

Enlightening Mobile Computer Aided Learning Assessment Tool.

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Abstract: A crucial element in any learning experience design is its assessment. The design is only perceived when its assessment turns successful. The more accurate the assessment is, the clearer the evaluation of the success of the design. However, most assessment processes innately sometimes render fear and/or hesitation at the student side. When this happens, it jeopardizes the assessment and could mislead any corrective measures that may be needed to improve the initial design.

In this paper, we propose a new user-friendly computer aided mobile formative assessment tool that both enlightens the students to improve the mental image they have during the assessment process itself through a probing mechanism and motivates the students to audaciously rethink the answer if needed. This mobile tool is composed of a course questions bank, interactive Quiz system with automated self assessment technique that offers instant feedback and a communication system. It is applied in an Engineering design college level course that is delivered in Active Learning setting. J2ME is used to develop this mobile tool and it is targeting mobile wireless sets that are common among the students nowadays. It can also be used in-class or online.

A study was conducted for two semesters, using qualitative and quantitative methodologies for data collection and interpretation to measure the effect of this tool on both students' attitudes and performance. Two control groups eighty students strong each, were selected each semester – one is using this tool and the other isn't – to the experiment. The study showed clear positive effects of this tool on both attitudes and performance in favor of the first group.

Keywords: Mobile learning - Learning experience design – probing - formative assessment - instant feedback.

1 Introduction.

Assessment is an indispensable part of the design of the learning experience (Richlin, Laurie, 2006). It sheds light on how far the students progressed for the teacher and provides them with the appropriate feedback on how good was their performance (Fabry, V. J., et al. (1997)). Assessment is also very important for success of meaningful learning. Wiggins G. (1998) and Dee Fink, L. (2003) distinguished between two types of assessment namely: "audit-ive" and educative assessments. The first type is just measuring the students learning in a backward look at what was taught. While the second is the assessment that helps the students learn better. Accordingly, how to assess classroom goal structures assumes considerable significance, especially classroom mastery goal structure that is considered highly conducive to learning (Patrick, 2004; Urdan, 2010).

The work of (Black, P., 1993, 2010) in formative and summative assessment provided a clear picture of how the needed assessment would look like. He (Black, P., 2010) provided a concise picture of the early study and development, the adopted perspective from 1990 to 2000, and then many other relevant issues. His work sheds light on the sort of assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning. He classified any assessment activity that can help learning as a formative one only if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers, and by students, in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities. (Sabina Kleitman, Daniel S.J. Costa, 2013) introduced an interactive formative assessment tool that factors in the student confidence in their answer as well as the number of quiz tries they needed. They concluded that, struggling students seem to benefit most from the confidence allocation process than other students, highlighting the important role of meta-cognitive feedback.

To design an educative and formative assessment module, one would need to consider many elements. First issue is to motivate the students for participation. Second interest; is how to make it transparent and enlightening? The third dilemma would be “how to make the students feel and share the responsibility about their education through sharing of power with them?” (Meta-cognition). The fourth goal is “how to make sure it probes every single student’s understanding equally and subjectively?”

Instructors and educators go very creative about these four elements and there are many proposals in the literature on what to do. For instance, Kay, Robin H., *LeSage Ann*, (2009) reviewed the Audience response systems (ARs) that permit students to answer electronically displayed multiple choice questions using a remote control device. All responses are instantly presented, in chart form, then reviewed and discussed by the instructor and the class. This is qualified for the first issue “Participation”. Also in the same issue there are (Bonwell, C. C. & Eison, J. A., 1991), (Ames, C. & Archer, J. , 1988), and (Barry W. McNeill & Lynn Bellamy et. al., 2002). For the second concern “Assessment” examples are (Bean, J. C., & Peterson, D., 1998), (Andrews, J. D. W., 1980), (Anderson, R. S., & Speck, B. W., 1998), and (Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P., 1993). Finally for the third and fourth issues, “Share of Power”, and “probing” the examples are (Weimer, Maryellen, 2002) and (Barry W. McNeill, Lynn Bellamy et. al., 2002).

