessment could be applied in Saudi Arabia to improve students' learning achievements in primary schools?

1.4 The background

The General education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia consists of kindergarten, six years of primary school and three years each of intermediate and high school. The Ministry of Education sets overall standards for the country's educational system. The Kingdom's ratio of 15 students to every teacher is one of the lowest in the world. The educational standards are being improved by raising the quality of teacher training programs, improving standards for evaluation of students and increasing the use of educational technology. One of the strategic goals is development of student assessment methods in a way that assures achievement of instructional objectives and taking part in the development of rules for student assessment. Improving and upgrading the curriculum and upgrading the education system is one of the priorities. The policy areas include enrolling all Saudi children of primary school-going age and implementing educational and training programs for teachers. The vision is to create an effective and practical system of education which is capable of discovering the potentials and predispositions and create the spirit of action (MOE, 2011). Public spending on education in Saudi Arabia is significant (5.7 percent of GDP) which is higher than in countries like UK & Germany (USSABC, 2010). Over 25 per cent of the \$35.5 billion budget was allocated to Education and Manpower Development (Al Sadaawi, 2010). The number of Primary education pupils in Saudi Arabia in 2010 was around 3.32 million out of which around 48.7% were females. In 2007, expenditure per student on primary education was 19.3% of the per capita GDP. In 2008, the primary completion rate was 96.5% (World Bank, 2013).

Interestingly, as stated by Al Sadaawi (2010), despite the amount of resources being spent, the number of schools & facilities is inadequate to meet the numbers of school-age children. Saudi Arabia has a substantial school system, with over 30,000 schools

educating 5 million students. The focus so far has resulted in quantitative expansion of the education system. However, there is no national assessment system to provide statistical evidence on students' learning outcomes. The government is developing a plan for national assessment. Priority areas for national assessment include curricula analysis, assessment design and approval, determining assessment structures relative to schools, teachers, and activities/questionnaires for students, developing assessment kits, and producing appropriate and sufficient materials such as teacher training sets, questionnaires, and activity materials, and dissemination, application, and collection of assessment materials. The national assessment framework for primary schools includes setting the purpose, identifying the subjects, determining grades, establishing standards, constructing instruments, sampling, review process, administration, and analysis and reporting.

As evident from above, Saudi Arabia spends a significant amount of money on education, and recently the focus on quality of education has increased. For this, a national assessment plan has been made which is likely to help the country in the long run. Good quality assessment in primary schools is crucial to improve the student achievement in Saudi Arabia.

1.5 Research method

For conducting the research, data has been collected mainly from the official websites of the Ministry of Education (Saudi Arabia), Queensland (Australia), the World Bank and UNESCO. In addition, various other published sources, including research conducted by other scholars & peer-reviewed journals were referred.

First, the definitions, types of assessment and the nuances of different types of the assessment have been examined. Definitions and fundamental concepts of Summative Assessment, Interim Assessment, Continuous Assessment and Formative Assessment were investigated. For this, the literature reviewed included books, papers in referred assessment journals, and policy documents. The required information related to the current status of the education systems was obtained. Also, research papers on the education system of Saudi Arabia and Australia (especially Queensland) and the policy documents related to government's goals and implementation plans were studied.

Further discourse analysis involved examining the CA and FA system & practices in Queensland. This has helped understand the methods being used to assess the students

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OK done below.

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at the primary level and the effectiveness of the assessment system. Some of the exemplary practices have been suggested for improving the student's achievements at primary level in Saudi Arabia.

1.6 Significance of the study

For improving the student achievement at primary level in Saudi Arabia, it is imperative to improve the assessment methods being practiced. To improve the quality of assessment, it is important to understand the current theory about assessment, the objectives set by governments to improve assessment systems for better student achievement, and their implementation mechanism. It is also important to understand the exemplary practices in schools and the methods being employed in more experienced and successful systems like Australia. This will help all to discover methods to overcome the difficulties and achieve the goal of a higher student achievement at primary level in Saudi Arabia. To date, a holistic study on the issue has not been conducted.

1.7 Limitations and delimitations

1.7.1 Limitations

As mentioned above, no comprehensive study has been conducted on the matter. Further, the official websites of Saudi Arabia and the other countries do not give detailed data and information about the education system, especially the status of CA. So information has been obtained from other sources. Some of the data is from a single source, and could not be verified for accuracy. Some of the studies which have been referenced are old, and hence some element of judgment has been exercised to assess their applicability to the current environment. Also, there may be some areas for which it is not possible to obtain data on the internet. Time and funding constraints limit the ability to obtain the data by either visiting the site, or getting information by writing to the relevant organizations.

1.7.2 Delimitations

The research focuses on finding methods to improve the quality of assessment in primary schools of Saudi Arabia to improve student achievement. For this, system of Australia (especially Queensland) is being studied. Some of the problems, situations and solutions may be specific to the education system of Australia. So applicability of those systems & solutions to Saudi Arabia may require necessary adjustments. Further,

the research is specific to the primary level. So some issues, theories and suggestions may not be relevant to higher levels of the system.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Assessment:

Nitko & Brookhart (2007) define assessment as a process for obtaining information that is used for making a decisions about students; curricula, programs, and schools. It is also defined as a process in which educators use student responses to tasks to draw inferences about students' knowledge and skills (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001). As mentioned in Black & Wiliam (2003), assessment can support learning as well as measure it. Assessment involves employing different ways to gather data about the teaching and the learning by the students (Hanna & Dettmer, 2004). According to Wiliam (2007), broadly, education assessments serve three functions, namely, formative (supporting learning), summative (certifying individuals) and evaluative (holding educational institutions to account).

Any assessment is intended to guide the students, change instruction, convey expectations and document progress. It helps provide information about the program by monitoring the outcomes, provides the basis for planning, helps implement improvements, and helps in proper allocation of resources (Carlson, Humphrey & Reinhardt, 2003).

According to Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) (2013a), assessment is the ongoing process of gathering, analyzing and reflecting on evidence to make informed and consistent judgments to improve future student learning. Assessment for improved student learning and deep understanding requires a range of assessment practices to be used with three overarching purposes: Assessment FOR learning - occurs when teachers use inferences about student progress to inform their teaching; Assessment AS learning - occurs when students reflect on and monitor their progress to inform their future learning goals; Assessment OF learning - occurs when teachers use evidence of student learning to make judgments on student achievement against goals and standards.

