Utilizing Formative Assessment Culture in EFL teacher education programs in the Middle East

By

Khaled M. El ebyary

Damanhour University
Faculty of Education
Curricula and Instruction Department

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Abstract

Although there is general agreement that there is a difference between assessment of learning (summative assessment), and assessment for learning (formative assessment), and that both forms of assessment have valuable roles to play, comparatively little attention is given to the latter in foreign language teacher education programmes (FLTEPs) in the Middle East, which is the major channel for training and recruiting teachers of foreign languages at pre-university levels in many Arab states. This paper claims that there is a sort of unconscious and inherent distrust in formative assessment in teacher education programmes and therefore, aims to provide a snapshot of the implicit/explicit formative classroom assessment culture in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya. More precisely, the study examines a) instructors' views about the purpose/role of FCA for themselves, as well as for students, b) instructors' attitudes towards FCA as well as their perception of the attitudes of other parties that might be interested (including students) and c) evaluation with current FCA practice and whether or not there is a need for change. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from 63 instructors. Results suggest that in practice there is a gulf between the decision-takers' requirements that formative classroom assessment should be used and instructors' distrust in this form of assessment. Results suggested that there is an inherent de-emphasis on the part of the education system and that leads students, instructors and the community to believe more in summative assessments as the only acknowledged assessment tool that would influence students' careers.

Keywords: formative assessment, summative assessment, assessment culture

Introduction

Despite being described as an indispensable and integral component of any curriculum (e.g., Chong, 2018) and claims of rising interest in it (e.g., Saito & Inoi, 2017), formative assessment has been overshadowed by summative assessment practices in more ways than one. In fact, summative assessment research dominated and comparatively very little attention was given to formative assessment per se to the extent that formative assessment practices appeared unreliable and lacking connection to school assessment approaches (Crooks, 1988; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Knight & Yorke, 2003). Indeed formative assessment has been overlooked by summative assessment promoters over the last four decades (Crooks, 1988; Jones, 2005) and a sort of conflation between these two assessment strategies is often found in the literature, which has obviously been a prime cause of *definitional fuzziness* (Yorke, 2003) in the relentless attempts to define formative assessment.

The term '*formative evaluation*' was originally used by Scriven in 1967 in *the Methodology of Evaluation*, but it was Benjamin Bloom who first used it in his *Handbook on the Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Learning* in 1971 with its current meaning (Wiliam & Black, 1996; Black & Wiliam, 2003). Yet, there is still some uncertainty and lack of precision in relation to the terminology used with formative assessment. In this respect, various terms have been used by researchers such as *classroom evaluation* (Scriven, 1967; Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971; Crooks, 1988), *teacher assessment* (Teasdale & Leung, 2000; Leung, 2005), *classroom assessment* (McMillan, 2001; Stiggins, 2002) *classroom-based-assessment* (Gipps, 1999), *teacher-made assessment* (Wildemuth, 1984), *in-course assessment* (Greer, 2001), *learning-oriented assessment* (Carless, 2003; Keppell, Au, Ada, & Chan, 2006), *teacher-developed assessment* (Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985), *assessment to assist learning* (Ash & Levitt, 2003), *low-stakes assessment* (Wise & DeMars, 2005) or just *feedback* (Dietel, Herman,

& Knuth, 1991). However, the most recently-coined term is *assessment for learning* (Wiliam, Lee, Harrison, & Black, 2004; James & Pedder, 2006). The current research uses formative classroom assessment (henceforth FCA) and embraces Brookhart's (2007) description of such practice as '*the information about the learning process that teachers can use for instructional decisions and students can use for improving their performance, which motivates students*' (p. 44).

This paper claims that there is a lack of emphasis on formative assessment in teacher education programmes. This claim find support in the literature. For example, Jones (2014) explains that '*in some teacher education programmes, learning about pupil assessment is often relegated to a late stage…[which] can lead to student teachers' perceptions of assessment as an 'add on' rather than an ongoing process of dialogue and feedback*'. This paper aims to provide a snapshot of the implicit/explicit formative classroom assessment practices in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya.

