

**Anecdotal Records:
A Successful Tool in the English Language Teaching and Learning**

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Abstract

A variety of strategies and tools are used to assess students' learning on an ongoing basis in the context of everyday classroom experiences. Assessment information provides the foundation for decision making and planning for instruction and learning. This paper discusses about using Anecdotal Records as a tool to observe students' progress in the learning of English language. Taken regularly, anecdotal records become not only a vehicle for planning instruction and documenting progress, but they also tell the story of every student. Students scored average and below average marks are the target participants of this study. The average and below average students of a particular course were selected based on their marks obtained in Quiz I and proper anecdotal records were maintained for these students to analyze their progress in studies throughout one full semester. The overall observation of the survey reveals the fact that maintaining anecdotal records is likely to encourage them to learn English language.

Keywords: Assessment tools, anecdotal records, teaching and learning.

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The world is advancing every day and students need to know not only the basic reading and arithmetic skills, but also skills that will allow them to face the challenges of the world. They should develop critical thinking skills and they must develop knowledge of analyzing and making inferences. Our students require educational goals that fit day to day challenges. These innovative learning goals change the relationship between the instruction and assessment. It is the high responsibility of the teachers to take active roles in making decisions about the purpose of assessment and the content that is being assessed. Research studies show that effective classroom assessment has a greater impact on student achievement than any other type of assessment. Assessment is an integral part of teaching, as it determines whether or not the goals of education are being met. Assessment has influence on the achievement and it affects decisions about grades, placement, advancement, instructional needs, curriculum, and, in some cases, funding.

Teacher observation and assessment inside and outside the classroom has been accepted directly as a legitimate source of information for recording and reporting student achievement of learning outcomes. Assessment involves observing and documenting children's overall personality development, their learning processes, experiences and relationships, and their effective interactions with the world around them. The purpose of assessment is to gather meaningful information about learners in their process of learning in order to make informed decisions to benefit their education and development. Teacher observation is directly capable of providing substantial information on student demonstration and achievement of learning outcomes at all levels of education. Teacher observation contributes to valid judgments concerning student learning outcomes and their achievements, evidence needs to be gathered and recorded systematically. Systematic gathering and recording of evidence of student progress requires preparation and foresight. Using a combination of various assessment techniques is generally best to gain a fuller understanding

of the student. Observational narrative techniques, also called anecdotal records, can result in a rich array of developmental information about individual student progress in learning that can be used in a variety of ways. The researcher has selected Anecdotal Records as such a tool to assess students' progress in English language learning.

Anecdotal Records

Among many observation tools, anecdotal record keeping is the best tool to observe students' progress in studies. The American Association of School Administrators define an anecdotal record as, "a written record kept in a positive tone of a child's progress based on milestones peculiar to that child's physical, social, economic, aesthetic and cognitive development." (AASA, 1992). Anecdotal records provide a longitudinal qualitative picture of the behavioral changes in the life of each student and this systematic recording is carried out overtime.

Rhodes and Nathenson-Mejia (1992) identified anecdotal records as a powerful tool for literacy assessment. Miller-Power (1996) argued that systematic, daily recording of children's actions was essential to generate focused instructional planning. Rollins-Hurely and Villamil-Tinajero (2001) used observational records to assess the language proficiency of English learners.

Baumann.J and Duffy-Hester, A. (2002) state that a fundamental purpose of assessment is to communicate what the child knows and is able to do. Teacher-generated, anecdotal records provide an insider's perspective of the child's educational experience.

Baker, L., Dreher, M.J., & Guthrie, J.T. (2000) identify that taking observational notes allows the teacher to record a wide range of authentic experiences and even unintended outcomes of literacy development. These notes are used to record objective and subjective information as well as affective information, such as levels of engagement, curiosity, and motivational factors

Grounlun (1985) asserts that anecdotal records provide a longitudinal qualitative picture of the behavioral changes in the life of each student. Omodara records about individual needs form a basis for decision making by aiding human memory. Anecdotal records are used to record the observed behaviors, skills and attitudes of individual learners as they relate to the outcomes in the program of studies. Anecdotes possess the advantage of being used to assess learners in the classroom lessons as well as outside the classroom activities. The record can be the description of the performance or events or activities going on in the class during the lessons and also it can be written in response to a product or performance that a learner has completed

Sax and Gillbert (1980) write that data obtained from anecdotes can be used to diagnose problems and hence ways of combating such problems. They can be used to develop behavioral norms. They are capable of enabling teachers to write valid and reliable reports or references about the pupils. This can be achieved through records of important episodes such as fight, quarrels, crying, failure to attempt or complete assignment, refusals to participate in games or other activities. Also truancy, cheating, shyness, fearfulness, suspiciousness, withdrawal, and other signs of emotional problems could be recorded as they occur.

