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The Students' Perceptions towards the effects of EFL Teachers' Classroom Assessment Technique on their Academic Achievements: The Case of Four Selected Secondary Schools in Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Assessment is an integral part of measuring effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. It basically focused on measuring the students' progress in what they learned. Current study examined the relation between the students' perceptions towards EFL teachers Classroom Assessment methods and their academic achievements. To this end, descriptive research design with qualitative and quantitative methods of data collections was employed. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources via questionnaire, interview and observations. Target populations of current study were randomly selected 281 students and purposely selected four teachers of secondary schools at Wolaita zone, Ethiopia. The data were analyzed using mixed methods of data analysis. Based on results obtained from qualitative and quantitative data, it was found out that the students' perceptions towards teachers' assessment was proportional to their achievement. Most dominantly, low achievers were not satisfied with their teachers' methods of assessment as their students were low and the vice versa it true.

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Introduction

The assessment process is a significant aspect of any teacher's work. Teaching involves assessment (Rea-Dickens, 2004). Thus, Assessment is an integral part of teaching processes. Favoring this, (Malone, 2011) stated that teaching and assessment are two interrelated factors in English Language Teaching. That is, with the help of effective assessment it is possible to judge success of teaching. Successful assessment is also predictor of students' academic achievement. That is why it is said that the quality of the assessment in the educational process has a profound and well-established link to student performance (Foundation for the Atlantic Canada

English Language Arts Curriculum). Hence, Assessment plays great role in the process of teaching and learning.

The assessment process is a systematic approach for gathering data about the different variables in teaching. Broadly, there are two types of assessment methods namely formal and informal assessments. Among others, Formal assessment are For instance tests like written/oral, national, and teacher made tests and informal assessments on other hand includes classroom attendance, classroom participations, classroom activities, homework, tasks respectively (Abbas, Abdelshafy, 1994; Brophy, 2012). A test as formal assessment method can be described as a specific

evaluative tool that is used to obtain information about a learner's achievement with respect to a given skill or procedure (American Educational Research Association, 1999). Such Classroom assessment has been focus of various studies for its role in measuring the students' progress in learning. EFL classroom assessment in particular is focused on the students' language development for effective learning of it. It functions as a diagnostic tool that provides feedback to the teacher about students' progress and their attainment by determining their strengths and weaknesses during learning (Rea-Dickens, 2000). As stated by Rea-Dickens, 2004:

In order to target the skill areas involving communicative competence, EFL teachers may incorporate various interpretive, presentational, and interpersonal aspects of communication in their periodic assessment practices. For instance, they may include tasks that target assessment of interpretive skills and situate these tasks within listening and reading exercises or activities. In the same vein, interpersonal skills could be assessed by designing speaking activities and exercises. Presentational skills could be targeted for assessment by allowing students to express, explain, and narrate ideas, information or events in writing or orally.

On the other hand, assessment and evaluation of structural and linguistic knowledge often involves asking students to read or listen to a text and answer questions about it or to select the accurate grammatical form or vocabulary item from a list. Cloze tests, multiple choice tests, short answer tests, and so on are also commonly used for this purpose.

To this end, EFL program instructions are usually stated in terms of the language competencies or skills, students are expected to acquire and develop via Assessment tools whether formal or informal which can be used to measure the students' acquired skills or developed language competencies (Abbas, Abdelshafy, 1994). EFL classroom assessment is thus the process of collecting information about a student to aid in decision making about the progress and language development of the student (Cheng *et al.*, 2004). Again, Piggin (2012) elaborates it as the overarching concern in language education is language proficiency.

In support of this idea, Angelo and Cross, 1993 explain the teachers use of assessment to obtain feedback on "what, how much and how well their students are learning. Effective assessments yield valid Evaluation on

what educators actually do with all of the information gathered from any assessment procedures they have employed. After all, the assessment methods together with evaluation among English language teachers become big concern in EFL teaching for its effect on the students' perceptions. Hence, this current study was intended to explore the students' perceptions of EFL teachers' classroom assessment on their academic achievement in secondary schools at Wolaita zone, Ethiopia. The need for conducting current study was geared in line with the statement educational institution in Ethiopia irrespective of its level has been using continuous assessment as a key to determine students' learning achievement (Sintayehu Belay Abejehu, 2016). In spite, English classroom Assessment method in Ethiopian case is more of focused on exams (Institute of International Education, 2012). Thus, the teachers' assessment methods via exams and the students' perceptions towards it was focus of current study.

