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## **An Investigation into the Extent to which Continuous Assessment Techniques are practiced in EFL Classrooms: The case of Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School**

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### **Abstract**

The Purpose of this study was to investigate the Extent to which Continuous Assessment Techniques are practiced in EFL Classroom at Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School. For this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through questionnaire and interviews. 226 students and 5 English language teachers were involved in the study. A simple random sampling technique was used for the students and availability sampling technique for EFL teachers. Findings of this research revealed that almost all teachers believe that the importance of implementing variety of continuous assessment techniques in EFL classrooms to improve the students learning status. However, most English language teachers perceive continuous assessment as strategy and to use different techniques, they have difficulties not to fully put into practice due to various pushing and pulling factors. Most teachers didn't include a variety of continuous assessment tools in their plan and did not use in the class room activities. As a result, the status of continuous assessment practice is far from what is needed, and they concentrated on few tools like oral questions and tests. On the other hand, assessments like homework, class work, assignment, observation, project work and storytelling were not regularly used in English language classrooms at the target school. Finally, based on the major findings of the study conclusions were drawn and recommendations were forwarded.

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### **Keywords**

Teaching English as Foreign Language, Assessment, Summative Assessment, Continuous Assessment and Continuous Assessment Techniques.

### **Introduction**

Classroom assessment offers appropriate information about the progress and competency of pupils to stakeholders (Brook Hart, 1997; Hassen, 1998; USAID/BEP, 2006). Hence, it is recommended that inculcating the new approaches to assessment is vital to improve instruction and help educational stakeholders benefit from the practice at high level. Realize this fact, Hassen (1998) pointed out that classroom assessment has now become the most crucial, frequent and pervasive

issue in educational systems to determine the quality of learning; how pupils know, how efficiently they perform and what attitude they have developed for future learning.

Nowadays, educators advocate that the assessment going at the classroom level should aimed at high stake tests, because the former operates in the context in which instruction is going on, is better to monitor and guide the teaching learning process so as to continuously improve teaching learning (USAID/BEP, 2006). Besides, unlike

nation or region wide tests in the form of high stake tests. Assessment takes place at the classroom level focuses not only on assessment of learning but also on assessment for learning (Nitko, 2004). In a similar way Hassen, (1998) stated that classroom assessment as much more potential immediate diagnostic and formulate feedback better than the summative. In the emerging view, therefore, the main purpose of classroom assessment is to guide pupils' learning.

According to Aggrowal (1997) continuous assessment is not simply continuous testing. It is beyond giving a test. It involves every decision made by the teacher in a class to improve students' achievement. Other researcher strength this idea, "continuous assessment is not continuous testing. Giving test every month and accumulating pupils for final grading is an insignificant aspect of the assessment package. Continuous assessment is a demanding task that requires the use of various assessment tools in order to assure the achievement of curricular objectives by each and every student" (Desalegn chalcisa (2001).

Although continuous assessment has been practiced in the English language teaching and learning process, the researcher's previous experience and practical observation in the schools shows that teachers and the students seem to have put doubt on the effective use of continuous assessment techniques. That means, it seems that teachers contradict about the idea of continuous assessment & techniques they encountered while striving to apply it in their EFL classes. This is because the students were found to be deficient in their English language skills.

Continuous assessment proposes a procedure for measuring the performance of students to improve their level of achievement. As stated by Bolyard (2003) in order to assess students' knowledge and understanding, continuous assessment is implemented by teachers. It provides valuable information about the students' progress in terms of knowledge, and cognitive skills. Teachers administer assessments in several ways in order to gather information regarding their students' knowledge and level of understanding and performance. The data regarding the students' progress provides feedback on a regular basis.

For evaluating language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, etc., continuous assessment is necessary as the process, progress and development of these skills can be more

appropriately evaluated through progressive appraisals, which are for native in their nature. The purpose of this kind of evaluation is not basically designed for the sake of comparison or classifying learners; rather its focus is to evaluate the progress of each learner during the process of learning and follow up his/her degree of improvement he/she has achieved after each lesson. In conducting the continuous assessment, the instructor can employ a variety of assessment techniques such as Oral Technique, Homework, Assignment, Class work, Observation, Project work, Tests, Writing, Reading, Field trip Reports, Storytelling and Singing.