Literature Review

It was in the last decade or so that FCA has come to the fore. It has even been claimed that this sort of assessment has developed into a prominent research area in its own right. The change in assessment vision has been ascertained by many research experts in different forums (e.g., Black & Wiliam, 1998a, 1998b; Gipps, 1999). In fact, considerable arguments have been concerned with finding answers to questions such as '*Is there a distinctive area where a line can be drawn between assessment and learning?*' and '*Do they overlap in a rather blurred area where assessment can be dealt with as a learning experience that would engage students into a sort of reasoning?*'. The development in our understanding of the learning process and how it takes place has been a major incentive to re-examine and reform education systems and this entailed a shift in the way(s) assessment is perceived. This reconceptualization, as labelled by Anderson (1998)

and McMillan (2001), has added to our insights of assessment in general and FCA in particular. The change in assessment purposes has led to the recognition of the limitedness of a single assessment method to serve all purposes. Dependence on objective testing and standardization procedures can be useful in certification and accountability, but the positive component every single learner might gain can be maximized through using other forms of assessment, i.e. FCA. In their description of the Black Box, Black and Wiliam (1998b) revealed how the pressures on the teaching/learning process is externally managed by some educational bodies with the prime aim of raising standards with the least attention given to what goes on inside the black box. They state "But what is happening inside? How can anyone be sure that a particular set of new inputs will produce better outputs if we don't at least study what happens inside?". In fact, Black and Wiliam (1998a) describe formative assessment as '*encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged*'(pp.7-8). Hence, Black and Wiliam (1998a, 1998b) urged the move towards a reconceptualization of the trichotomous interrelationship among *assessment, teaching and learning*. To Black and Wiliam (1998a)

> '*one of the outstanding features of studies of assessment in recent years has been the shift in the focus of attention, towards greater interest in the interactions between assessment and classroom learning and away from concentration on the properties of restricted forms of test which are only weakly linked to the learning experiences of students*'. (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, p7)

The move has been widely acknowledged by many researchers (e.g., Boud, 1995; Sadler, 1998; Shepard, 2000; Fautley & Savage, 2002; Briggs, Martin, Woodfield, & Swatton, 2003; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; James & Pedder, 2006; Irons, 2008). Similarly, many educational organisations (e.g. *Qualification and Curriculum Authority* (QCA) and *Department for Education and*

Skills (DfES)) have adopted such move as a keystone. Nevertheless, the very nature of this battle varies from one educational context to another.

Various meta-analysis studies in the area of language testing as well as general educational studies suggested that FCA has its benefits on students' learning (e.g., Kingston & Nash, 2011). Quantitatively oriented studies (e.g., Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000; Edelenbos & Kubanek-German, 2004) focused on individual teacher behaviours in relation to collecting formative assessment information and how such information is used. Large scale quantitative studies have also been used to compare perception and practice in different contexts. For example, Cheng, Rogers, & Hu (2004) compared the perception of college EFL/ESL teachers in three different context (Canada, Beijing and Hong Kong) and results suggested that compared to EFL teachers from Hong Kong and Beijing,

Canadian ESL teachers had positive predispositions toward the use peer assessment and self-assessment than teachers from. Satio and Inoi (2017) developed a mixed method study to scrutinise variances in 727 EFL junior and senior high school teachers' use of FCA in Japan. Results suggested that even within the same context, teachers' use of FCA seems to vary because of differences in intentions, approaches, purposes, and feedback. This study therefore examines the explicit/implicit formative classroom assessment culture in foreign language teacher education programs in some Middle Eastern countries, i.e. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya.