Goodman (1985) mentions that evaluation provides the most significant information if it occurs continuously and simultaneously with the experiences in which the learning is taking place. Teachers who observe the development of language and knowledge in children in different settings become aware of important milestones in children's development that tests cannot reveal.

Anecdotal records are systematically kept notes of specific observations of individual student behaviors, skills and attitudes in the classroom and it relates to the outcomes in the program of studies. Anecdotal records give cumulative information regarding progress, skills

acquired by a student and directions for further instruction. Anecdotal notes are often recorded as the result of ongoing observations during the lessons but may also be written in response to a product or performance the student has completed. The notes recorded about a student are brief, objective and focused on specific outcomes. Notes taken during an activity or immediately after an activity are generally the most accurate. An anecdotal record is the observed behavior of a student in and outside the classroom. It is a record of some significant episode that happened in the life of the student in and outside the classroom that sheds light on the conducts, thinking, skills and capacities revealing significant features and characteristics about his/her personality. Anecdotal notes for a particular student can be periodically shared with that student or be shared at the student's request. These records can also be shared with students and parents at parent-teacher-student conferences.

The purpose of anecdotal notes is to:

- provide information regarding a student's development over a particular period.
- provide ongoing records about a student's instructional needs.
- capture observations of significant behavior of students that might otherwise be lost.
- provide ongoing documentation of learning that may be shared with students, parents and teachers.

Techniques for Writing Anecdotal Records

Reflecting about techniques for writing anecdotal records can positively affect both the content of the records as well as the ease with which they are recorded. Thorndike and Hagan (1977) suggested guidelines for the content of anecdotal records that teachers may find helpful.

- Describe a specific event or product.
- Report rather than evaluate or interpret.
- Relate the material to other facts that are known about the student.

Focus of the Study

The main aim of this study is to find out how anecdotal records are the most useful and successful tool in the undergraduate language teaching class rooms in Saudi Arabia. Usually, anecdotal records are not used effectively in the classrooms by the students and teachers. There is no record for a student's progress in studies. In reality, there are many students who drop a course due to the lack of knowledge of their own progress that leads to lack of confidence in a particular course. This situation led the researcher to find a proper method to motivate the students to continue in a course.

Proper maintenance of anecdotal records helps the teacher to observe individual students and their progress in studies. This observation helps the teacher to give suitable guidance as well as providing suitable materials and adapt suitable teaching strategies for improvement. Observing the anecdotal record of a particular student, the teacher gets a clear idea about the student. It also helps the student to analyze and observe her own progress for further improvement in her studies.

Methodology

To get the general idea of the use of anecdotal records, this research was conducted for one full semester during the Auiz II, first and second mid-terms and the final examination. Students who scored average and below average marks are the target participants of this study. Average and below average students were selected based on their marks obtained in Quiz I which was conducted for 10 marks. Forty students were selected for this survey and the researcher maintained a total record of all students personally.

Test Administration Procedure

The researcher prepared a table format of anecdotal record for each student. The researcher identified each student's educational needs. Students' profiles provided ideas for the researcher for collecting assessment information and give feedback about students'

learning outcomes. Based on the assessment, formative feedback was given to each student personally about their learning styles. The data collected by the researcher were related to the learning attitude of every student. Entries were made at regular intervals with the presence of the students followed by the guidance and advice given for the academic improvement of the selected students.

Observation and Analysis

Table -1 Performance in Quiz 1

Total number of students	69
Total number of students passed	35
Total number of students failed	34
Pass percentage	51
Fail percentage	49
Class average	5/10

Table -2 Performance in Quiz 1I

Total number of students	69
Total number of students passed	40
Total number of students failed	29
Pass percentage	58
Fail percentage	42
Class average	5.5/10

Table -3 Performance in Mid-term I

Total number of students	69
Total number of students passed	59
Total number of students failed	10
Pass percentage	85
Fail percentage	15
Class average	14/20

