

Using SP Xpress as an Analysis Tool to Enhance the Learning and Teaching of Reading in English Language

Zoe So Yee Chan

Lingnan University Alumni Association (H.K.) Primary School

Introduction

Assessment for learning is an effective method of raising students' learning performance. It is based on the principle that students will most improve if they understand the objective of their learning and how they can achieve this objective.

Over the past two years, our school has aimed to develop assessment-for-learning practices. By investing in assessment data analysis, it was found that teachers can ensure that learning is meaningful for all students, teaching is effective and attainment outcomes are improved. This article shares our experiences of using SP Xpress as an analysis tool for assessment for learning in the key learning area of English Language Education.

The Aim of Assessment for Learning Strategy

The purpose of assessment for learning is to collect information about students' progress and achievements in relation to the learning objectives at the corresponding level. Teachers review their expectations of students' learning, the content of learning, and their teaching strategies to enhance learning and teaching through assessment, thereby providing *quality feedback* on how to improve performance. This is assessment for learning (CDC, 2004).

Our strategy is to make assessment for learning more systematic and consistent. Since this was the first stage of developing assessment for learning over the past two years, our aim was that *every teacher* has (1) equipped to make well-founded judgments about students' attainment, especially in reading,

(2) understood the concepts and principles of progression, and (3) have been able to know how to use their assessment judgments to plan ahead, particularly for students who are not achieving basic levels of competence.

Using SP Xpress® (Version 2.2) as an Analysis Tool

As mentioned in the previous section, assessment helps teachers understand students' learning processes, strengths and weaknesses, and the effectiveness of the related teaching strategies. Based on assessment data, teachers can adjust their own teaching objectives in order to fulfill students' learning need more effectively.

SP Xpress® (Version 2.2) is an assessment data analysis tool which helps teachers to implement assessment for learning. It analyzes students' performance in assessments, thereby generating statistical data and graphs to help teachers diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of each student. SP Xpress® (Version 2.2) also helps teachers further improve the quality of assessing items in order to transcend learning and teaching.

SP Xpress® (Version 2.2) reveals students' performance in assessment and thereby allows teachers to understand the relationship between students' learning ability and the facility level of the assessment items. It categorises students into 4 types according their performance in the assessment. These 4 types are:

Type A: high learning ability; high learning stability

Type B: high learning ability; low learning stability

Type C: low learning ability; low learning stability

Type D: low learning ability; high learning stability

Type A Students are able to follow the learning process and grasp the ideas of the assessing items; Type B Students are those who get the correct answers by luck due to their unstable performance in the assessment; Type C Students are the careless students who may lack assessment skills or misunderstand the