The Study Background and Methodology

Foreign language teacher education programmes (FLTEPs) in the Middle East are generally undertaken by Faculties of Education, Arts and sometimes Teacher Education Higher Institutes in certain countries in which student teachers generally enrol on four-year pre-service programmes after obtaining their secondary school certificate. The mission of these institutions is mainly to provide pre-service

teacher training that would qualify foreign language teachers at a Bachelor level to work as language teachers at the pre-university stages. However, schooling in most Middle Eastern countries can be characterised as an examination oriented system (Hargreaves, 1997) and so are FLTEPs in these countries. Consequently, almost all sorts of classroom practice align with the summative assessment plethora inherited in the education context. In contrast, the challenge of providing realistic formative assessment that would have positive impact on student teachers' learning is often questionable in such contexts. The challenge, this researcher suggests, is presumably based on an assessment culture created by a number of forces (e.g. large student numbers) and hence imposed on instructors and student teachers in these contexts. According to this working assessment culture, the sole purpose of FCA is to provide assessment tasks that would simulate the summative ones, i.e. summative use of formative assessment with the purpose of training students to pass the final tests. As a result, a feel of distrust in formative assessment that would imply any sort of dissimilarities with summative ones is generally often the case. This study therefore aimed to provide a snapshot of the implicit/explicit formative classroom assessment culture in foreign language teacher education programs in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya as typical Middle Eastern countries. Other Arab countries in the Gulf area (e.g. Qatar, Bahrain, UAE) were not considered here for a number of reasons the most important of which is that such countries depend on native speakers in EFL teaching in both state schools as well as international accredited schools.

The present study focused on FCA practice in writing classes in which the importance of this sort of assessment has continuously been emphasized in the literature (e.g. Hattie and Timperley, 2007). The study questions, as so will the results, address three major themes. These are a) instructors' views about the purpose/role of FCA for themselves, as well as for students, b) instructors' attitudes towards FCA as well as their

perception of the attitudes of other parties that might be interested (including students) and c) evaluation with current FCA practice and whether or not there is a need for change. The study questions were therefore tied closely to such themes. These questions were:

1- How far do instructors in the target contexts have common/different perception of FCA purposes?

2- What are instructors' attitudes, as opposed to their perception of their students' attitudes, towards FCA?

3- How do instructors evaluate current practices and how far do they share common views about the need for change?

The Study Sample

The sample comprised a total of sixty three instructors from different universities within the three countries involved (see table 1). Fifty-four participants responded to a questionnaire. The rest of the participants were interviewed through a semi-structured

Table 1. The Study Sample

Country	Questionnaire	Interviews
Egypt	21	3
Saudi	19	3
Libya	14	3
Total	*54*	9

interview. The sample comprised lecturers, assistant lecturers and demonstrators. These represented nineteen universities in all three countries. Egyptian participants came from nine universities, Saudi came from six universities and Libyans came from four universities.

The Study Instruments and Data Collection

The study was mainly based on two instruments: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was administered online and was live for two months. The questionnaire aimed to elicit data about the three themes mentioned at the beginning

of this study. Participants were reached through snowball sampling which involves 'identifying one or more members of a rare population and asking them to name other members of the same population. These additional persons are then contacted and asked to name additional persons in the rare population' (Chromy, 2008, p. 824). Having established communication with some participants through their contact details as published on the universities web pages, these provided contact details of other participants. A total of a hundred and thirty seven invitations were sent off and a total of sixty three responses were completed while fifty six dropped out after starting and eighteen did not respond at all. However, the completion rate was somewhat similar in all three countries (see table 2). Although the overall completion rates of the questionnaire were not very high as compared to the number of the online invitations sent off (see table 2), the respondents came from various universities in all three countries and this would urge the researcher to suggest that the study sample was representative.

Table 2. Instructors Questionnaire Completion Rate

	Viewers	Responses	Drop Outs	Completion Rate
Egyptians	53	21	20	51.22%
Saudis	49	19	15	55.88%
Libyans	35	14	21	50%

The questionnaire included twenty seven items divided in three sections. While section one collected demographic data, section two and three aimed to collect information with regard to a) instructors' views about the purpose/role of FCA for themselves, as well as for students, b) instructors' attitudes towards FCA as well as their perception of the attitudes of other parties that might be interested (including students) and c) evaluation with current FCA practice and whether or not there is a need for change. Five questions used Likert

scales and five were open-ended. The rest of the questions were multiple choice (see appendix A). On the other hand, semi-structured interviews were also used with a total of 9 participants distributed evenly with regard to the countries involved. The interviews aimed to seek more meaningful and in-depth information with regard to the themes involved. Furthermore, interviews explored the implicit issues brought about in the questionnaire and to find out the extent to which participants might share common perceptions of the need for change. Interviews were conducted online via Skype. It is noteworthy to mentions that the data obtained from the questionnaire was validated during the interviews.