Although there are many great ideas in all these resources (Sabina Kleitman, Daniel S.J. Costa, 2013), one was always left with the feel of needing a tool that can address all these four points. Especially that, the fourth point, probing; is a time consuming if correctly and frequently done to every single student. Such a tool would prove valuable if it could be automated and made reusable at almost every class. This is because of the fact that, a constant accurate feedback (better yet with probing) is considered one of the essential three sides of the learning triangle that has the other two sides as learning and teaching activities and learning goals (Dee Fink, L., 2003). All these references and many others draw a clear picture of the facets of the needed assessment tool.

This paper presents such a Tool. It is designed to interest the students, provide a clear, enlightening (through feedback), and instructive assessment, make the students feel the share of power with their teacher and finally allow for an automated probing for every single student as frequent as needed. We present here the design and implementation of this tool. We also present a comparative study that was conducted over one year on the students at the college level studying an introductory engineering design course. Two control groups were selected where the first is using this tool in and the second is not. The study showed a clear improvement of both the attitude and performance of the first group as detailed in this paper.

2 Probing.

The importance of deep processing and self-regulation strategies, and adaptive help-seeking behaviors in (Grasha, A. F., 1972; Karabenick, S. A., 2004; Karabenick, S. A., et al. 2007) would only materialize through the enforcement academic rigor in the course of probing the student understanding. Crespo, S., (2000) showed that, the analysis of students’ thinking is a resource that can help teachers make informed decisions in their classrooms and improve their practice. Crespo, S., (2002) explored the ways in which teachers should begin to interrogate and problematize praising and correcting technique and to consider alternative forms of teacher responses to students’ right and wrong answers such as probing.

There are many types of probing techniques (Kelly, M., 2011) such as: Clarification, Puzzlement, Minimal Reinforcement, Minimal Criticism, Reconstruction, Justification, Redirection, and Relational. These probing methods provide teachers with the ability to guide students to either refine or expand on their answers. This assessment tool focuses on the first four types. It is programmed in an interactive quiz system. In the following we present how these four types of probing techniques are implemented in details.

3 Tool’s design and implementation.

The assessment tool is integrated into The Smart-Quiz System (SQS) which is developed in Java language J2ME version. This gives it the advantage of being mobile to any Java ready set. Those sets

are commonly available to the students nowadays such as laptops, mini e-machines, (i/A)Pads, and Java ready cell phones. The SQS feeds from the question bank of the course on the course's server. The server is programmed to offer the quizzes through the SQS in the appropriate classes' time slot according to the course activities agenda, which is distributed to the students at the first day of the classes.

The SQS is offering a user-friendly graphic user interface and starts by asking the students to insert and verify their personal information. In this process, the students have to fill an electronic checklist of the quiz about checking their readiness and allowing them to submit any bonus granting extra efforts such as research or journal on the quiz subject. Then, the first question shows up with a drop down menu of possible answers for the student to choose from and the process follows as shown in the flow chart in Fig. 1 and explained below.