As alluded to above, Assessment is of different types, depending, inter-alia, upon the timing, frequency, type of data, and the process followed. The next sub-sections discuss

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the different types of assessment, and highlight the diversity of views, especially related to the concept of CA.

2.2 Diagnostic Assessment

Diagnostic Assessment (DA) is a type of assessment which examines what a student knows and can do prior to a learning program being implemented. It provides a baseline against which the progress can be assessed. It is especially useful in re-engagement programs because of the complex learning needs and barriers of students in these programs. It is important that these aspects are considered in the design and delivery of the training programs (DEECD, 2013b). It helps identify the student's current knowledge of a subject, his skill sets and capabilities, and to clarify misconceptions *before teaching takes place*. Knowing students' strengths and weaknesses can help the teachers plan what to teach & how to teach. Pretests, self-assessments, discussion board responses, and interviews are examples of diagnostic assessment (NIU, n.d.). According to Department of Education, Training & Employment (DETE) (2012), it is designed to identify areas of weakness and strength.

2.3 IA

Interim Assessments (IA) are periodic assessments closely modeled on summative tests. Such assessments are helpful in predicting student performance on later exams, but are much less useful in guiding teachers on anything more than coverage of specific topics (Noyce & Hickey, 2011). Further, as per Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (2012), IA comprises tests administered periodically throughout the school year to fulfill predictive (identifying students readiness for success on a later high-stakes test), evaluative (to appraise ongoing educational programs), and/or instructional (to supply teachers with individual student performance data) purpose. This view acknowledges the utility of these tests in guiding the teachers.

Commented [DDC6]: Need not be standardized. That is a separate issue.

Commented [DDC7]: Note that this recognises that the results of these tests can guide teachers, contrary to what Noyce and Hickey said.

2.4 Summative Assessment

Summative Assessment (SA) is used at the end of a stage of learning to sum-up or summarize what the student has achieved to that point in time (DEECD, 2013c). It usually happens at the end of a cycle of learning for summative purposes (Timperley, 2011). As mentioned in Black & Wiliam (2003), summative evaluation tests are given at the end of episodes of teaching (units, courses, etc.) for the purpose of grading or certifying students, or for evaluating the effectiveness of a curriculum. Here, data is

collected at certain pre-decided intervals, and used to show what the students have achieved to date. The data provides a *summary* of progress over time (Carlson, Humphrey & Reinhardt, 2003). This assessment can provide feedback *to the teacher* about the effectiveness of the unit of work (DETE, 2012). So it takes place after the learning has been completed, and normally when no more formal learning is taking place. It helps assess what has been learned and how well it has been learned. It indicates the level of knowledge to determine the suitability to go to the next class or level. It is more product-oriented and assesses the final product. Types of SA include examinations (major, high-stakes exams), term papers (drafts submitted throughout the semester could be a FA) and projects (project phases submitted at various completion points could be formatively assessed) (NIU, n.d.). SA is essential to certify that graduates meet prescribed standards to enter professional practice. It is used to tell students, parents, administrators and employers what students know and can do (Hamilton & Curtis, 2012). It is viewed as the ‘assessment OF learning (Berry, 2009; Carless, 2005; Earl, 2003; Gardner, 2006; Harlen, 2005). Conversely, Assessment OF learning is also called ‘assessment for summative purposes’ or SA (Earl & Giles, 2011).

2.5 Continuous Assessment

Continuous Assessment (CA) is a type of assessment that happens in real time rather than at the end of a week or unit. It is continuous/ongoing because it involves daily observations and documentation of students’ work while they are engaged in inquiry investigations and discussions. The key here is that the collection of data about students’ understanding of concepts, and their practice of the processes and habits of mind of science happens *while* the students are engaged in learning (Carlson, Humphrey & Reinhardt 2003). As stated by Rous & Townley (2006), CA system includes both formal and informal assessments, it is conducted on a regular basis, integrated with instructions, helps improve learning, helps guide the teaching-learning process, and provides information on every aspect of the instruction and curriculum.

The objectives of assessment include promoting child learning and development, monitoring trends and evaluating programs and services, and assessing developmental progress to hold individual children, teachers, and schools accountable (Rous & Townley, 2006). CA also supports designing of assessment tasks which fit the interests of a group of learners (NIED, 1999).

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Department of Education, Training and Employment.

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That depends on the extent to which the student is able to learning from any feedback.

The teacher places emphasis on improving the process adopted by the student in accomplishing the task, thus, in the latter case, the assessment is an ongoing process. In the literature, CA has been considered as a ‘time-honored practice’ (Harlen, 2005, p. 207). The main emphasis is placed on learning rather than assessment and it is referred to as ‘the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers, to identifying where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there’ (ARG, 2002). The basis of CA depends on multiple factors, such as a suitable curricula design; appropriate instructional methods/pedagogic styles; the availability of teachers and resources, an appropriate learning environment, the emphasis on student-teacher interactions; the motivation of students and teachers, the autonomy of students and teachers; and self-reflection (student and teacher) (Carless, 2005; Harlen, 2005; Harlen & Gardner, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Importantly, according to Carlson, Humphrey & Reinhardt (2003), when these data are used by teachers to make decisions about next steps for a student or group of students, to plan instruction, and to improve their own practice, they help inform as well as form practice; this is *Formative Assessment* (discussed next). On the other hand, when data are collected at certain planned intervals, and are used to show what students have achieved to date, they provide a summary of progress over time, and are *SA*. Both types of assessment are important and useful for the purposes they serve. It is, therefore, important to note that CA includes both formative and summative elements. However, CA is *formative* by nature. It serves various purposes. Unlike SA, the support can be more real time. This is because, it helps plan and execute the teaching methods on a more continuous basis. It enhances student learning by catalyzing deeper thinking and understanding. This is partly due to the enhanced support of the teachers. Increased involvement of teachers can help in their professional growth. It helps them become more reflective about the methods of teaching being employed by them. They are able to change their teaching methods and style to help the students perform and learn better. The interactions with colleagues also becomes more enriching as all teachers are themselves learning continuously. Importantly, it provides information to report students’ progress. This particular result is akin to what is achieved through the summative technique. This is because data collected in the continuous process helps understand the progress the student is making. This view emphasizes on the formative elements of CA.