Results

The results obtained in this study addressed the three main themes described earlier. These themes were the basis on which the assessment culture in the study context was profiled. These were a) instructors' views about the purpose/role of FCA for themselves as well as for students, b) instructors' attitudes towards FCA as well as their perception of the attitudes of other parties that might be interested (including students) and c) evaluation of current FCA practice and whether or not there is a need for change. In the remaining part of this section, findings on such themes are introduced correspondingly.

A. Instructors' Views about FCA

Investigating instructors' views targeted participants' understanding of the purposes and roles of FCA for instructors themselves, as well as for students. As for instructors' views of the purposes of FCA, a three-point scale was used to elicit their dis/agreement on the following purposes:

- *identifying what knowledge and skills have been learnt,*

- *providing evidence for student current writing performance,*

- *providing evidence of student long term progress,*

- *providing information about what students can do rather what they can not do, and*

- *monitoring teaching performance.*

Table 3.Participants' views about the roles of FCA for instructors

Item	Country	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Identify what knowledge and skills have been learnt	Egypt	94%	0 %	6%
	Saudi	95%	0%	5%
	Libya	92%	8%	0%
Provide evidence for student current writing performance	Egypt	97%	0%	3%
	Saudi	80%	**15**%	5%
	Libya	89%	11%	0%
Provide evidence of student long term progress	Egypt	81%	6%	13%
	Saudi	85%	5%	10%
	Libya	78%	7%	14%
Provide information about what students can do rather what they can not do	Egypt	68%	16%	16%
	Saudi	55%	30%	15%
	Libya	67%	22%	11%
Monitor Teaching Performance	Egypt	4%	26%	70%
	Saudi	5%	40%	55%
	Libya	11%	11%	87%

Table 4. Participants' views about the roles of FCA for students

Item	Country	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Give students feedback	Egypt	94%	3%	3%
	Saudi	89%	6%	5%
	Libya	100%	0%	0%
Motivate students	Egypt	90%	6%	3%
	Saudi	65%	25%	10%
	Libya	78%	22%	0%
Help students produce better writing QUALITY	Egypt	97%	0%	3%
	Saudi	75%	15%	10%
	Libya	89%	11%	0%
Help students produce better writing QUANTITY	Egypt	55%	19%	3%
	Saudi	20%	15%	30%
	Libya	67%	11%	22%
Provide evidence of long-term performance	Egypt	53%	21%	2%
	Saudi	65%	23%	12%
	Libya	67%	25%	8%

Participants showed their strong agreement to three main issues in terms of FCA roles for instructors: *identifying what knowledge and skills have been learnt, providing evidence for student current writing performance and providing evidence of student long term progress.* Less agreement was revealed with regard to *providing information about what students can do rather what they cannot do* (see table 3). However, a considerable number of participants revealed that formative assessment is not viewed as a valid tool to *monitor teaching performance*. Further elaboration with regard to these issues was brought to the interviews. An overall look at the participants'

responses during the interviews, the researcher perceived a feel of summative use of formative assessment among interviewees. The strong agreement participant reflected with regard to *identifying what has been learnt, providing evidence for performance and long-term progress and evenwhat students can do rather what they cannot do*was mainly because such aspects, according to interviewees, are signs of good achievement in future summative assessments. On the other hand, participants viewpoints indicating that formative assessment is not a valid tool to monitor teaching performance is simply because their contexts are highly summative examination led and the consequences of this type of assessment are often more influential on students' careers. Hence, policies are orientated more towards summative assessment in which instructors and students exert efforts to achieve better marks. According to one participant, '*students would never engage with a formative assessment task in the same way they would with a summative assessment*'. Moreover, many viewpoints assumed that students are even distrustful in any type of assessment that might have marginal influence, or even no influence at all, on their marks. Consequently, instructors' lack of enthusiasm enhances distrust in this sort of assessment. Therefore, the majority of instructors see no point in using FCA for monitoring teaching performance.