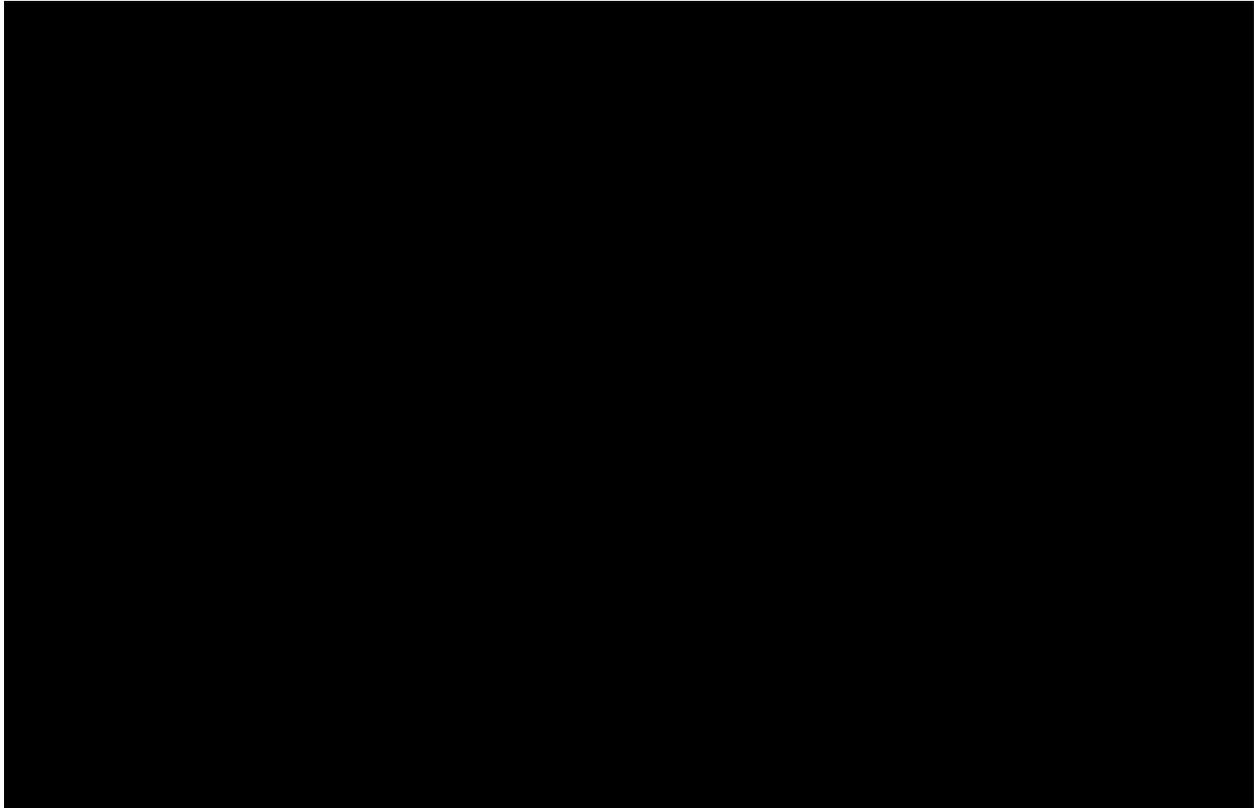


Fig. 1 The Computer flowchart of the assessment tool.

Once the student chose an answer to the question, a verification windows pops up with both the question and the student's selected answer only together, asking the student to confirm her/his choice. This is where the first probing method comes, the Explanatory or Clarification. This basic technique has teachers trying to get students to further explain or clarify their answer. The tool forces the student to clarify the answer s/he has selected through the verification window as shown in Fig. 2 below.

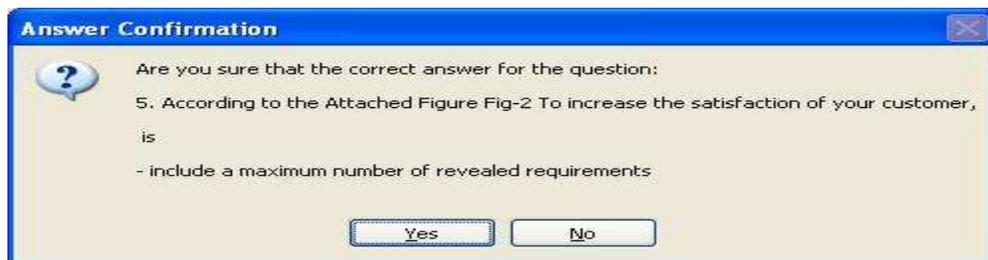


Fig. 2. The Clarification and puzzlement probing techniques in the tool.

If the student still hesitant they can opt to leave the verification step and go back to rethink about the answer by choosing "No" in the window. This is where the second probing method comes, Puzzlement, Where teachers can get students to further explain by expressing their own lack of understanding of the student's response. The verification window is performing this role when it isolates the selected answer and represents the question and only this answer to student for reconsideration. If s/he is sure, they proceed with the verification and accept their answer by choosing "Yes".