Commented [DDC10]: This is one view of CA – a view that is very similar to FA. You do need a discussion of the similarities and differences between CA, FA and IA. I think Noyce and Hickey have pointed out the confusion between CA and FA and propose IA as that form of CA that is not formative. See also Timperley(2009).

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As stated by Ramalebe (2010), CA promotes frequent interaction between students and teachers which enables teachers to know the strengths and weaknesses of students. This helps identify the students who need review and remediation. The problems are identified and corrected before one reaches the SA stage. CA helps develop students' knowledge, skills and *values*, gauge the strength and weaknesses, it lends extra support to students, make changes to the curriculum as required, and motivate and encourage students. The methods used in CA help the students develop independent and critical thinking patterns, skills of effective communication. The students learn to work collaboratively with colleagues / peers. They also learn the work ethic required to complete tasks such as investigation, research projects, and interviews. Here, the teachers are placed at the center of all performance-assessment activities, and so it encourages their enhanced participation in the assessment process. It is guidance oriented, and helps get better data because the gathering is done over a longer time frame. This view is more related to the summative element of CA as the element of feedback is not that pronounced.

As stated by Carrillo & Pérez (2012), the usefulness of the CA in facilitating student learning has been found to be overwhelming. In this research, students were allowed to choose the CA procedure and analyzed their academic outcomes and subjective satisfaction in comparison with a control group (within the same classroom) under traditional assessment with final exams (TA). In the study, the CA group was associated with fewer students' dropping the course or not taking the exam at the end of the semester, improved academic achievement, better grades, better progress, higher proportion of pass outs, and better official qualifications compared to the control group (traditional assessment methods). Here, CA is associated with a more distributed learning effort throughout the course and is thought to promote deeper learning, greater motivation, and consequently improved understanding of course material. Even this view alludes to more distributed assessments, and the formative aspect is not central.

As evident from above, CA is a more collaborative and continuous process than SA. The objective is different, it is a process which supports and improves the overall learning. It helps both the students and the teachers become more proactive in their approach. The continuous nature of assessment helps in generating a more real-time support by the teachers so that corrective action can be taken before it is too late. The focus is on learning and improving the learning process. Due to its inherent attributes

mentioned above, the teaching becomes more tailored to the requirements of individual students. This is because the increased involvement of the teachers and the students helps in identifying the weaknesses of each student. The remediation response is also tailored and more measured. Most importantly, CA is formative if the element of interactive feedback is paramount. This is discussed next.

2.6 Formative Assessment

Formative Assessment (FA) refers to assessment that is specifically intended to generate feedback on performance to improve and accelerate learning (Sadler, 1998). Sadler (1989) wrote that FA is concerned with how judgment of the quality of student responses can be used to shape and improve the learner's competence. It is a range of informal and formal procedures undertaken by teachers as an integral part of the normal teaching and learning process. The information obtained via these procedures is used, by *teachers and students*, to modify and enhance learning and understanding (Black & Wiliam, 1998). It is a process used by teachers and students *during* instruction that provides *feedback* to *adjust* the ongoing teaching and learning. FA is not an adjunct to teaching, but, integrated the system. It is a process which involves a number of FA strategies that can be implemented during classroom instruction. The teacher shares the learning goals with students and provides opportunities for students to monitor their ongoing progress (McManus, 2008). As mentioned in Black & Wiliam (2003), all who are involved—student, teacher, curriculum maker— will find FA useful in helping them improve what they wish to do. It is used to map and monitor learning progress *during* learning. The assessment provides information on progress, and identifies and addresses areas that require improvement / development (DETE, 2012). As stated by Nitko & Brookhart (2011), FA is an active, continual process in which teachers and students work together. It has six important elements, namely, sharing learning targets and criteria for success, feedback that feeds forward, student goal setting, student self-assessment, strategic teacher questioning, and engaging students in asking effective questions.

FA provides continuous feedback and information during the teaching and learning process and measures the progress being made by the student. It also helps assess the progress being made by the teacher. These assessments are usually not graded, but help understand learning progress, and to make the teaching more effective. Examples of FA include, observations during in-class activities, homework exercises as review for

Commented [DDC12]: Try to avoid using the '/' character between words. I guess it means "to map and or monitor..." Perhaps one of the two words is better than the other, perhaps you mean map, perhaps you mean monitor.

exams and class discussions, reflection journals that are reviewed periodically during the semester, question and answer sessions, both formal and informal (spontaneous), and feedback from students on instruction and their self-assessment of the performance and progress (NIU, n.d). As stated by DEECD (2013c), FA is interwoven with, or conducted in parallel with learning, where regular *feedback* is used to help in learning and also to alter the teaching program. FA is referred to as assessment *for* learning. FA focuses on the process toward completing the product (NIU, n.d.). Hamilton & Curtis (2012), argue that FA informs learning, and must involve feedback that focuses on the gap between current and desired levels of performance and specifically on the actions (by learner and teacher) required to close that gap. It is also referred to, as ‘assessment for formative purposes’ (Earl & Giles, 2011). It usually refers to integrating assessment information into the teaching and learning process (Timperley, 2011). Assessment ‘as’ and ‘for’ learning are sometimes referred to more generically as ‘formative’ assessment. (Timperley, 2011). Caffrey (2009) states that summative and FAs must be closely aligned in terms of the test content and goals. The FA should have the ability to predict achievement on a SA.

FA is a continuous, collaborative and dynamic, process which puts the onus of learning on students as well. There is no one-shot testing, but a continuous endeavor to enhance the learning of the students and improve the teaching process. In FA, the involvement of the teacher is relatively more compared to that in SA.

2.6.1 Feedback

FA (Assessment *for* learning) transfers assessment from summative to formative by enhancing students' learning and providing them *feedback* highlighting strengths and weaknesses of each student (Earl, 2003). Feedback is the most critical element of FA. It helps both the teachers and the learners to know the progress on a more real-time basis, so that corrective action can be taken promptly. FA approach creates opportunity for teachers to modify pedagogical styles continually to enhance student's learning (Harlen, 2005; Harlen & Gardner, 2006). FA enhances motivation for both teachers and learners; it is an effective way of empowering both teachers and learners; also as a democratic process, it creates opportunity for various other stakeholders, such as parents and guardians to interact (Heritage, 2010; Nicol et al., 2006). Using FA assist teachers to monitor the progress of students' learning (Nitko & Brookhart, 2011). Improving FA has a great effect in raising standards of achievement (Black and Wiliam,

Commented [DDC13]: Because of its central importance in FA, I think it would be useful to include a discussion of **feedback**.

