

Dr. Eldar Shahgaldiyev
Khazar University, Head of English Language Department

**“Theoretical and Practical Substantiations
of the Role of Assessment in Improving Teacher Quality”¹**
Report at the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA)
33rd annual conference
Interdependence of National Assessment Systems and Education
Standards
16- 21 September 2007 at the Park Inn, Baku

In this report we try to offer a rich menu of quality tools and resources that can help schools and teachers improve teaching, learning and the documentation of classroom processes. It is related to the role of Assessment. It highlights three major activities - leadership, teamwork, and learning. Nowadays the schools in cooperation with the relevant ministries are trying to set the standard of performance which is sometimes not working with a magic recipe—they are using the essential elements of leadership, teamwork, and learning.

Leadership - is management of schools, personnel –are the faculty members, and the processes of learning are the full range embrace of triple interactions – teacher – students, teacher -teacher, and student – student/s. And the teacher quality is not only connected with humans but resource materials prepared by them as well. Moreover it also includes a quality of school curriculum and syllabus, all facets of teaching and learning materials and supplementary aids, physical, social and economic conditions of both levels - micro and macro.

If we consider the time space after the fall of USSR, for nearly 15 years, Azerbaijan’s schools have been at the center of a major reform effort to improve student learning. To accomplish that goal, it is also needed a crucial improvement of teaching. Consequently, efforts to address the quality of teaching are in progress at all levels — from individual schools and districts to much broader state initiatives. These reforms focused attention on what students were actually learning, but assumed educators could promote that learning by doing what they had always done; but now only redoubling their efforts. The achievement results sometimes did not produce a desirable and widespread improvement in student performance. On the next stage these reforms were directed to structural aspects of the teaching profession and the schools, including teachers’ salary and schools’ autonomy rise. It enhanced more decision-making authority in schools. However, despite the gained obvious achievements the student achievement still did not improve conspicuously. What was the problem that the schools couldn’t gain a desirable result?

Dear colleagues, features of the conducted educational processes and procedures make a witness that now our policy focus is much more concentrated on improving the quality of teaching. Reforms address teacher preparation, certification, continued professional development, and professional standards. We think that, central to these reforms is the recognition that capable teachers are the most critical link to higher achieving students. For this reason now even in the current focus of our International Conference there is put a question of quality improvement of teaching which is now highly invigorated.

This report also seeks to provide some suggested methods to such efforts. Its role is to review the range of contemporary thought on assessing teacher quality and to discuss the possibilities and problems of adapting existing methods and measures for the use of in large-scale surveys - Ministries of Education, Universities or the world wide educational institutions of the various types and range, involved in the processes of improving teacher quality.

¹ <http://iaea2007.tqdk.gov.az/cp/Assessment%20in%20MFA%20Career%20and%20Education%20Path.pdf>

The offered theme embraces two major parts: 1. the “role of assessment”, and 2. “improvement of teacher quality”. The following issues are brought forward related to these interrelated processes:

- a. What is an Assessment?
- b. The role of Assessment
- c. Ways and methods of Quality Assessment.
- d. Why do we need to improve teachers?

Assessment is very valuable element of education. Its role is undeniable so that a professional development must be of high quality to be appealing and perceived as valuable. But professional development initiatives are rarely evaluated in a constructive manner. An overall ***lack of evaluation and assessment tools*** and accountability not only contribute to a lack of information about the usefulness or effectiveness of professional development, but they also give teachers no incentive to take professional development seriously. Without incentives, teachers are not likely to participate in the professional development available to them. Unlike other professionals, teachers have little financial or professional incentive to improve their skills through professional development. Due to development of society inevitable some professions become less required; and on the other hand there emerge the new fields of educational development. Here we should underline some positive practices which have been developed by the Azerbaijan Ministry of Education. It refers to the opportunities given to our teachers’ to change or extend their specialty to the new fields of education through skills upgrade and refreshment courses.

Teachers do not have a career ladder whereby promotions are earned upon mastery of new techniques or successful demonstration of new skills. Teacher performance evaluations seldom measure whether teachers are translating professional development into effective classroom practice and student achievement. Instead, teachers tend to be rewarded solely for length of service. Obtaining a master’s degree is an exception to this rule but, because most districts do not specify that the degree must be in relevant subject areas, the incentive for obtaining the degree exists whether or not the degree improves classroom instruction or student learning. For the aforementioned reasons *the tools of assessment* and *a mechanism of improving teacher quality* still remain as two of the decisive issues in increasing an overall quality of education.

That is why nowadays Test of Teaching Knowledge (TTK) has become the key to improving student learning and teacher quality. But if we want to analyze the quality issues related to education it is necessary to overview the process from the early beginning – here from students’ admission. We propose the following ***instrumental theses and priorities to quality learning and teaching***:

I. Method applied on Zero level - Admission

- a) *improvement of admissions criteria* (incentives, etc) by the states – *enrollment*
- b) *application of psychological science* to clinical preparation of teachers

Azerbaijan State Committee on Students’ Admission has made some conspicuous positive changes in the students’ admission in 2007. Some new subjects were included into the block of subjects relevant to the appropriate specialties. The new methods applied for the improvement of admission criteria are underway.