After confirming the answer in the verification window the grade is calculate automatically against the right answer and is reported to the screen. Thus, the student has an instant feedback. If the answer is correct, they get the full grade of this question. If the answer is wrong, the tool reports to the screen also instantly and offers another try at the question with reduced grade as shown in Fig. 3 below.

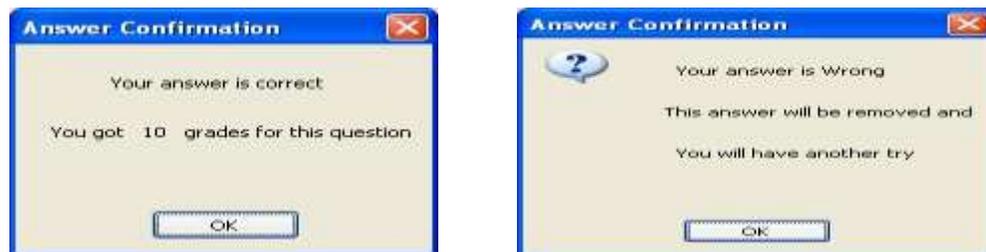


Fig. 3 The Reinforcement probing in the tool. The Positive (left) and negative (right).

This feedback is crucial pedagogy for the students to help them rethinking the construction of the right representation of their knowledge according to the constructivism theory (Chapman, D. W., 2000), (Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R., 2001), and (Bloom, B. S., & Krathwohl, D. R., 1956). This is where the third method of probing comes, Minimal Reinforcement. Here teachers give students a small amount of encouragement to help move them closer to a correct response. In this way, the students feel like they are supported while the teacher tries to get them close to a well-phrased response. As the tool would grade the question at the spot, the encouragement is evident if the answer is correct. If the answer is wrong, the tool would omit it and represent the question with the remaining choices for student's reconsideration with a reduced grade for this question. This is where the fourth method of probing comes, Minimal Criticism, where teachers can also help students give better responses by warning them of impending mistakes. As the tool subtracts from the total grade the student can get for the question at hand, the warning is delivered as shown in Fig. 4 left below.

When the student finishes the quiz, a fully detailed report is written and the total grade it reported automatically to the student's screen and to the teacher on the system server as shown in Fig. 4 right below. Also, an Excel work sheet is initiated and populated automatically for the grades of all the students in the class. A performance distribution curve is fitted to the histogram of students' grads. This gives the teacher an instant assessment of the class performance in the quiz.

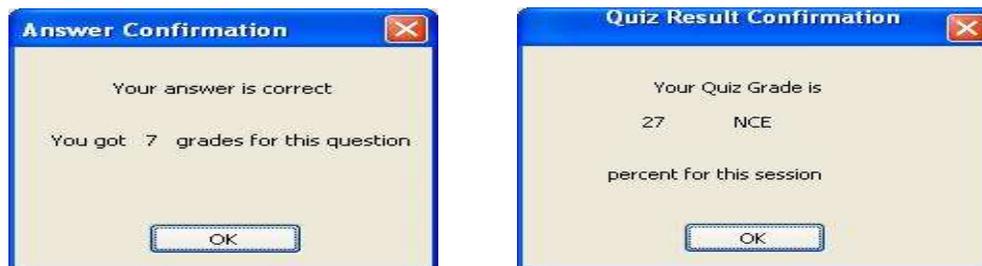


Fig. 4. The Minimal Criticism instant feedback of the tool for a single question (left) and the whole quiz (right).

If the student didn't pass the quiz, a makeup one is scheduled at a later date as a second chance. This makeup quiz has the same rules except that; the total grade that the student can gain is less than that of the first try.

4 How it works.

The students have to join a collective pre-class reading session. This would take place few days before the class where they set in teams. Every team is given the same jigsaw reading exercise. Every member would have to read and thoroughly understand a small portion within a certain time, and then educate his/her fellow team members on this portion. Upon finishing of the jigsaw exercise, the teacher would assess the successfulness of this exercise by asking some members of the team to recap what they were taught by their fellow teammates. If the answers are correct, then the exercise was successful. If not, the teacher would push in the right direction, through probing and motivation without giving the full answer yet, allowing the students try again to refine their jigsaw mental model, until they get the right answers.