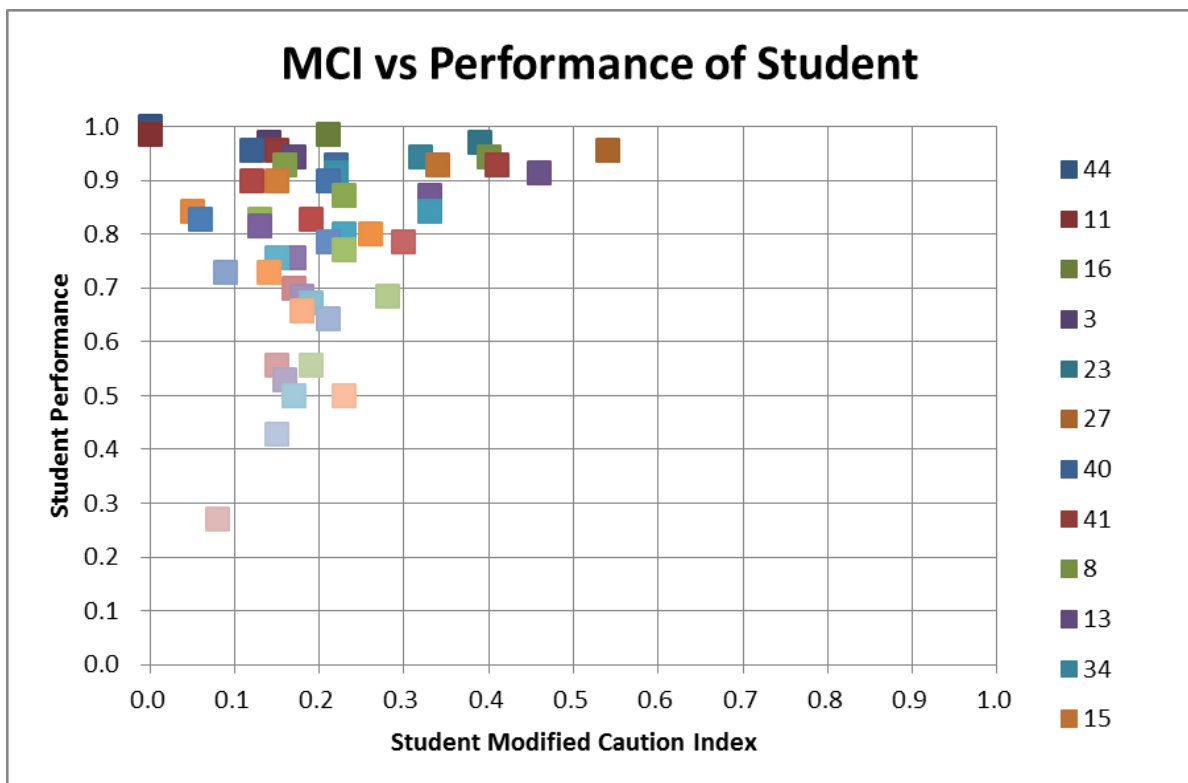
assessing items; Type D Students are remedial students. After knowing their students' situation, teachers can make plans with appropriate learning and teaching strategies for effective improvement (莫慕貞 et al., 2011).

The Use of Assessment Information

Using Summative Assessment Data for Groupings

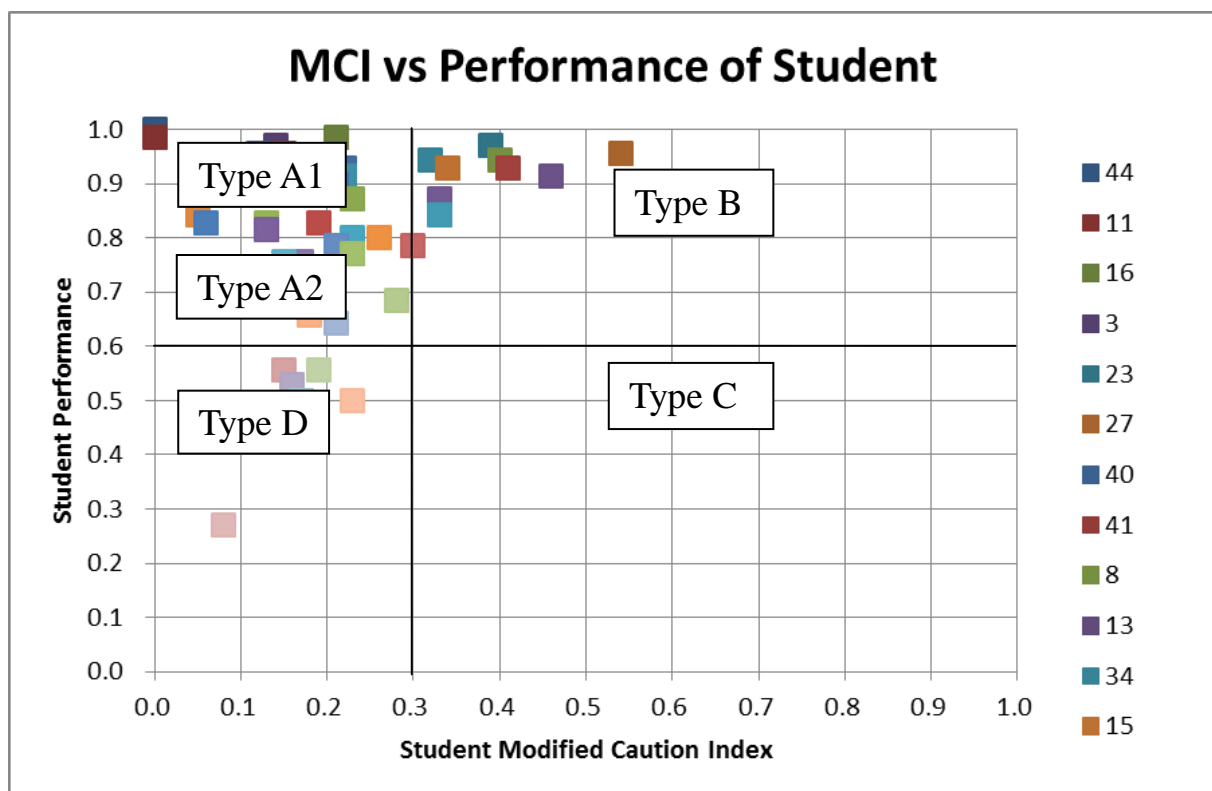
In the study of students' self-regulated learning, it was found that students with lower abilities used fewer self-regulated strategies than those with higher ability (Salili and Lai, 2003). In order to better cater for learning diversity, we placed students into 2-3 groups according to their English learning ability in Primary 3 to Primary 6. Thus, the first step of our strategic approach was to have *parallel English lessons* in each form level so that we can put students into the ability groups.