Statement of the problems

For sure, Assessment can affect students' learning negatively or positively. According to Rea-Dickens, 2004 foreign language teachers are in reality agents of assessment, in that they routinely design and implement assessments and interpret student performance resulting from those assessments. Through the assessment process, the EFL students can compete with each other to get the best grades of evaluation, as assessment is the indicator of the student's achievement (Abbas, Abdelshafy, 1994).

Besides, it is conducted to show whether or not the learning has been successful, or to clarify the expectations of the teachers from the students (Dunn *et al.*, 2004). However, Students can have positive attitudes, if they find that the assessment process is based on what they are taught in the foreign language program. In contrast, they may perceive it negatively as they failed to achieve marks than what they expected. Therefore, unidentified expectations and perceptions of students towards EFL class assessments initiated the researcher to conduct this study. The reason for due attention given for this problem was it helps a low competent student to overcome his/her points of weakness, and the higher competent one to reinforce his or her points of strengths.

Hence, the students in target study area were involved in various tests and examinations during schooling, however; no studies have been documented regarding how do they react to the assessments as well as to what extent do the student satisfied by their achievement in it.

Because of not known perceptions of the students and to what extent they are satisfied by their EFL teachers' assessments, it is vital to understand their perceptions and level of achievements. Hence, secondary school EFL teachers' classroom assessment strategies and students perceptions towards it were the main concern of this study.

Objectives of the study

General objective of the study

The main objective of this study was assessing the Students' perceptions towards EFL teachers' Classroom Assessment on their academic achievements with particular reference to four selected secondary schools in Wolaita zone, Ethiopia.

Specific objectives of the study

- To identify the perceptions of students towards EFL classroom assessments
- To discuss the assessment method of EFL teachers
- To analyze the relations between assessments and academic achievements

Significances of the study

Assessments are tools to judge students attainments in educational goals. English language assessments in this case are focused on the students' improvements in English skills. Therefore, this current study shed light on teachers' awareness regarding the effects of assessments on students' achievements. It also encourages teachers to use varied types of assessment tools for its reliability in measuring the students' achievements. Besides, this study facilitates the improvements in the students' English fluency as they are assessed by different tools which measure their actual improvements in speaking, writing, reading, and listening of the language for better communications.

Materials and Methods

Research design

The aim of this study was assessing the Students' perceptions towards EFL teachers' Classroom Assessment on their academic achievements with particular reference to four selected secondary schools in Wolaita zone, Ethiopia. To this end, descriptive research

design with qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection was employed.

Population of the study

Among total populations of teachers and students, the researcher selected portions of them as a sample. So, all selected teachers and students in four target schools were direct participants of the study. Totally, four EFL teachers and 281 students containing 174 male and 107 female students were chosen by using simple random sampling technique respectively. Hence, total numbers of teachers and students who participated in this study were 285.

Instruments of Data collection

Reliable were collected from primary and secondary data sources via data gathering tools. The major tools employed in this study were questionnaire and interview. Each of these instruments was prepared in line with the objectives of the study and helped the researcher to triangulate and check the reliability and validity of each tool. Besides, secondary data were collected from books, marked documents, journals and other reliable sources. Finally, overall results of the data gathering tools were analyzed and findings reached.

Questionnaire

Totally 281 questionnaires containing series of open-ended and close-ended questions which focused on objectives of the study were administered and distributed to the students. The respondents were chosen from four schools by using simple random sampling techniques to fill the questionnaires. It was prepared and administered in English language and distributed only for students. Therefore, total of 281 students were participated in filling it.