Every team member would then have to generate two questions. They present their questions to the team and then to the class to omit repeated questions. Upon teacher approval of the questions, the students pair their sets with the server to submit their questions to the questions bank. This reinforces the students' feel of both belonging and the share of power (Weimer, Maryellen (2002)).

The self assessment tool within the quiz system is fully automated and is adjustable to cater for the teacher goals (Wiggins, G., 1998). It can provide as many tries as needed for each quiz question to control the depth of both the probing method and the feedback. This makes it qualified as a formative assessment tool (Black, P., 2010). At every new chance of the same question, the question grade is reduced by a reduction factor the teacher set forth. As an illustration, the teacher may choose to set every question offers five suggested answer choices (C) in the answer drop down menu and three second chances to solve it with a reduction factor (R) of 2 for each. This choice results in the following question grade table.

Table 1: Grade reduction verses the total answers choices.

C = 5 & R = 2	Question Max. grade	Answer Choices
Answer at the first time	Full Grade = 10	5
Answer at the second time	Reduced Grade = $10 - 2 = 8$	4
Answer at the third time	Reduced Grade = $8 - 2 = 6$	3
Answer at the fourth time	this option is not allowed	0

This provides for adjustment for the target level of learning of the quiz (Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R., 2001). For instance an Analysis level question would have more tries than a Comprehension level question which will still have more tries than a Knowledge level one.

5 Results.

Two control groups were selected for two semesters where the first is using this tool and the second is not. Each group is almost eighty students strong each semester with total of 156 and 158 for the two groups respectively. They attended an engineering design course targeting the sophomore level student in active Learning setting that calls for constant feedback though ten quizzes each semester. Each quiz is presents seven questions typically except when the student consumes all the time to answer fewer set of questions. The tool was set to allow only one second chance at each question of each quiz. Table 2 below shows the results of the first group that used the tool.

The Table shows the quiz name, number of attended students, the total questions number, questions were solved in the first try (1st), how many were solved at the second try (2nd) and how many were wrong in both tries (W) in its left side, respectively. At the right side are the percentages of these values.

Table 2: The results of the ten quizzes of the first group at their first try of each quiz.

	Students	Questions	1st	2nd	W	1st %	2nd%	W%
Quiz 1	156	1071	639	213	219	59.7	19.9	20.4
Quiz 2	147	1003	565	176	262	56.3	17.5	26.1
Quiz 3	144	1011	702	140	169	69.4	13.8	16.7
Quiz 4	148	1034	773	136	125	74.8	13.2	12.1
Quiz 5	136	959	718	105	136	74.9	10.9	14.2
Quiz 6	138	969	553	157	259	57.1	16.2	26.7
Quiz 7	135	959	595	150	214	62.0	15.6	22.3
Quiz 8	128	900	499	159	242	55.4	17.7	26.9
Quiz 9	137	957	588	151	218	61.4	15.8	22.8
Quiz 10	136	953	703	117	133	73.8	12.3	14.0
Average	141	982	634	150	198	64.5	15.3	20.2

At the bottom of the right side, it is clear that, the average of questions that students answered correctly at the first try is 64.5% (1st % column). The average they get it right after the second chance is 15.3% (the 2nd %). Finally, the percentage of wrong questions after the second try is only 20.2% (W %).

Table 3 below shows the results of the second group that is not using the tool. It has the same fields as Table 2 without the second chance column.

Table 3: The results of the ten quizzes of the second group at their first try of each quiz.