Commented [DDC14]: You raise assessment of, for and as learning but you have not included any discussion of assessment as learning. This could be useful.

1998). This approach allows teachers to explore strengths and weaknesses of every learner and provides them with effective feedback to revise their work on the basis of that feedback; thus learners can take an active role in the learning process and develop self-awareness and cumulative confidence (Harlen, 2005; Stiggins, 2005; Stobart & Gardner, 2006). Feedback consists of corrective information and can be termed as a 'consequence of performance' (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). Given the fact that an effective feedback has the potential to encourage a student to correct mistakes through looking for alternative strategies, searching more information and developing analytical skills, teachers need to be clear about what is the meaning of feedback, types of effective feedback, and their effectiveness in promoting student's learning (Harlen, 2005; Harlen & Gardner, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Hattie & Timperley (2007) have identified three potential outcomes of an effective feedback, namely increased motivation to improve performance, increased effort (more relevant for challenging tasks) to look for better strategies/techniques to complete the task, and increased engagement. Continuous evaluation improves learners' 'error detection-skills' and 'self-regulatory proficiencies'. Teachers can also help students in clarifying their goals and enhancing commitment/effort through effective feedback; moreover, teachers may encourage students in seeking more challenging tasks. Effective feedback must answer three major questions asked by a teacher and/or by a student: Where am I going? (goals), How am I going? (progress), and Where to next? (Action required to make better progress?). These correspond to the terms feed up, feed-back, and feed forward. These three questions do not move in isolation, but work together.

ARG (2002) has identified the following 10 key principles of *assessment for learning*:

1. Effective planning encompassing all aspects of assessment practices
2. Main focus is on how students learn
3. Emphasis on classroom practice
4. Teachers need to acquire intensive professional skills
5. It is a constructive approach
6. Focuses on improving motivation (for students and teachers)
7. Focuses on clarifying/understanding of goals and strategies

8. Learners receive unambiguous guidance on how to improve
9. Promotes students' self-assessment capability
10. Recognizes the need for educational achievement

Feedback is the central element of FA. It is one of the main factors which distinguishes it from other forms of assessment like SA. McManus (2008) described FA as having certain important attributes. In FA, learning progressions should specify the sub-goals of the main objective of learning. Learning progressions describe the learning process, and show the path of learning for the students. This implies that the teachers have the milestones, as well as the ultimate goal in mind. The milestones or the sub-goals are connected to the FA, and help track how the learning is progressing. It is, therefore, imperative that the learning goals and criteria for success are clearly defined and communicated to the students. Apart from this, the students must be clearly informed about the criteria by which learning will be assessed. It is a collaborative process where both the teachers and the students are involved. FA also involves self and peer-assessment which helps the students think meta-cognitively about the learning. This puts the responsibility of learning on the students also, and makes them realize that they have an active role in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own progress. This requires support of the teacher so that the students learn to understand and evaluate their own work and the work of their fellow students. This helps build an environment of constructive feedback. The partnership between the teachers and students is an essential aspect of FA. The interactions involve feedback, which is a critical element of the process.

According to Wiliam (2007), in order for assessment to function formatively, it needs to identify where learners are in their learning, where they are going, and how to get there. Crossing this three-fold typology of information needs with the different agents in the classroom (the student, her or his peers, and the teacher) creates the framework for looking at the role of FA. Further, during learning, feedback has three elements, recognition of the desired goal, evidence about present position, and some understanding of a way to close the gap between the two. It is important to understand all three to improve learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Feedback is one of the most important elements of FA. It is defined in terms of the information about how successfully something has been or is being done. Feedback is the information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap (Sadler, 1989, citing Ramaprasad). As stated by McManus (2008), students should be provided with evidence-based feedback linked to the goals and the success criteria. The feedback should be specific, about the qualities of student learning. The feedback should clarify the goal, and give clear information about the gap between where the student is and the criteria for success. It should allow the student to identify ways to improve the learning, and discover the areas & methods of improvement. Here, comparison with peers should be avoided. Since the monitoring is continuous, the corrective action is more timely based on the feedback.

DEECD (2013c) points out that feedback is a two way street. It is the information given by the student to the teacher and vice-versa, about learning processes and progress towards learning goals. It can help students tweak their learning approaches, and it helps teachers in changing their teaching programs.

As stated by Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) in a study related to higher education, writing about higher education, assert that during learning, the students are already assessing their own work and generating their own feedback. FA and feedback can help the students become more self-regulated and take control of their learning. In FA, the importance of the quality of the feedback is paramount. A good feedback practice, helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards), facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection), delivers high quality information to students about their learning, encourages teacher and peer discussions, encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem, helps close the gap between current and desired performance, and provides information to teachers for improving the methods. The students are more involved in the learning, but there has been reluctance to give them more responsibility for assessing their performance. Since learning is a continuous process throughout one's life, the student's capacity to regulate their own learning should be developed. The key principles mentioned above help organize FA and feedback to support this development. The principles address the cognitive, behavioral and motivational aspects of self-regulation. Self-regulation is an inherent principle of the FA.

As stated by Chappuis and Chappuis (2008), feedback occurs while there is still time to take action. It offers descriptive information about the performance compared to the learning objectives. It avoids marking or judgment which implies that the learning is complete. It focuses on intended learning, helps find the strengths and areas which need special attention for improvement. It also suggests the path to close the gap between the current and the desired state. It is important to keep in mind the amount of corrective feedback the student can handle at any point of time. It also helps model the type of thinking students will engage while assessing themselves. This is remarkably different from the SA method where there is a product focus e.g. the final grades or marks. The grading or the marking does not identify the individual strengths and the points requiring extra effort. It is, therefore, not very successful in discovering the best path for improvement. The continuous nature of feedback in FA helps the teachers & the students to adapt quickly based on the guidance provided by the assessment.

As stated by Sadler (1998), in feedback, the communication is not between equals. So the nature of the inequality needs to be kept in mind to determine if the communication is effective or not. The teacher's feedback act comprises of three aspects. The teacher must attend to the learner's production, appraise it through comparison with some standard, and the teacher reflects the judgment through marks, grades or a verbal response.