It is already two years since Azerbaijan has started application of psychological science in admission of MA level students. As one of the nominated experts of this field I can assure you that from year to year the level and structure of the related questionnaire for the quality evaluation is becoming more and more comprehensive. I would offer in future the group members plan presentations on psychology's contributions to education, academic and teacher training assessment, statewide accountability, classroom management and evidence-based interventions for students and families.

Psychologists need to grab the reins and gather support from their colleagues in teaching and education to bring to bear what they know. That's why we need to consolidate the psychological efforts to work for the benefit of quality improvements.

II. Methods applied and common at the beginning - Recruitment stage: 1- 6 months

- a) a test of *content knowledge* (math, science, etc.)
- b) a test of *teaching knowledge* (classroom management, pedagogy, etc.)
- c) an assessment of *actual teaching* (integration of a content and teaching knowledge, mentoring and measuring student performance)

We want to specifically underline the role of collaborations among educators and psychologists to enhance teacher and student learning. For this purposes at the beginning of a recruitment stage we offer the following priorities:

- a. Professionals of mental health and schools should share resources so that *mental health goals join with academic goals*, hence force the energetic level of professionals should thoroughly be considered. Like an "early warning system" we should work out the feasible structure of students' examination – would it be IQs or something else, but mainly working effectively in the field of "students' at risk"
- b. Schools can better academic achievement expectations if they implement highly *integrated standards-based instruction for all students*.
- c. Schools of education can improve preparation of teachers, for example, by revising admission criteria for teachers (actually in Azerbaijan this field is undergoing to some crucial positive changes nowadays) and incorporating more training that simulates realistic teaching situations through computer programs, videos and role-playing. It should also consider thinking skills, critical reasoning and personal qualities – like responsibility, self-esteem and management, integrity and honesty.

III. Analysis during the teaching process – Performance: 8 months-2 years

- a) Test of Students Knowledge (TSK) - *qualitative and quantities indicators* of the students (the school uses video samples of students' teaching to measure their progress, etc).
- b) Appropriate *statistical analyses* around validity and reliability

Teacher education models can better incorporate science. For instance, we can more energetically use the method of usage of video samples of teachers' and students' teaching to measure their progress, providing multiple approaches to assessment. The advanced and approved methods of teaching can further be disseminated and built on.

The conducted by us experiments during the school hours made a testimony to the fact that a thorough analyses of the test results, inter and intro group comparisons and expertise, charting, detailed results variables by sectors and areas, their constant and regular assessment and evaluations give a wide range of comprehensive feedback for further improvement of teaching and learning quality. The qualitative indicators are closely connected with quantities indicators or vice versa. For example:

- a. Age, succession of the session, time lost, time spent, time on task or engaged time, divisional structure of the classroom hours, allocated curriculum and thematic hours, and the likely quantities are interrelated with no less important factors as:
- b. Quality performance, systematic education, teaching methods and strategies, problem solving and critical thinking skills and etc.

The progress or continuum of the performance level is limited to 2 years covering the full range of educational activities.

One more important issue is connected with the effective distribution of resources. If we charge by statistical analyses, there is an inequitable distribution of effective teachers. The schools with the biggest achievement gap (low-performing schools) tend to attract insufficient numbers of quality teachers. Schools serving predominantly low-income and minority students are much more likely to be staffed by inexperienced, unlicensed teachers who hold no advanced degrees and who lack content knowledge or a college major in the subject they teach. This situation can also be easily found from the achievement result analyses of the students involved in those educational institutions.

IV. During reassignments and carrier promotions: more than > two years

- a) Suitability of the criteria to the *related areas* and
- b) to the *unrestricted areas* (contributions to education, academic and teacher training assessment, statewide accountability, classroom management and evidence-based interventions, etc)

Studies provide strong clues but no definitive answer to the question of what makes a teacher effective. Available evidence (sometimes disputed) suggests that student achievement may be related to these **measurable teacher qualifications**:

- Certification
- Licensure
- Experience
- Subject-matter knowledge
- Pedagogical preparation

Some studies even have found that student achievement depends more on teacher qualifications than on a student's socioeconomic background, or than the size of budgets or classes at school. In particular, **math and science** teachers who majored in those subjects tend to produce more highly performing students (39%, according to one analysis).²

Apart from this, the quality assessment of the teachers needs to meet the requirements of Public Model Policies proposed for effective teacher standards. I think we should very deliberately collect these opinions and translate them into the appropriate police for the teacher licensing system, specifically into licensing standards for individual candidates and standards for institutions that provide pre service and in service programs. The purpose of it is not to create yet another standard document, but to consider best thinking of education practitioners and researchers, and to articulate the collective voice of the states regarding sound teacher licensing policy.

At the end of my report I would like to thank all the conference participants and organizers for their hard works and contributions in improvement of our educational system and life.

² <http://teachersmind.com/>