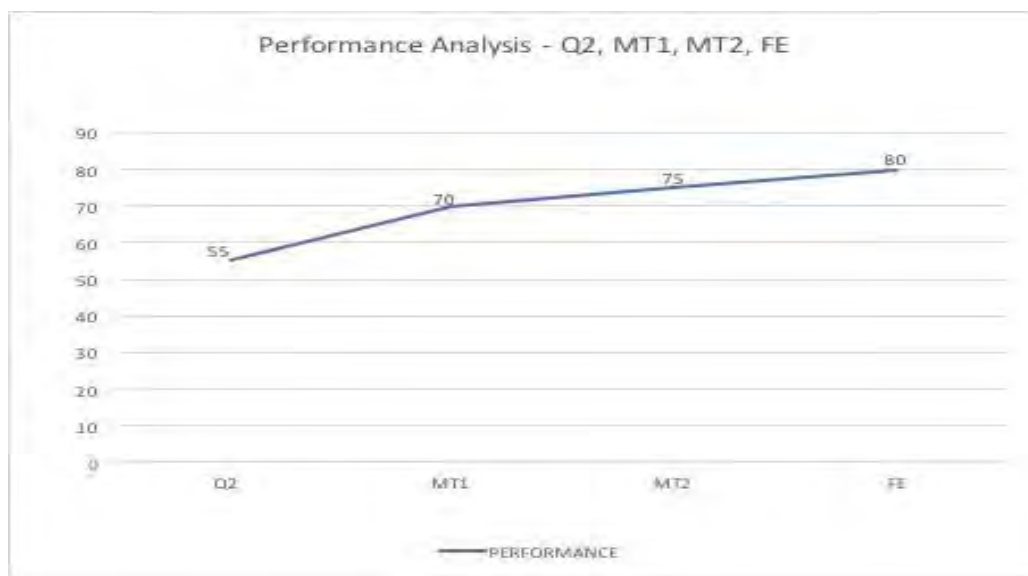
Table -4 Performance in Mid-term II

Total number of students	69
Total number of students passed	62
Total number of students failed	7
Pass percentage	90
Fail percentage	10
Class average	15/20

Table -5 Performance in the Final Examination

Total number of students	69
Total number of students passed	62
Total number of students failed	7
Pass percentage	90
Fail percentage	10
Class average	16/20

Graph 1 – Performance Analysis



The analysis of the average and below average students’ performance was observed after Quiz II, Mid-term 1, Mid-term 2 and Final Examination. There was a gradual progress observed in the performance of the students. In Quiz II, the students’ pass percentage was slightly improved and the average mean score of the class also had slight improvement. After

Quiz II, the selected students of the survey gained awareness that there was a record maintained by the researcher to observe their performance. This awareness created a positive impact on students to make further improvement in their studies which was evident in the results of the first Mid-term. In the first Mid-term, students' pass percentage was further improved with the moderate improvement in the average mean score of the total students' population. In the Mid-term II and Final examination, the pass percentage was the same, but in the final examination, there was improvement in the total mean score. The overall observation of the survey reveals the fact that maintaining anecdotal records is likely to encourage students to learn English language.

Suggestions for Using Anecdotal Records

Learners need to feel that their progress in studies is systematically recorded and maintained by the instructor. Anecdotal record assessment is informative to the parents and higher officials in that it compares the standards to the student's performance. Instructors must give open comments about students' progress in studies and they should create a chance for the students to meet their instructors whenever they need. With the help of anecdotal records, teachers observe the strengths, weakness and students' needs for further progress in their studies. Instructors must ensure quality of their instruction and encourage the students. Instructors must meet the students periodically and they should insist about the importance of time. They should provide valuable information sources. They must understand the students and be able to pinpoint the source of confusion.

Conclusion

Anecdotal records are a very useful tool for collecting information on an ongoing basis during instructions and evaluating the products of their instructions. Keeping anecdotal records on a regular basis can enhance a teacher's classroom observation skills. As a better practice of observing students in the classroom, the teacher can manage records, analyze observational

data, and provide standards-based recommendations. Anecdotal records give instructors a clear-cut idea about their students' progress in studies. They are advantageous not only for planning instruction but for keeping others informed of students' progress and for focusing future assessment. Keeping anecdotal records can become a natural and important part of teaching and learning. Anecdotal records facilitate communication between the children, their families, and educational professionals participating in the assessment process.

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Anecdotal Recording Form

Observer: -----	Observation Date:
Student Name: -----	
Observing Unit: -----	
Semester: -----	
Description of Student's progress	
Observer's Interpretation:	
Cognitive Development:	
Health and Ability	
Learning Outcomes/Class test Marks:	
Personal Incidents if any:	
Educational needs:	
General Comments:	