Therefore, continuous assessment is the important techniques that help to evaluate the students' performance in English language skills. Hence the teachers must utilize this method of assessment by giving them class work, homework, assignments, different tests, and other assessment techniques. One weakness in teaching English language skills is less use of continuous assessment to promote learning of English language skills. In line with this, the purpose of this study was an Investigation into the Extent to which Continuous Assessment Techniques are practiced in EFL Classrooms: the case of Bombe Secondary and Preparatory school.

### **Statement of the problem**

Assessing students in the teaching learning process has many benefits. It can expose learners to experience creative reflections through which the teacher probes their understanding to elicit answer for question he or she poses. Concerning this, Elington and Early (1997) Said that continuous assessment is carried out on an ongoing basis while students are actually working their way through a course. Similarly, Farant (1980) states that continuous assessment is practiced day to day basis to judge the quality of individual work or performance.

Language teaching, should stress on raising the communicative capability of the students since the primary purpose of language is to enable people to exchange ideas as well as to interact each other. It is, therefore, significant to develop students' language skills through continuous assessment by using variety of continuous assessment techniques in EFL classroom.

Recognizing the importance of continuous assessment, the MoE has introduced it at different levels of the education system. As stated in the 1994 Education and Training Policy, the practical task of implementing the

new curriculum at different educational levels (primary, secondary and university) requires continuous assessment as part of the curriculum in general and instructional process in particular. To realize this, the role of teachers and students has paramount important. This means that teachers and students should be well informed and have awareness about the concept and procedures of practicing continuous assessment before they are made to implement it.

In line with this, Teshome (2001) suggested that teachers' knowledge and attitude should be considered for effective implementation of the assessment program. Wiliam, D. (2000) also strengthen this contention and pointed out that teachers' actions are highly influenced by their knowledge. This implies the need for attention to be given to the practice of using continuous assessment techniques alternatively in EFL classroom.

Many scholars confirm that it is difficult to achieve the goals of language teaching without language assessment (Heaton,1988; Hughes, 1989; Taylor, 2006).

They also state that language assessment is an integral part of language teaching. In other words, language teaching and assessment are so closely interrelated that it may be difficult to view them separately.

Even though many educators agree that language teaching and assessment have closer relationship, they are not clear with which type of assessment may promote language teaching effectively. However, they indicated that tests and exams that are mostly given at the end of a unit, a semester or a course do not reflect the overall achievement of a learner.

However, the observation and previous experience of the researcher in high school English Language classrooms, most teachers seem the concept of continuous assessment is only testing students with scheduled time. This wrong conceptualization of the term will even affect the need to employ variety techniques to assess learners' progress to improve language skills based on the feed-back. By taking the above scholars idea and the researcher's previous personal observation regarding the practices of continuous assessment techniques into account, the researcher was highly concerned to investigate the practices of continuous assessment techniques in EFL classrooms. Hence, the main focus of current study was an Investigation into the Extent to which Continuous Assessment Techniques are practiced in EFL Classroom at Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School.

## **Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study was to investigate the Extent to which Continuous Assessment Techniques are practiced in EFL Classrooms at Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Design**

The focus of current study was an investigation into the Extent to which Continuous Assessment Techniques are practiced in EFL Classroom at Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School. The researcher used descriptive research design for this study. According to Creswell (2007), this design is used to describe the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest accurately and systematically. A descriptive design is non experimental and it deals with the relationships among non manipulated variables (Best and Kahn, 2003).The researcher has chosen this design as it is to describe the extent to which practices of continuous assessment techniques in EFL classrooms. That is, the researcher used both the quantitative and qualitative methods for pragmatic effects or mixed approach to answer the research question.

### **Research Setting**

The study was conducted at Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School. The school is located in South Nation, Nationalities and Peoples Regional(SNNPR) State of Ethiopia, Wolaita Zone, Boloso Bombe Woreda, in Bombe Town. Wolaita Zone is about 300km from Addis Ababa; the capital of Ethiopia and about 150 kilometers far from Hawassa, the capital of SNNPR. Bombe is 57km far from WolaitaSodo. The researcher selected the school for the study because the students are supposed to begin independent learning at this level by themselves in reading and writing using different texts when compared to primary levels, and because of the great number of students' population he came across while he was working there.