On the other hand, this paper examined instructors' perception of the role of FCA for students. Almost all participants in the three countries agreed that FCA should provide feedback to students. Although 90% of Egyptian participants believed that FCA should be a source of motivation, a considerable number of Saudi and Libyan participants (25% and 22% correspondingly) were neutral about this issue. Furthermore, the majority of participants agreed that FCA should improve students' writing quality rather than writing quantity. This was reflected in their responses to the items in table 4. The interviews revealed that such neutrality was because in reality FCA practice is not as frequent as it should be in these contexts, and
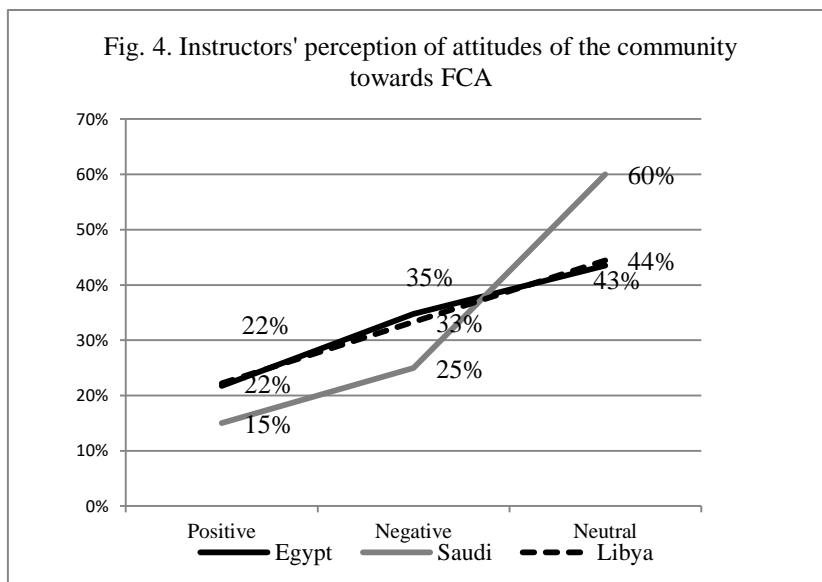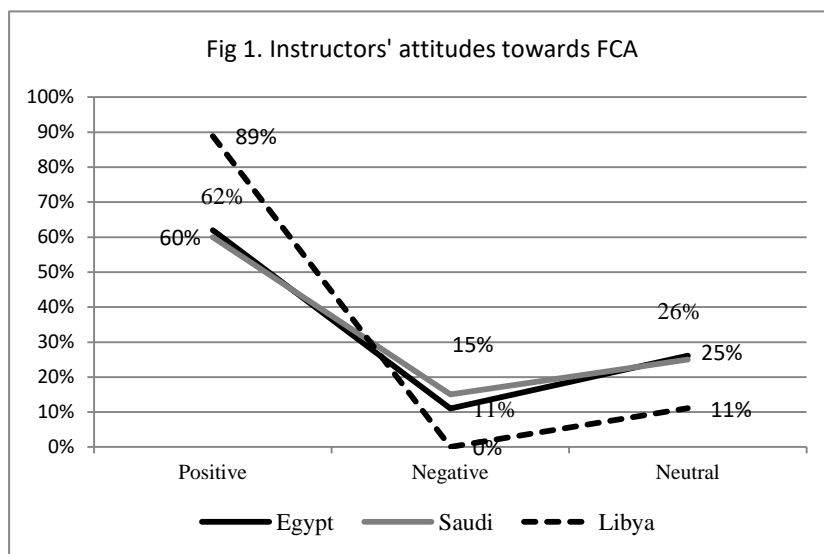