Feedback reduces the discrepancy between current and desired understanding. Further, there are four major levels of feedback, and the level at which the feedback is directed influences its effectiveness. The feedback can be about the task / product, the process used to accomplish the task/ create the product, it can be at self-regulation level (e.g. for improving self-efficacy) or it can be personal (directed at the individual). Feedback combined with effective instructions can be very powerful to enhance learning. However, teachers often consider assessment feedback as making statements about the students and not about their teaching. Thus, the benefits are diluted (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

The quality, and not just the quantity, of feedback is important. Quality refers to the technical structure of the feedback (e.g. accuracy, comprehensiveness and appropriateness), and its accessibility to the learner (good communication), its catalytic

and coaching value to improve learning, and its ability to inspire hope and confidence in the system.

As stated by Nitko & Brookhart (2011), effective formative feedback describes the student's work in terms of the learning targets and criteria. It also provides suggestions to the students about future course of action. Feedback strategies include describing the work against criteria, describing at least one strength & at least one suggestion for improvement of the work, providing timely feedback and giving more feedback to practice work (formative part) rather than the final graded work (summative part).

As apparent from the above mentioned literature, feedback is an essential element of FA. It is continuous and dynamic process which intends to improve the learning, rather than make one time, end-of-the-semester judgment about the student. The quality of the feedback has to be good so that the teachers and the students can optimize the learning process, and take timely and relevant corrective action in a collaborative manner. The feedback should have certain attributes so that the quality is optimal. Further, the difference between the levels of the two communicating parties, namely the teacher and the student, needs to be kept in mind. This ensures that the feedback has the desired effect on the learners, the teachers and the learning process. Proper feedback requires maintaining a collaborative teaching environment.

2.6.2 Other Perspectives

Other views about FA look at it from different perspectives. As stated by Chappuis and Chappuis (2008), ready-made benchmark tests cannot take the place of FA conducted by teachers. FA is not a product, but a process, and how the results are used determines whether the assessment is formative or summative. FA delivers information *during* the instructional process, *before* the SA. It is an ongoing, dynamic process, much more than what is achievable through frequent testing. Nearly all assessment instruments can be used for both summative and formative purposes. However, the design makes the instrument more suitable to one form. In case of FA, there is no marking or grading, but the assessment helps the student and the teachers improve the process & the outcome. The teachers can modify the instructions based on the information collected for faster benefits to all. This helps the students in actively managing their own learning. The ready-made tests are actually intended to teacher-proof the assessment process (for standardization). However, this hurts the FA process as it is against its spirit. The key

questions inherent in the FA process are, where am I going? Where am I now? And how can I close the gap? (Chappuis and Chappuis, 2008). This involves sharing of the goals and targets, identifying the strengths and weaknesses, and providing feedback for making improvements (closing the gap). This feedback mechanism helps the student become more responsible for their own performance. The focus is on improvement rather than judging. The feedback has to be timely, understandable, and descriptive.

According to Wiliam (2007), the terms formative and summative apply not to assessments themselves, but to the functions they serve, and as a result, the same assessment can be both formative and summative. Assessment is formative when the information arising from the assessment is fed back within the system and is actually used to improve the performance of the system. Assessment is formative for individuals when they can use the feedback from the assessment to improve their learning. Assessment is formative for teachers when the outcomes from the assessment, appropriately interpreted, help them improve their teaching, either on specific topics, or generally. Assessments are formative for schools and districts if the information generated can be interpreted in such a way as to improve the quality of learning within the schools and districts.

2.7 Assessment AS Learning

The concept of *assessment AS learning* emphasizes that students should be valued participants in their own learning. They should anticipate receiving and utilizing constructive feedback and feed-forward, and be able to identify their own learning gaps and solve their learning needs with teacher assistance. This can help them develop skills for life-long learning and be self-motivated by learning self and peer assessment strategies (Earl & Giles, 2011). In assessment AS learning, students monitor their learning and use feedback from this monitoring to make adaptations and adjustments to what they understand (Earl, 2003). It has a stronger emphasis on students becoming adaptable and independent learners (Timperley, 2011).

2.8 Summary

Thus, diagnostic assessment takes place before the learning starts, FA takes place during the learning, and SA is done periodically to measure the effectiveness of learning. CA is a continuous process, and has both summative and formative elements. However, it is important to understand that CA is NOT simply collection of summative

data more frequently. Feedback is the central element of FA. CA with continuous feedback at its core can be referred to as FA, while CA without feedback is more akin to SA. The process of regular collection of data makes CA formative by nature. Noyce and Hickey (2011) have pointed out that there is a confusion between CA and FA. They propose that IA is that form of CA which is not formative. This is because, the emphasis remains on ‘tests’, and the crucial element of feedback is much less pronounced.

Good quality education at the primary level is vital for the growth and development of any nation. Primary education is the foundation on which higher levels are built. There is a belief that the education system of Saudi Arabia is not functioning at its optimal level despite the adequate allocation of resources. To improve the students’ achievement, it is vital to improve the quality of primary education. For this, the quality of CA has to be improved. Here it is suggested that formative elements of CA need to be emphasized. As per discussions in previous sub-sections, this implies that continuous feedback should be made and integral part of teaching in Saudi Arabia. It is also suggested that the phrase CA should be avoided, and FA should be used to stress upon the importance of feedback in the learning process. The adoption of CA approach requires considerable planning, resources, empowerment, and commitment. Research will help understand exemplary practices that can be implemented in Saudi Arabia to improve the student achievement at the primary level.

SECTION 3: DISCUSSION

3.1 Australian Education System - Overview

According to Santiago et al. (2011), Australia has a federal school system with the State and Territory governments having the constitutional responsibility for schooling. Student learning outcomes in Australia are very high by international standards. It has national-level entities such as the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Evaluation and assessment in Australia operates at four key levels:

- **National and systemic** (state, territory or non-government system) through the National Assessment Program (NAP) and state- and territory-based assessments,

Commented [DDC15]: This section is comprehensive. Unfortunately, it is also repetitive. The structure can be simplified by addressing each issue once.

The information is good. It simply needs to be re-organised.

I am not convinced by equating CA with FA. I think that different people have different views on CA. You could suggest that in KSA, the phrase CA be avoided and that FA be used, but that the key element of effective FA is feedback. Then you section on feedback would be more useful in your argument.

Commented [DDC16]: This avoids any potential confusion about the word ‘primary’.