Summative assessment data of the previous school term was used when forming groups. We looked into the chart of "MCI vs Performance of Students" provided by SP Xpress which shows students' accuracy rate and their modified cautions index.



There are two ability groups in Primary 3 to Primary 5. All students of Type A are placed into RED GROUP and those who are Type D are placed into BLUE GROUP. For Type B and C Students, the form level English teachers are required to look into their performance in the assessment and assign suitable groups for those students.

For Primary 6, students are divided into 3 groups (RED GROUP, BLUE GROUP and YELLOW GROUP). As mentioned above, we look into the information from the chart of “MCI vs Performance of Students” but categorize students into 5 types instead of 4.



All students of Type A1 are placed in RED GROUP (higher ability group) while students of Type A2 are assigned to BLUE GROUP. YELLOW GROUP is the remedial group, which are Type D Students with lower learning abilities in English. As same as Primary 3 to Primary 5, other form level English teachers are required to look into the assessment performance of Type B & C Students and assign suitable groups for those students.

Using Summative Assessment Data for Locating Students’ Learning Difficulties

For the first stage of the development of assessment over the past two years, we have focused on students’ reading ability and 21 school-based reading strategies have been developed. Questions raised in reading lessons and asked in school-based reading worksheets are all based on these reading strategies according to our school-based reading curriculum framework. These reading strategies are then assessed in both formative and summative assessments in order to understand students’ learning processes in reading. Using SP Xpress, the accuracy rate of each question is shown and we make good use of this data when planning reading lessons.

Question	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4	Q.5	Q.6	Q.7	Average
Reading Strategies	Recognizing the format of text types	Analysis skills	Constructing meaning from the text	Dictionary skills	Identifying main ideas	Constructing meaning from the text	Relating personal experiences to reading	
5Red accuracy rate	92.59%	14.81%	<u>66.67%</u>	37.04%	14.81%	<u>66.67%</u>	100%	56.08%
5Blue accuracy rate	<u>61.54%</u>	15.38%	26.92%	26.92%	15.38%	42.31%	<u>65.38%</u>	36.26%
Total accuracy rate	77.36%	15.09%	47.17%	32.08%	15.09%	54.72%	83.02%	46.36%

The above shows an example of one of the comprehension sections in a summative assessment. According to the information, generally, students did not do well in constructing meaning from the text, identifying main ideas, applying analysis skills and dictionary skills. This implies that students at this form level should have further practice with these four reading strategies during the next school year and these strategies will come to be the core reading strategies at this form level next school year. Teachers are required to think of more questions with those reading strategies when planning lessons and designing reading worksheets. Questions with those reading strategies will be assessed with reading comprehension in both formative and summative assessment to understand students’ learning progress.

Since students are formed into ability groups, questions with different learning levels are provided. When planning units of work, teachers are asked to think of questions with different reading strategies according to students' learning ability. That means teachers have to plan individual units of work of reading sections for RED GROUP, BLUE GROUP and YELLOW GROUP. When teaching the same reading strategy, questions may be different in terms of wording, cues, ways of delivery, etc.