### **Participants of the study and sampling techniques**

The participants of this study were students of grade 10 and the English language teachers who were assigned to teach grade 10 in the target school. The researcher used simple random sampling techniques to select sample students to conduct this research. Simple random

sampling is the technique in which all students get equal chance to be the member of the sample study (Kothari, 2004). Therefore, out of the 520 grade 10 students, 226 students were selected as the desired sample size based on Slovan's sample size determination formula to give the data needed for the research.

$$\text{Formula: } n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where: n= is sample size

$$520 \times 0.0025 = 1.3 + 1 = 2.3 \quad N = \text{Total population}$$

$$520 \div 2.3 = 226 \quad (e) = 0.05 \text{ or allowance of random error}$$

From this number 106 students were females and 120 students were males. The reason that the researcher used this number of people to be respondent was to manage their response correctly. The total number of English language teachers, who were teaching grade 10 in target school were five. The researcher included all these English language teachers as a sample by using purposive sampling technique because they were fewer in number and easy to manage. Of the total five English language teachers four were male and one was female. None of the teachers held MA in TEFL and all teachers held BA in English language and literature. The researcher used these respondents to save time, and came up with accurate result.

The researcher also used a table of random numbers to select first element to inclusion in the sample. The rest of elements for inclusion selected using sampling interval. Sampling interval was calculated dividing the total population size by desired sample size. This means that 520 were divided by 226 and its result is 2.3. Therefore, the researcher drew each sample after 2 intervals. In fact, the random starting point was number 2 and the selection continued using 2, 4, 6...520.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Analysis of the Assessment Techniques that English Language Teachers Used**

As can be observed from the above data presentation, (57%) of the students reported that their English language teachers did not use homework repeatedly to assess their language performance and 97(43%) responded that the EFL teachers use home work when necessary.

They also reported that tests were the commonly used assessment devices to evaluate their language abilities. As we can see from the table, 103(45.6%) of the participant students said that their EFL teachers always use tests and, 123(54.4%) of respondents responded that teachers use tests when necessary for assessment purpose.

However, these devices help teachers to judge the achievement of learners at the end of unit or semester. In general, the frequently used assessment devices at selected secondary school by English language teacher were tests. Tests are part of the traditional mode of assessment and most often used for assessing students' knowledge of content; nevertheless, they may be used for assessing processes skills and attitudes. According to Hayes (1997) quizzes, tests and examinations are used as assessment mechanisms in combination with alternative methods of assessment these days. This shows paper and pencil tests and alternative methods of assessment complement each other. This enables the teacher to have detailed, valid and reliable information about the students particularly and the teaching learning process in general.

According to above table, 132(58.4%) participants responded that teachers always use oral questions. On the hand, 94(41.6%) respondents responded that teachers do not use oral techniques. Most of the time for assessing the skills of listening and speaking, oral technique is used. Variety of tasks can be used for this purpose; these tasks can be set up either formally or informally. Answering questions is a good device to assess the use of vocabulary, various structures, pronunciation, and intonation.

On the other hand, assessments like homework, class work, assignment, observation and project work were not regularly used in English language classrooms at target school. As can be seen in the above table, 132(58.4%) of respondents replied that their teachers do not use assignment 94(41.6%) participants answered that teachers use assignment when necessary. 173(76.5%) of respondents replied that their teachers do not practice project work assessment and 53(23.5%) answered that the teachers use project work when necessary in English classroom. A project work gives opportunity students to learn by themselves through working tasks. When projects are given individually or in groups, encourage students to be active in their participation and independent learners. Whether projects are used early or late in the course, the time that is needed must be

programmed for learners as well as for teachers (Brown *et al.*, 1997). They further stated that projects encourage students to work together and reflect their work. Furthermore, Spandel and Stiggins (1990) asserted that projects are important to show the attitude, skills, knowledge and the learning process of students as they engage in activities. However, most of the teachers at Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School, have not implemented the project work in EFL classroom to enhance students language skills.

According to the data presented on the above table, 48(27.27%) of participants replied that teachers always used writing activity in EFL classroom for assessment, 116(51.4%) of students replied teachers used writing activity when necessary and 62(27.47%) of respondents answered teachers did not use writing task in EFL classroom to for continuous assessment. Furthermore, a few teachers used reading strategies in EFL classroom. For improving pronunciation, reading aloud is a good activity. Dialogues, short conversational pieces or a short passage from the text book can be given to the student to read aloud. The assessment may be made on specific point like pronunciation of vowel sounds and consonants, intonation patterns and stress.