Commented [DDC17]: Here you could also include participation in international assessment programs like PISA and TIMSS.

- **School** – a variety of forms of school evaluation typically in the context of a School Performance Improvement Framework,
- **Teacher** – through registration processes, performance management, and Advanced Skills Teaching positions, and
- **Student** – with instruments ranging from national standardized tests to ongoing daily FA in the classroom.

Commented [DDC18]: Refer to the national performance standards for teachers.

As part of NAP mentioned above, Australian students also participate in international tests, including the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). This helps in benchmarking Australian education performance internationally by comparing student performance against international standards.

In Australia, The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) are a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. The NPST comprise seven Standards which outline what teachers should know and be able to do. The Standards are grouped into three domains, Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. Within each Standard focus areas are laid out, and are separated into descriptors at the four professional career stages of teachers (Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead) (AITSL, 2011).

3.2 The Queensland System

Commented [DDC19]: You need a brief introductory paragraph to this section saying why you have selected Qld.

For the purpose of this study, the Queensland System has been studied because of its uniqueness, and its alignment with the fundamental concepts of effective FA.

Out of the diverse educational systems in operation in various states of Australia, the Queensland's assessment concepts and practices are fundamentally different from other territories in Australia, and are firmly founded in educational and assessment theory and research. The system of externally moderated school-based assessment has evolved over time, and demonstrates how a comprehensive approach to curriculum and assessment can be successfully designed and improved over time (Maxwell & Cumming, 2010).

According to Maxwell & Cumming (2010), the system is mainly based on the recommendations of report by William Radford in 1969 and subsequent research and

developments. The two main aims of the Radford Report were increased flexibility and adaptability in curriculum, and increased reliability and validity in assessment by removing single shot testing and assessing the full range of intended and desired learning outcomes. *Queensland Studies Authority (QSA)* is one of the most important institutions for education system in the state.

The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) was established by the Education Act 2002 (the Act), which has the following objectives:

- To help schools achieve quality learning outcomes for their students
- To facilitate students' transition through the education sectors
- To maintain public confidence in certificates of achievement.

The QSA develops, approves and revises syllabuses for the Preparatory Year to Year 12, and accredits syllabuses prepared outside of the QSA (e.g. for non-government Schools). It helps teachers implement QSA syllabuses by providing relevant services and resources (QSA, 2009). One of the key purposes of the Strategic Plan – 2013-17 of QSA is to support schools and other education providers by delivering high quality syllabuses and guidelines, and assessment and certification services (QSA, 2013).

3.2.1 Assessment System

As mentioned in QSA (2010), unlike most states and territories in Australia, Queensland has found no need for high-stakes public exams. It relies entirely on school-based assessment system where:

- Teachers are responsible for the assessment of students' achievement using standard descriptors, making judgments of students' work against these standards, and by using other resources and
- Review panels of trained teachers undertake external moderation.

The aim of moderation is to ensure comparability. Teachers' judgment is moderated by the QSA, using trained expert panels of teachers from schools. The District review panels are appointed and trained by QSA for each subject in all 13 districts. The system is cohesive and has a cumulative approach to teaching, learning and assessment from the Preparatory Year to Year 12 (P–12).

Commented [DDC20]: But teachers have considerable resources, e.g. examples of assessment tasks that they can use. You have referred to the QCATs below.

3.2.2 Principles & Framework

The principles of this system in the senior years are beginning to be applied to the early and middle years of schooling. The “year 1–9 system” focuses on aligning curriculum with assessment for student learning and the way learning is reported. This is achieved via the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework. The framework supports this through:

- **Essential Learnings**, to help align curriculum with assessment through connections between the two dimensions of “Ways of working” and “Knowledge and understanding”, and the assessable elements.
- **Standards** for Years 1–9, which reflect the two dimensions.
- **An online Assessment Bank** which gives models of assessment instruments that align essential learning and standards for consistency in teacher judgments.
- **Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks (QCATs)** in English, Mathematics and Science in Years 4, 6 and 9. QCATs provide model assessment tasks.

Schools have the option of administering either:

- Centrally-devised QCATs, developed by the QSA, or
- School-devised QCATs, developed by schools in accordance with a design brief (QSA, 2010).

3.2.3 QCAT

The QCATs, are a key component of the QCAR Framework, and are akin to Queensland’s tradition of moderated school-based assessment in the senior years of schooling. These tests are administered statewide annually. The three main purposes of QCAT are, to model an example of a quality assessment instrument aligned closely to the curriculum, support teachers in making consistent judgments about the quality of student work and to increase the consistency of teacher judgments, and to provide information to teachers and students about what students know and can do, as well as what is working well and what needs attention in school programs. They are designed to gather data that is most useful for teachers in schools. They are not conducted to

Commented [DDC21]: It would be worth discussion this system and the influence it might have on teachers and their assessment knowledge and skill.

measure the performance of schools or students. They are aimed at building the culture of school-based assessment in the middle years of schooling, and help in professional development for teachers who are not normally involved in the high-stakes moderation. The performance is reported through grades (A–E). The tests gather information on how their students are progressing and help in gauging the effectiveness of curriculum programs or the areas of the curriculum designed to cover problem solving and higher-order thinking (QSA, 2010). The QSA describes QCATs as ‘low stakes’ because they are not intended to be suitable for use in measuring school or teacher effectiveness or for comparing the performances of students in one school with the performances of students in other schools (Masters, 2009).

3.2.4 The Assessment Bank

The Assessment Bank is an online collection of assessment instruments and resources linked to the Essential Learnings and Standards. The Assessment Bank demonstrates the alignment of assessment, curriculum and reporting guidelines. The teachers have access to several assessment instruments and resources in the key learning areas (KLAs), and for all year levels from Years 1–9. All assessment instruments and resources pass through quality assurance processes (internal and external panels, editing and, field trials). The Assessment Bank also has an online forum for informal teacher collaboration and discussion about assessment.

Assessment packages include:

- A student booklet — the assessment as presented to students.
- A guide to making judgments — which states what is valued in the assessment and describes expected qualities of demonstrated student learning.
- Teacher guidelines — which gives task-specific information about the Essential Learnings being assessed, and preparation, implementation and feedback.
- An indicative A response — an example of an A-standard model response.
- Assessment-related resources (where applicable) —audio and/or visual stimulus required to complete the assessment.