therefore the impact on students' motivation is minimum. Furthermore, a considerable number of participants in Egypt, Saudi and Libya expressed their agreement that FCA should provide evidence of student long-term progress (81%, 85% & 78% correspondingly). In this respect, minor responses expressed neutrality and even disagreement. Reasons for such responses were sought in the interviews with instructors. While some views disagreed to attempts of any performance-profiling role of FCA, an examination oriented context, to these participants, would urge students to adhere to certain learning strategies in which they tend to exert efforts in the weeks preceding the final exams memorizing a subject matter.
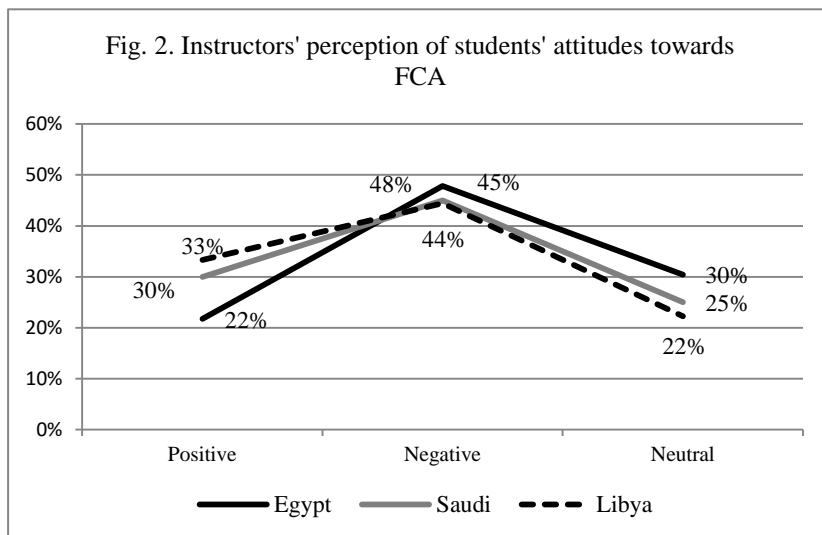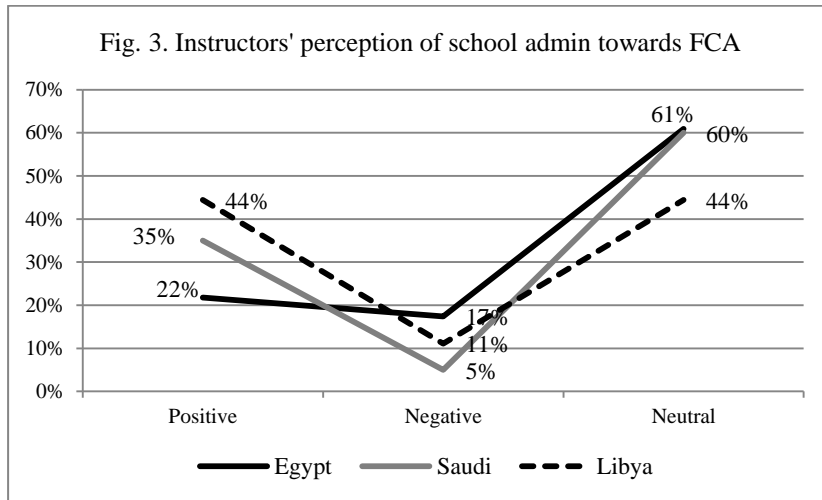
B. Attitudes