Interview

For collecting data for current study, face-to-face interviews were conducted between teachers as well as students. The type of interview the research employed in this study was semi-structured interview for its flexibility in asking interview questions. Therefore, four teachers and six students were participated in interviewing process. The interviewees were chosen based on simple random sampling technique participated in interviewing. Thus, total of ten individuals were asked interview questions.

Methods of data analysis and interpretation

The sources of data for current study were 281 students and four EFL teachers who were selected from four secondary schools in Wolaita zone by using simple random sampling technique. The data from the participants were collected through questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Regarding the questionnaire data, close-ended questions were analyzed quantitatively by tabulating the results and described in words. Besides, the data obtained through interview and open-ended questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively by describing results in statement form. Thus, mixed methods of data analysis employed in current study helped the researcher to discuss reliability of the data sources and validity of the data. Finally, overall results of the data were triangulated to reach appropriate findings and conclusions.

Data analysis and Interpretation

To begin with, Chastain, 1988 believes that teachers need to evaluate constantly their teaching on the basis of student reaction, interest, motivation, preparation, participation, perseverance, and achievement. Based on results of current study, Assessment as continuous process is undertaken by teachers to measure their students understanding of what has been taught in class. Such assessments were given in the form of tests/exams and other informal activities like classroom attendance and participations during teaching lessons. In this case, English language classroom assessments as identified in current study, were focused on the students' competencies of English skills. However, not all students have showed similar outlooks towards the methods of their teachers' assessment together with its contents covered and areas of assessments. Because of language classroom assessments are basically done by centering learners' performance in specific skills of English language, the students showed varied perceptions towards the assessment methods for its effect on their academic achievements. In effect, those students who were satisfied on the assessment methods showed positive perceptions but some others of them were less satisfied though rationale behind each group of students was differs. Thus, the detailed discussions of finding of the study were presented as follows.

When we think about assessment, the issues like what, how, and why we assess come in to our mind. The reason here is the use of assessment techniques by the teachers depends upon the learners' needs and level of knowledge

(Mertler, 2003). Regarding this, the teachers' interview results indicated the teachers intentionally measured their students understanding via different methods of assessments. What they measure in this case is based on exams and tests as formal types of assessment tools in addition to other indirect assessments like class attendance and classroom participation. In support of this, students' interview results indicated that they were assessed by their teachers via different forms of assessment tools like quizzes, tests, class works, home works, group works, and assignments. Therefore, the teachers reported that they mark the results obtained from each tool to decide their students' understanding of the lessons taught in the class. Hence, they use these result to identify the students who are good achievers from low achievers as well as medium achievers. That is, those students who scored good marks in these assessments were judged as high achievers and the reverse is true.

Regarding how the teachers assess their students, Abbas, Abdelshafy (1994) suggested that the teachers are supposed to measure what they teach and teach what tests usually measure. In line with this, current study revealed that the teachers mostly assessed the students after teaching the lessons by focusing on what has been taught. Though all the students learned similar lessons by attending similar classes, the teachers responded that not all of them perform equally in different assessments. As to the teachers' interview result, such situations happened because of the differences in the students' capacity to understand the lessons. Hence, their ability to understand the lessons thus directly correlates to their academic achievements as well. Accordingly, the students' perceptions towards the assessment methods were judged by the level of their success in what they were assessed.

The extent of students' learning is an important and necessary criterion for judging the success of teaching approaches (Medwell *et al.*, 2009). Every successful teacher including EFL teachers measures their students understanding of the lesson they learnt through the results obtained through assessments. Accordingly, the students also judge themselves as success learner or not by the results they achieved in each assessment. Thus, the above table indicated the students' perceptions towards the assessments and methods of assessments by EFL teachers.