	Students	Questions	Right	Wrong	Right%	Wrong%
Quiz 1	158	1106	690	416	62.4	37.6
Quiz 2	149	1043	531	512	50.9	49.1
Quiz 3	149	1043	774	269	74.2	25.8
Quiz 4	148	1036	788	248	76.1	23.9
Quiz 5	142	994	558	436	56.2	43.8
Quiz 6	139	973	581	392	59.8	40.2
Quiz 7	135	945	604	341	63.9	36.1
Quiz 8	139	973	584	389	60.0	40.0
Quiz 9	137	959	565	394	58.9	41.1
Quiz 10	139	973	682	291	70.1	29.9
Average	144	1005	635	369	63.2	36.8

Both Tables 2 and 3 showed that, the total number of the students drops slightly from quiz 1 until the add/drop period of courses is over around quiz 4. It hits almost a plateau after that and so is the total number of solved questions by students. It is observed that, around quizzes 6, to 9, in both tables there is a slight drop in both groups performance (in the "1st" and "Right" columns). This is due to the fact that, this is the time where the students are having majors and mid-terms in their other registered courses.

At the bottom of the right side of table 3, it is clear that, the average percentage of questions that students answered correctly at the first try (Right %) is 63.2% which is very close to the first group at table 2 of 64.5%. However, the percentage of wrong questions (Wrong %) in table 3 is 36.8%, almost double that of the first group in table 2 of 20.2%. This shows that, the impact of the formative assessment tool is saving 15.3% of what would be a wrong answer to be a correct one at the second try of the question. This increase in the performance is only due to the formative assessment tool with probing mechanism. According to (Crespo, S., 2002, Dee Fink, L., 2003) this is considered an indicator of better learning.

Table 4 below shows the results of the first group with the tool in the makeup quizzes taken by only a subset of the total number of students, those who did not pass the quiz at first time. At the bottom of the right side, it is clear that, the average of questions that students answered correctly at the first try of the question is 62.9% (1st %). The average of question they get it right after the second chance is 15.1% (2nd %). The percentage of wrong questions after the second chance is 22.0% (W %). These results are consistent with that of Table 2 as it show improvement of about 15%. This is again a direct impact of using this tool.

Table 4: The results of the first group in the ten quizzes second chance.

	Students	Questions	1st	2nd	W	1st %	2nd%	W%
Quiz 1 C	75	525	326	109	90	62.1	20.8	17.1
Quiz 2 C	87	599	303	121	175	50.6	20.2	29.2
Quiz 3 C	56	399	295	45	59	73.9	11.3	14.8
Quiz 4 C	36	252	191	22	39	75.8	8.7	15.5
Quiz 5 C	38	265	148	37	80	55.8	14.0	30.2
Quiz 6 C	91	656	390	110	156	59.5	16.8	23.8
Quiz 7 C	66	464	295	68	101	63.6	14.7	21.8
Quiz 8 C	83	586	350	91	145	59.7	15.5	24.7
Quiz 9 C	71	498	292	75	131	58.6	15.1	26.3
Quiz 10 C	34	242	169	34	39	69.8	14.0	16.1
Average	64	449	276	71	102	62.9	15.1	22.0

Table 5 below shows the results of the second group that is not using the tool in the makeup quiz. At the bottom of the right side, it is clear that, the average of questions that students answered correctly at the first try is 64.6% (Right %) which is very close to the first try of this group. Also, the percentage of wrong questions is 35.4% (Wrong %), almost double that of the first group but consistent with this group first try as shown in table 3.

Table 5: The results if the second group of the ten quizzes makeup.

	Students	Questions	Right	Wrong	Right%	Wrong%
Quiz 1 C	74	518	329	189	63.5	36.5
Quiz 2 C	83	581	306	275	52.7	47.3
Quiz 3 C	56	392	298	94	76.0	24.0
Quiz 4 C	36	252	194	58	77.0	23.0
Quiz 5 C	38	266	151	115	56.8	43.2
Quiz 6 C	88	616	393	223	63.8	36.2
Quiz 7 C	66	462	298	164	64.5	35.5
Quiz 8 C	81	567	353	214	62.3	37.7
Quiz 9 C	71	497	295	202	59.4	40.6
Quiz 10 C	35	245	172	73	70.2	29.8
Average	63	440	284	156	64.6	35.4

6 Discussion.

Fig. 5 below shows the performance of the two groups in solving questions correctly along the vertical axis against the ten quizzes during the semester on the horizontal axis at the first try of the quiz. It is obvious from the figure that the first group has a higher performance than the second.