- Sample responses (where available) — student responses annotated to clarify how the samples match the task-specific descriptors to guide the judgments. These are important resources for teachers’ professional development.

Commented [DDC22]: Again, these serve as important professional development resources or teachers.

Each complete assessment package models *five processes*, namely identifying curriculum, sequencing learning, developing assessment, making judgments, and using feedback (how and when to provide feedback to students) (QSA, 2010).

3.2.5 Resources

Resources are either professional or classroom resources. Professional resources provide information and links for readings, presentations, QSA publications and professional development materials for teachers. Classroom resources are designed for teachers to use or adapt for teaching and learning (QSA, 2010).

3.3 Exemplary Characteristics of Queensland System & discussion

As mentioned in (QSA, 2010), the Queensland system promotes authentic pedagogy. The act of “teaching” involves placing high-stakes judgments in the hands of teachers, and all their assessment “counts”. Assessment within the QCAR Framework values the professional judgment of teachers. The judgments about the quality of student achievement are made against predefined standards which ensure that:

- Both students and teachers know the expectations for each level of achievement, and can work together for best results
- They are comparable from school to school, and
- The achievements can be discussed with parents

Teachers are allowed to choose from a range of assessment techniques, and can tailor curriculum and assessment to local needs. Each syllabus has general objectives grouped by importance of relevant dimensions which state what needs to be taught and assessed. They undergo specialist training / development, and receive external advice. CA ensures that students receive frequent and detailed feedback. FA indicates the standards achieved by students and provides meaningful reports to parents. In any assessment instrument, students are made aware of the task, the conditions and the criteria and standards against which they will be assessed. There is total engagement with the assessment process and they learn to think creatively about problems. Teachers use a

standards matrix (A-E grading for each dimension) first at the individual assessment instrument level, and second for decisions about overall achievement towards the end of the course.

However, it is also important to note that concerns have been expressed about success of the Queensland education system. Performance of Queensland primary students was found to be lower in comparison with students in other states and territories in the NAPLAN and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2008. This has been partly attributed to the fact that in Queensland, students start in Year 1, whereas in other states there is the Kindergarten year. This means that for students in a particular grade level (e.g. Year 5), the students in Queensland are one year younger and have had one year less of schooling. However, there was also evidence of a declining trend in mathematics achievements in students from later years (Masters, 2009). This has received a lot of public attention, and aligning QSA assessment resources to the Australian Curriculum, managing the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, assisting schools to use NAPLAN data to inform teaching and building assessment capability are part of QSA's strategic plan for 2013-17 (QSA, 2013).

3.4 Salient Features of Saudi Arabian System

In Saudi Arabia, the Education Policy Document of 1969 has remained the main reference on the fundamentals, goals and objectives of education (IBE, 2011). The Supreme Committee for Educational Policy (established 1963) is the highest authority supervising education in the country. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Higher Education Council are other important bodies. The Ministry of Education delegates all operational and administrative responsibilities to the regional and provincial education bodies. Education Councils in each educational area democratize the decision-making process, reinforcing the ties between the educators at various levels, and open the doors towards the society.

A number of policy measures have been taken to ensure education for all, and to improve quality of education. Enforcing mandatory primary education (decision taken in 2004), and jumpstarting mechanisms for involvement of parents in monitoring the activities of children and performance of the school management and teaching staff are focus areas (MOEP, 2009). The Strategic Attitudes for improvement in education

Commented [DDC23]: I would like to see a discussion of the Qld system, linking it to the discussion in the previous chapter on types and purposes of assessment. The issue of teacher professional learning is also an important one.

Commented [GRS24R23]: This is included in the comments (a few paragraphs later).

include Admission entry & assessment systems development (MOE, 2005). Provision of qualified teachers is a priority for the Ministry (MOE, 2008).

Commented [DDC25]: Capitalisation??

Commented [GRS26R25]: MOE (2005) refers to school buildings etc., but the element of capital expenditure is not so pronounced. So the sentence has been reworded to focus on assessment systems only.

3.4.1 Primary education

As mentioned in IBE (2011), children enter the primary level at the age of 6, and the duration of studies at this level is six years. At the primary level, the focus is on learning about culture and enhancing abilities for making better choices regarding future academic or vocational direction. The emphasis is on religious studies, Arabic, general culture and science. For better evaluation of students' achievement, a regulation was approved in 1999 in order to reduce the number of examinations to ensure more time for learning. The main goal of the *school Comprehensive Evaluation Program* is to understand how the school is contributing towards student achievement, patterns of behaviour and skills as required by the education policy. The *Systematic Achievement Tests* are the basis of a comprehensive group of educational evaluation and measurement tools for Islamic Education, Arabic, mathematics and sciences. The Ministry has a list of basic requirements (knowledge and skills) that students are expected to meet during the elementary stage classes. The requirements are based on an analysis of the contents of the subjects.

Since 2006, students at the primary level are assessed only by CA. There are no more examinations or diagnostic tests in primary schools in Saudi Arabia. This is an important step in improving the quality of student learning. However, the transition to a FA system is not complete. This is because although the teachers are implementing CA, there is the lack of sufficient feedback on students' learning. Teachers are concentrating on assessing students' outcomes without enhancing their learning through effective feedback. Since feedback is a central element of FA, the Saudi CA assessment is primarily summative in nature. Therefore, considering the fundamental principles of CA and FA, the system is more akin to frequent SAs. Consequently, the effectiveness is likely to be limited. Improving the feedback mechanism is imperative for moving towards a FA system. FA system is known to enhance learning outcomes, and hence the Saudi Arabian system should make a conscious effort towards implementing that.

Commented [DDC27]: These are very important points, but they are buried. You should highlight each of them and make them separate paragraphs in which you elaborate on each.

Commented [GRS28R27]: I do not have the required reference. Please let me know the source so that I can elaborate further. In any case, I have expanded the section a bit.

3.5 Comments

The system in Queensland is unique compared to most systems in the world (including other parts of Australia). There is a collaborative approach to assessment, with ample

freedom for teachers to decide on key elements, and at various stages of assessment. The fact that they can choose the curriculum and the assessment models, albeit within the constraints imposed by QCAR & QSA, and also participate in development of the instruments makes the system inherently conducive to participatory development. Even the students participate in the assessment process as stakeholders due to the continuous nature of interactive feedback. This makes teachers and students more involved in the process and gain a sense of ownership of the system. The externally moderated school-based assessment balances the required weight between the teachers' student specific knowledge, and the need for standardization & moderation required to prevent bias and lack of uniformity. This is in line with the fundamental principles of continuous and FA which are discernible from the literature review. There is emphasis on deciding on the essential learning elements, setting standards for performance, continuous & interactive assessments and feedback to cover the gaps between the status quo and the goals.