Using Formative Assessment Data to Detect Students' Learning Difficulties

There are 2 formative assessments for reading comprehension in each term. The taught reading strategies, including the core reading strategies, are assessed in the paper. The reading strategy is shown next to the comprehension question to let students know about their reading performance and which kind of reading strategies they are weak in. Similar to the summative assessment, SP Xpress is also used as data analysis. As mentioned before, we emphasize on reading at the first stage.

Question	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4	Q.5	Average
Reading Strategies	Recognising the format and language features of some common text types	Identifying main ideas	Locating specific information	Locating specific information	Analysis skills	
3RED accuracy rate	100%	92.59%	85.19%	<u>77.78%</u>	100%	91.11%
3BLUE accuracy rate	95.83%	95.83%	29.17%	<u>62.5%</u>	54.17%	<u>67.50%</u>
Total accuracy rate	97.92%	94.21%	57.18%	70.14%	77.09%	<u>69.22%</u>

Using the summative assessment information of the previous term, we were able to locate the core reading strategies for each level. For the formative assessment information, we could also decode students' existing/potential learning difficulties in reading. For example, RED GROUP students performed well in the above formative assessment but generally, only 77.78% of the students got the correct answer in Question 4 with the reading strategy of locating specific information. And BLUE GROUP students also had an

unsatisfactory performance in the application of the same reading strategy. The data reveals that maybe there was a lack of practice on locating specific information in the previous weeks or the questions within this reading strategy were too difficult for the students. For the form level English teachers, they were asked to think of some questions with this strategy in the following lessons. For BLUE GROUP students, they need to have training of analyze the passage as the assessment data shows that only 54.17% of the students got the accurate answer when applying analysis skills.

Outcomes of Using Assessment Data Analysis

With the development of 21 school-based reading strategies and school-based curriculum framework, teachers, as well as students and parents, know what students are learning and what is going to be assessed. By having better understanding of assessing knowledge, teachers know more about students' learning difficulties and with the development of structured and systematic assessment systems, teachers find it easier to track students' progress, especially in reading. Each teacher is able to recognize the weakest reading strategies that his/her students have and develop ways to improve the strategies by looking at the units of work and lesson plans. After two years, it has been observed that our students' reading level is improving when having benchmark level reading tests and the TSA. Although it is quite time-consuming to insert assessment data, teachers have revealed that it is worthwhile to spend time on the data analysis and they would like to have further analysis on other language skills such as writing and speaking.

Further Development

Self-regulated Learning

The development of assessment of students is still continuing and we aim to have further development over the next few years. Having built on the work of our teachers, our aims for the next stage are that:

- every student is aware of their progress, and understands what is required to improve and how to achieve this;
- every parent is aware of how their child is doing, what they need to do to improve and how they can support their child and their teachers.

The long-term goal of assessment analysis is to let students become ‘metacognitively wise’ (Galton, 2007). Students should learn to self-regulate their own learning by not only acquiring appropriate reading strategies provided by teachers but also be able to apply the strategies autonomously and recognize when a chosen strategy is inappropriate. A key to developing this kind of self-regulated learning is the use of processing feedback. In the future, we plan to get students involved more in their own learning by letting them identify their own mistakes, questioning them about the suitability of their chosen reading strategies and calling for suggestions as to how to solve the same problems when reading.

References

- Curriculum Development Council (2004). *English Language Education Key Learning Area: English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-6)*. Hong Kong: The Education and Manpower Bureau.
- Galton, M. (2007). *Learning and teaching in the primary school*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lee, J. C. K., Yin, H., & Zhang, Z. (2009). Exploring the influence of the classroom environment on students’ motivation and self-regulated learning in Hong Kong. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 18(2), 219-232.
- 莫慕貞、丁彥銓、何昊璇、黃英華、謝棹南、徐坤、姚靜靜 (2011)。《優化學習導向評估之SP Xpress 2.2》。香港：PACE Publishing Ltd。

Author’s e-mail: chanmakmak@gmail.com