Other important findings were explored on the dimension of attitudes. In this respect, this paper examined instructors' attitudes towards FCA as opposed to instructors' perception of their students' attitudes towards the same sort of practice. In the same way, the current paper examined instructors' perception of the attitudes of other stakeholders: school administrations and the community in the target contexts at large.

While instructors marked their own positive attitudes towards FCA in Egypt (62%), Saudi (60%) and Libya (89%),26% of Egyptian participants, 25% of Saudis and 11% of Libyans still revealed neutral attitudes (see figure 1). In comparison, instructors were asked to rate their perception of their students' attitudes towards this sort of practice. In this respect, considerable perception of negative students' attitudes was expressed by instructors (48% in Egypt, 45% in Saudi and 2% in Libya) as opposed to a balanced perception of positive and neutral students' attitudes in all three countries (see figure 2). In terms of instructors' perception of the attitudes of other parties of interest, general neutral attitudes however, were noticed with regard to school administrations in all three contexts (61% in Egypt, 60% in Saudi and 41% in Libya). Although lower ratings were given to the

positive attitudes of school administrations, there was a clear perception of low negative attitudes (see figure 3). Instructors'perception of the attitudes of the community at large was not muchdifferent to their perception of school administration in terms of neutrality. A general neutral attitudes towards formative assessment by the community was perceived by instructors as opposed to lower negative attitudes and lowest positive ones (see figure 4)

Fig 1. Instructors' attitudes towards FCA

Fig. 4. Instructors' perception of attitudes of the community towards FCA

Fig. 3. Instructors' perception of school admin towards FCA

Fig. 2. Instructors' perception of students' attitudes towards FCA

However, in the interview an importantconcern voiced by instructors was their constant reference to the well-perceived negative student teachers' attitudes towards FCA practices. Many of them identified the explicit negative attitudes of his/her students towards FCA and the reasons behind that were not very clear to the researcher though mention of the educational system as a summative examination led context was often made. In addition, although many of the instructors expressed their awareness of the potentialities that such an assessment method might bring to students' learning, they revealed their dissatisfaction with the general unvoiced distrust in formative assessment. Moreover, participants indicated the urgent

need to device strategies that would improve the perceived negative attitudes.

C. Evaluation of FCA Practice

The attempt to evaluate FCA practice in the target contexts focused on participants' ownaccounts of these practices. This was carried out in a way that would compare to their understanding of FCA purposes for both instructors and students.Table 5 below illustrates such comparisons.

Although participants showed their strong agreement that one purpose of FCA is to be informative for instructors and for student teachers in relation to a number of aspects (see tables 3 & 4 above), one emergent result from the instructors' questionnaire was that current FCA is uninformative for instructors. On a five-point scale all participants in three countries rated FCA as *below average* in terms of reporting what has been learned. Similarly, reflecting students' learning was rated*below average* in Egypt and Saudi and *average* in Libya. On the other hand, analysis also revealed that respondents deemed FCA as being either *below average* or *extremely poor* in terms of informing student teachers about their own learning, providing feedback and reporting long term progress on such learning (see table 5). Such assessment sort was even rated as *below average* in Egypt and *average* in Saudi and Libya in motivating student teachers.

Furthermore, the data revealed that instructors' responses with regard to the extent to which FCA is fulfilling to student teachers' learning objectives align with their responses that indicated their awareness of FCA being fulfilling to course teaching objectives. In this respect, 34% of Egyptian instructors, 40% of Saudi and 55% of Libyan, rated FCA as *below average* in terms of helping to fulfil the objectives of a course. On the other side, 56% of Egyptians, 60% of Saudi and 88% of Libyan classified current FAC practices roles in helping students fulfil their learning objectives as either *below average* or *extremely poor*.

However, further discussion of these issues wasa major impetus for exploration during the interviews. It was revealed that instructors' awareness of student teachers' distrust in FCA practices acted as an impediment. To these instructors, FCA practices are not taken seriously by student teachers. In other words, the assessment culture encourages student teachers to believe in summative assessment as the sole type of assessment that would impact their careers. So, it would seem impractical for an instructor in these contexts to use FCA for purposes other than training students to collect more grades in the final exam, i.e. teach to the test. This reveals the extent to which the power of summative assessment tends to control instructors' practice even if they believe otherwise. Furthermore, some contextual constraints were reported in the interview to be highly influential on current practices. For instance, the issue of regularity of FCA practice was investigated and it was shown that practice of formative assessments in the classroom tended to be *average* in Saudi Arabia and Libya and *below average* in Egypt (see table 5 below). The main reason behind this irregularity was large student teachers numbers. In this respect, one participant stated, "*our section has too many students and not many teacher with much time. Marking assessment tasks every now and then is just not practical*". The interviews also revealed the issue of the impact of formative assessment. To these participants, student teachers show explicit distrust in FCA due to the inherent belief that they either have a marginal impact or even no impact at all on their final status in terms of success. Hence, instructors' efforts in this respect might be taken somewhat seriously by student teachers only when university regulations indicate that FCA counts towards the final grades. On the other hand, instructors feel more restrictions imposed by the contextual constraints of student teachers numbers and the summative examination plethora inherent in the assessment culture. This seems to justify instructors' views with regard to the extent to which FCA practices fulfil the teaching objectives. In this