Regarding the statement number 1 in the above table 1, majority of the respondents rated their English teachers'

assessments methods as it fits their level of knowledge and skills regarding understanding of English language. Out of total respondents, 71.2% were strongly agreed and agreed that their teachers' methods of assessment clearly measure their level of understanding. That is, 47(16.7%) respondents were responded as they strongly agree, whereas 153 (54.4%) were responded it as agree. However, the numbers of students who responded it as less effective were less than those who judged it as undecided. Among others, only 51(18%) of the respondents said they were strongly disagree and disagree on the above statement. Specifically, 39(13.9%) respondents reported they disagree and only 12(4.3%) were strongly disagree that their teachers' method of assessment was not appropriate. On other hand, 30(10.7%) of total respondents were neither in support of nor against their teachers' methods of assessment. Hence, the results showed that majority of the students have no objection regarding their teachers' assessment technique.

As teachers and students interview result indicated, EFL teachers assessed their students understanding of the lessons through exams, class works, home works and assignments. Regarding exams, the students further pointed out that it contains multiple choices, matching, fill in the blank, dialogue completion, true/false items, and reading passage completions. In support of this, questionnaire result indicated that the tools that their EFL teachers used were not fair to assess their competence in English language. The students' responses for statement 2 on table 1 regarding fairness of these assessment tools to measure their understanding was rated as strongly agree and agree by 23(8.24%) 49 and (17.4%), whereas 84(29.9%) and 63 (22.4%) responded as disagree and strongly disagree respectively. Besides, 62(22.1%) respondents responded it as undecided. It could be realized from the above result was that the students have negative perceptions towards these assessment tools because these tools may assess their academic performance but may not measure actual performance of the language skills. For instance, the students may score good mark in speaking but his/her actual speaking performance may be poor. Thus, the students have complaints on suitability of exam as sole assessment tool to measure their actual performance of English language skills.

Whatever assessment tool the teachers use to assess their students, its effectiveness is measured by the students effectiveness in it. Thus, Effective assessment can clearly measure the students' fate to pass or fail it if not affected

by biases. In line with this, current study revealed that the students perceptions towards their current status of pass and/failure was not only based on their understanding of subject matter but also influence of assessment tools as well. For this reason, more than half of the respondents believed that they were failed because of influence from assessment tools. That is, 52(18.5%) and 97(34.5%) of the respondents were responded that they were strongly disagreed and disagreed that they passed or failed because of not their capacity whereas 76(27.1%) and 31(11.25%) strongly agreed and agreed that they were passed or failed because of their capacity. However, 25(8.9%) responded as undecided it yet. Besides, the students' interview results indicated that there were biases of assessment tools on their success or failure. In line with this, the students further elaborated it as every language skills cannot be assessed only by pen and paper based examinations, rather it should be based on appropriate assessment tools that fit each language skill. For instance, the students mentioned an example of assessing grammar skills and listening or speaking skills that the former can easily be assessed by giving examinations but the later ones need some other tools like listening texts or giving speaking activities than pen and paper based examinations. In support of this, Rea-Dickins (2004) argued that the primary focus of assessment in Teaching English Language has been language assessment and the role of tests in assessing students' language skills.

Because of its bias on the students' achievements, current study revealed that most of the students were less satisfied by the assessment techniques used by their EFL teachers. In this case, all the options except strongly agree were rated by the students to judge the English teachers' methods of assessments. That is, 70(25%) respondents responded as agree to mean they were satisfied by their teachers method of assessments, whereas 72(26%) and 38(13%) of them responded as disagree and strongly disagree respectively to mean they were dissatisfied. However, the remaining 101(36%) respondents were not sure about their feeling about their teachers' assessment methods. Moreover, the students' interview results also supported the above idea that they perceived it as less reliable to measure their understanding of each language skill. For this reason, it is argued that testing and evaluating the language skills and competencies are a very important part of language teaching process and the Students' achievement can be measured from different perspectives of educational approach (Brown, 1984; Md. FazlurRahman *et al.*, 2011).

As to the students’ response, their achievement in learning English language must not be judged solely by good marks or grades but also their improvements in competency of each language skill too. That is, most of the students felt that they are effective in learning English when their overall outcome of learning language brought success in assessment as well as improvements in their actual use of each language skills. Therefore, majority of the students responded that they were less successful in learning English because they scored good marks in every language skills but their actual performance in each skill was poor. Statically, 77(27%) students agreed as they were successful in learning English and 69(25%) of them were neutral. However, 102(36.3%) students were disagreed that they were not effective in learning English and the remaining 33(11.7%) were strongly disagreed that they were not successful.