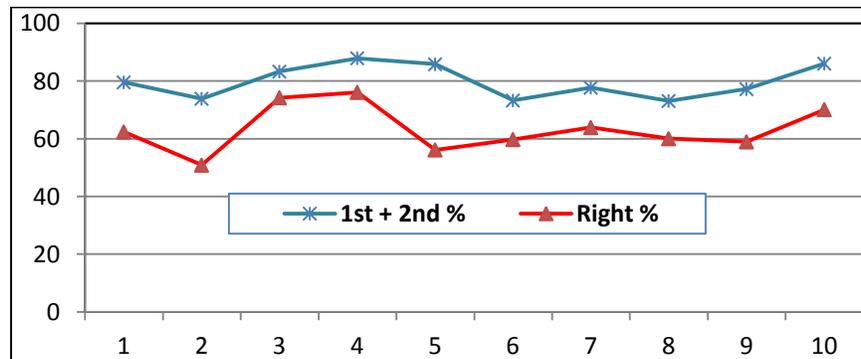


Fig. 5. The percentages of correct answers for both groups in the first try of the ten quizzes. Upper is using the tool and lower isn't using it.

Also it shows less deviation in the first group curve around the mean average (around the 80% line) than the second group (around the 60% line). This suggests a better performance and attitude of consistency to the favor of the first group.

Fig. 6 below shows the performance of the two groups in missing the correct answer along the vertical axis against the ten quizzes on the horizontal axis. It is obvious that the first group has lower mistakes than the second with the average of 15% improvement. Also it shows less variation in the first group curve around the mean average (around 20% line) than the second group around (around 35% line). This suggests a better performance and attitude of uniformity again to favor of the first group.

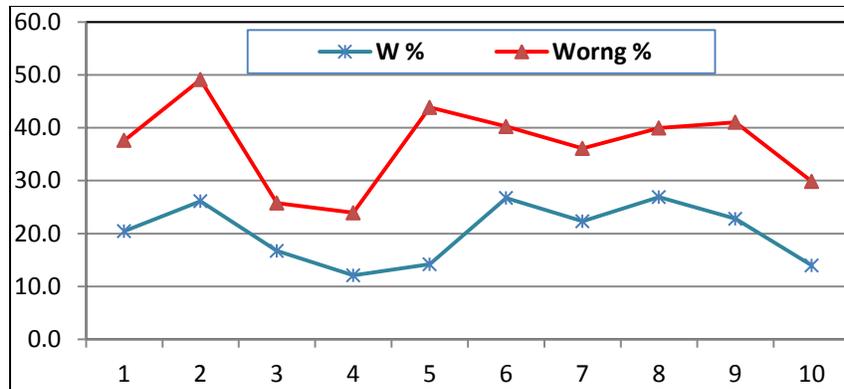


Fig. 6. The percentages of wrong answers for both groups in the ten quizzes. Upper is not using the tool and lower is using it.

7 Conclusion.

In this paper we have presented an automated formative assessment tool that would prove valuable in the design of learning experiences as it implements some probing techniques with instant feedback. It reinforces the feelings of belonging and share of power for the students as they contribute to the questions bank and then go through programmed process of probing of understanding. It also motivates and challenges them by providing a hands-on interaction, and gives them the needed time, software, and learning experiences environment to construct their own mental image of the information they are exposed to. Such a tool would allow the students to assess their mental model representation and keep modifying it if needed, until it proves to be the right model using the instant feedback module. It provides a great deal of help to students to learn better and approach academic rigor.

For the teachers, it shortens the time burden for the probing process as it is done to all students in the same time while they take the computerized quiz, especially for courses with huge number of students. This helps teachers to both prepare and conduct a successful design of the course's learning experiences and is valuable both for initial design as well as for iterative improvements of the initial design.

We presented an analysis for two semesters of the performance and attitude of two control groups of the students each is almost eighty students strong, where one group is using the tool and the other is not. The analysis showed improvements for the first group using this tool on both attitudes and performance. We concluded that the improvement of 15% in performance is consistence due to usage of this tool in this course. However, this may vary from one course to another.

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