respect, responses even support the views that practices are not fulfilling to objectives of the courses as assigned by instructors.

Table 5. **Overall Matrix of instructors' evaluation of FCA**						
	Aspect		**Excellent**	**Above Average**	**Average**	**Below Average**	**Extremely Poor**
1.	Reporting what knowledge and skills of writing have been learnt	Egypt	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Saudi	▬▬▬▬▬ (to Average/Below Average)				
		Libya	▬▬▬▬▬ (to Average/Below Average)				
2.	Accurately reflecting student learning	Egypt	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Saudi	▬▬▬▬ (to Average)				
		Libya	▬▬▬▬▬ (to Average)				
3.	Providing students with information about their writing performance	Egypt	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Saudi	▬▬▬▬ (to Average)				
		Libya	▬▬▬ (to Average)				
4.	Reporting long term progress in writing	Egypt	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Saudi	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Libya	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Extremely Poor)				
5.	Providing students with feedback about their writing	Egypt	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Extremely Poor)				
		Saudi	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Extremely Poor)				
		Libya	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Extremely Poor)				
6.	Motivating students to write	Egypt	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Saudi	▬▬▬▬▬ (to Average)				
		Libya	▬▬▬▬▬ (to Average)				
7.	Fulfilling to course objectives	Egypt	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Saudi	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Libya	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
8.	Fulfilling to students' learning objectives	Egypt	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Saudi	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				
		Libya	▬▬▬▬▬▬ (to Below Average)				

Compared to their views of what FCA should be like, instructors' evaluations of FCA practices revealed huge discrepancies between theory and practice. This was made obvious through the interviews where the majority of participants indicated the need for change. A high percentage expressed a lack of institutional support in this respect. In other words, regulationswithin the universities involved in this study often prescribe issues that the contextual constraints would make them impractical and unrealistic. For them, the institutional role, especially in higher education, is much more important than the prescription of regulations and course specifications. It was also noticed that the sever lack of communication among colleagues about FCA and the way it has been de-emphasized not only by the Education system but by the assessment culture as well.

V. Discussions and Conclusion

This study attempted to provide a snapshot of the assessment culture in foreign language teacher education programs in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya. The main feature of the study findings is the paradox between theory and practice. Participants referred to a well-perceived distrust in formative assessment among student teachers. The study drew attention to irregularity of formative assessment practices on the part of instructors who therefore deemed this form of assessment as invalid tool for monitoring teaching performance or students' learning. The study suggested that there is an inherent de-emphasis on the part of the education system and that leads students, instructors and the community to believe more in summative assessments as the only acknowledged assessment tool that would influence students' careers. According to the participants of the study, this of course reflects itself in the negative attitudes held towards formative assessment practices by many stakeholders. An implicit message in the interview, however, expressed a lack of institutional support in this respect. In other words, universities regulations often

prescribe issues that the contextual constraints would make them idealistic.

It was also revealed that instructors implicitly criticized their institutions with regard to preaching unrealistic values. The institutionsimpose regulations that conform to theoretical advance in the filed, but do not correspond to reality. Findings therefore suggest that although the potentialities of this type of assessment have been well established as it is believed to have a beneficial impact on levering students' learning to the extent that more and more educational bodies consider it worth exploring and exploiting, the assessment culture in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya seemed to have established a paradox between theory and practice. To sum, FCA in the contexts involved is seen as a main concern for policy makers, school administrators, and instructors, but actual practice is different.

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