The most remarkable feature of the system is the trust on the professional capabilities of the teachers. This empowers the teachers and strengthens their stature. It also helps them continuously learn on the job because they own and operate the system. On the other hand, the Saudi system is in the process of making the move from a high-stakes examination focused approach to a CA approach. As evident from the literature review, there is surely some focus on developing assessment systems at various levels of education, but there is also a necessary focus on building the infrastructure and provision of qualified teachers. The continuous system is more akin to frequent SA or IA. Improvement of feedback mechanism can take it closer to a formative system which can be more effective in improving student learning achievement.

The Queensland system has taken several decades to reach this level. However, due credit needs to be given for doing away with high-stakes examinations, and empowering the teachers as well as the students to reach higher levels of achievement. The system has been built upon the fundamental principles of effective assessment, and has also evolved by imbibing relevant suggestions from researchers, teachers, students and other stakeholders over time.

The Queensland assessment system is time tested, and the Saudi System can take inspiration and guidance from several exemplary practices being followed. So while adapting the system, there should be a move towards increasing the quality of CA and

empowering the teachers. The CA practices should be modified to include more interactive feedback between the students and the teachers. This will help achieve the goals of CA and inculcate better practices in the students and the teachers. However, it has to be kept in mind that even the recent performance of Queensland has not been very good. The achievements were below the Australian average in the preliminary results for NAPLAN (literacy & numeracy – years 3,5,7 & 9) for 2012 (ACARA, 2012).

With experience the competencies of the stakeholders, and the capability of the system will improve. However, the maturity level of the Saudi System, professional capabilities of the teachers (due to lesser experience with the CA system), and cultural & social nuances need to be considered so that the adaptation can be more effective.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

Many researchers are coming up with cognitive theories regarding the assessment of students and its importance in understanding its influence on the overall performance of the students. According to the study, positive learning is constructive, that is, students or learners are not only considered as receivers but can create their own set of knowledge. Hence, learners can achieve their goals easily and more successfully under the guidance of teachers and their assessment. Theories based on assessment are growing and dealing with complexities rather than assessing students on the basis of simple tests, exams and scores. Gone are the days when the dominating teachers were preferred by the head of the institutes, and test scores were the only criteria to judge the compatibility and the performance of the students.

The importance of primary education cannot be neglected in the upbringing of a child. Primary education is a foundation which actually helps the child to grow physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. Learning at an earlier stage helps the child to achieve milestones in his future career. The focus of this study was to evaluate the practices being followed in assessing the performance of the students at the primary level in Saudi Arabia and how the assessment is influencing their learning and achievements. To understand this influence, the researcher opted for some theories to get the complete understanding of the subject and the related policies, procedures and framework have also been studied. To implement positive learning, the environment, teachers and the Government had to face certain constraints and difficulties which also became the part of the researcher's analysis.

In this study, the research is focused on the assessment system in Queensland. Other points on which the research emphasized is the assessment practices being followed in Saudi Arabia at a primary level and how it is being considered as effective in terms of its positive results. Moreover, what are the other models which can be applied to improve the overall learning of the students at primary level were studied. Various concepts have been used in this research in order to get a better understanding of the subject. The term assessment has been described and studied in detail in the literature review and the associated term diagnostic assessment means that it takes place before the actual process of learning is initiated. FA happens during the process of learning and SA takes place periodically in order to measure the results or the outcome of learning. CA is a continuous process and has the elements of formative and SAs. FA has an important part which is called feedback. CA becomes formative if an effective feedback mechanism is integrated with the learning. In absence of feedback, the system is summative in nature. In this research, the source of data is secondary and has been collected through websites of Queensland and ministry of education of Saudi Arabia. Other data sources include journals and research papers on the education system of Saudi Arabia and Queensland.

The focal point of this research was to understand the education system of Saudi Arabia and the researcher came up with the conclusion that the education system of Saudi Arabia is not strong irrespective of the fact that the country has enough resources to strengthen their education system. The allocation of resources is not correct and hence the results are not positive. In order to improve the learning capabilities and performance of students, it is necessary to improve the quality of education at the primary level and to achieve the best level of primary education, the assessment practices have to be continuous and improved. Improving the continuous process of assessment requires, planning, commitment, time, resources and empowerment. This research also focused on the practices which can be implemented at primary level in Saudi Arabia in order to improve the efficiency and learning capabilities of the students at the basic level, that is, primary level.

According to this study, Saudi Arabia needs to implement the right strategies urgently in order to improve their learning environment and compete at the international level. For that, the government can conduct a comprehensive national assessment of education at the primary level to examine the positives and negatives of their

Commented [DDC29]: You could make this a much stronger statement.

assessment system. The recent initiatives and allocation of resources by government can yield better results if the monitoring of the implementation is better.

However, there is a huge argument among policy makers and the educators about achieving the optimal assessment system specifically for primary level of education that will actually enhance the learning outcome of the students and also meet the governmental and national targets. Though, Saudi Arabia has adopted CA practices in their education system in order to raise the quality of education. However, the system does not lay sufficient emphasis on feedback. Hence it is hypothesized that continuous system in Saudi Arabia is closer to frequent SA or IA. However, this requires further investigation. It is suggested that the assessment system may be changed to involve an effective feedback mechanism. This will help focus on the formative practices in assessment.

The assessment system of Queensland is considered as unique against many other systems being followed in the world, over here, the teachers have the authority to take decisions regarding assessments. The decisions are made based on participation including the participation of students as the stakeholders of the institute. The institute trusts on their teachers' knowledge and capabilities which also helps the teachers to make sound decision and keep on growing professionally. On the contrary, Saudi system are trying to adopt CA approach rather than practicing examination based approach. In order to adapt the better assessment system, Saudi system needs to make special efforts to improve their teachers' capabilities and make the overall Saudi system more effective.

Commented [DDC30]: I suspect that the CA practices are possibly closer to IAs are not formative. You could suggest this as a hypothesis that requires investigation. Timperley (2009) might be a good example of a way to investigate this possibility.

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