One can clearly understand from the above result is that EFL teachers are responsible just not only for recording assessment scores but also for its effectiveness on the students’ learning and satisfactory attainment of language skills in actual performance. For this reason, the students complained that their teachers do not balance their students’ achievement scores in each language skills with the proficiency levels in the skills. Besides, current study revealed the rationale behind the students compliant in this case was basis on their teachers’ focus on improving assessment scores than enhancing the students’ language proficiency. Therefore, the students felt that they were less successful in learning English though they scored good marks in it. Despite, Successful performance can lead to feelings of pride and a sense of achievement (Oxford and Shearin, 1994) though target populations of current study felt opposite to this.

Table.1 Students’ Perceptions on EFL Teachers’ Assessment Methods

No	Items	SA		A		NU		DA		SDA	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	My English teacher’s assessments fit my understanding of the subject.	47	16.7	153	54.4	30	10.7	39	13.9	12	4.3
2.	The assessment tools are fair and appropriate to measure my understanding.	23	8.2	49	17.4	62	22.1	84	29.9	63	22.4
3.	I am failed/passed in the assessments because of my capacity.	31	11	76	27.1	25	8.9	97	34.5	52	18.5
4.	I am satisfied by my EFL teacher’s assessment methods.	-	-	70	25	101	36	72	26	38	13
5.	I feel I am successful in English subject	-	-	77	27	69	25	102	36.3	33	11.7

Note: SA=Strongly Agree; A= Agree; NU= Neutral; A= Disagree; SDA- Strongly disagree

Findings of the study

The focus of current study was EFL teachers’ classroom assessment techniques on the student’s academic achievements. The problem under study was critically analyzed to find out the effects of teachers’ classroom assessments techniques on the students’ academic achievement. The data gathered through interview and questionnaire indicated that English language teachers assess their students through giving test, assignment, classwork, and homework. Accordingly, the students scored good marks in these assessments, which helped them to promote next grade level. However, the students

have no recognition for the way they failed or passed in the assessment because it was highly dependent on ineffective assessment tools than their own competence in it. That is why the students have complaints on the assessment tool for its failure in measuring their success of learning the language. Therefore, the students were not satisfied on their teachers’ implementation of the assessment technique itself together with its instruments as well as their achievements through it. In general, Overall finding of the study showed that the students did not feel they were successful in learning English because of its lack of effective assessment techniques.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Current study was focused on investigating the Students' Perceptions towards EFL Teachers' Classroom Assessment Technique on their Academic Achievements in the Case of Four Selected Secondary Schools in Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia. Accordingly, the data were analyzed and the findings of the study showed that the students have no positive perceptions towards their EFL teachers' assessment methods as well as the tools used to assess them because it affected their academic achievements negatively.

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that the students lacked interest towards their EFL teachers' method of assessments for it only focused scoring marks than their improvements in actual performances. Besides, the students felt that the tools which the teachers used to assess were failed to judge the students' improvements in actual use of the language. That is, it was less suited to the students' wish in improving their English speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills in actual communications. Indeed, the students did not perceive themselves as successful in learning English since it did not help them to use the language in actual performance.

In general, the students perceived their low achievement in learning English was affected at large by the methods and tools of assessments which their English teachers used to assess. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers in the study area should not only focus on the students achievements in scoring good marks but also their actual use of those skills in communication as well.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusions of the study, it was recommended that EFL teachers should focus on the activities that assess the students' improvements in actual English competence than merely giving them marks. Besides, the teachers should also use the assessment tools which suit the students' need to overcome their English proficiency through different kinds of assessments than pen and paper based examinations. Moreover, the teacher is fully responsible not only for the students' achievements in English learning but also they are responsible for the students' failure if not assessed effectively. Hence, the teachers should give due attentions for the students' achievements in English proficiency.

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