According to the above data presentation, Fieldtrip report was hardly used in target school. Storytelling and singing were continuous assessment techniques which teachers did not pay attention in EFL classroom. However, Fieldtrip, Storytelling and Singing give chance learners to develop their talent and help to assess speaking skills. A short presentation may also be used to assess the oral skills of the student; for this we may choose topics that are within the range of the students' experience.

It is better to give some clues so that the students can speak at least 26 sentences on the given topic. Enough preparation time should also be provided. Sometimes questions may be asked based on the talk. Furthermore, in storytelling assessment the teacher tells the students a story or s/he is given a story for reading. After this, s/he is asked to tell the story in her/his own words and assessment is made of her/his production.

As we have seen in the above discussion, the poor implementation of variety of continuous assessment techniques may indicate that English language teachers have tendency to practice traditional assessment techniques and this prevented them from practicing variety of continuous assessment techniques properly at the target school.

## **Analysis and Discussion of Semi-structured Interview**

In the first item of the interview, the teachers were asked their understanding of continuous assessment. In fact, their responses were commonly related to each other except two (T1 and T2) accordingly, they defined continuous assessment as a way of evaluating the students' knowledge in teaching learning process. They also added that continuous assessment is a method of identifying learners' level of understanding in the teaching-learning process. However, the rest two respondents defined continuous assessment differently. One of them, T3, said continuous assessment means asking the students different questions again and again until they understand. On the other hand, the second respondent, T4, also defined it as the process of giving assignments, tests and home works continuously. As one can understand from the above definitions forwarded by English language teachers, even if most of them understood continuous assessment, some of them did not. In relation to this, T5 explained his understanding as follows:

“Continuous assessment is assessment strategy that uses tests, assignments, homework and observation in order to evaluate students' performance, which will be administered after a topic has been completed.

This shows that even though most English language teachers perceive continuous assessment as strategy that uses different techniques, they have difficulties not to fully put into practice due to various pushing and pulling factors.

Regarding the practices or implementations of teachers toward continuous assessment techniques, teachers responded that continuous assessment is hard to implement with a classes of many students as they need to mark each students' score every time. And also the school teachers explained that they teach many classes per a week which makes it difficult for them to implement continuous assessment. Let us see each teacher's response. T1 'I feel that continuous assessment is a student evaluation system that uses a variety of assessment techniques to check whether they grasp the lesson or not; but I use tests and oral questions. T2 'I usually give my students tests, mid and final exam and sometimes ask oral questions to measure their English language skills. Hence, tests and examinations are the dominant assessment strategies at this school.' T3, 'I sometimes assess my students' English language abilities by giving them test.' T4, 'I mostly use tests and

sometimes quizzes because the testing time and format is already scheduled by the school administrators. And it is not comfortable to conduct other strategies because of the shortage of time since we always rush to complete or cover the text book portions.’

Teachers were interviewed what their view was on the contribution of continuous assessment. From the teacher respondents, T1 said “continuous assessment is assessment strategy that uses tests, assignments, home

work, and observation in order to evaluate students’ performance after the completion of each topic. Moreover, it involves keeping records of learners’ performance using different strategies as often as possible. However, we did not do this due to its taking time.’

The other of the question presented to the respondents was which strategies that they think are very essential in implementing continuous assessment.

**Table.1** The Frequency of Assessment Techniques English Language Teachers Used Most Frequently

Methods of CA	Frequency at which the methods are used						Total	
	use always		when necessary		Not use		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Homework	-	-	97	43	129	57	226	100
Class work	-	-	79	35	147	65	226	100
Assignment	-	-	94	41.6	132	58.4	226	100
Observation	-	-	58	25.7	168	74.3	226	100
Oral questions	132	58.4	94	41.6	-	-	226	100
Project work	-	-	53	23.5	173	76.5	226	100
Tests	103	45.6	123	54.4	-	-	226	100
Writing	48	21.27	116	51.4	62	27.47	226	100
Reading	56	24.8	110	48.7	60	26.5	226	100
Fieldtrip reports	-	-	-	-	-	-	226	100
Story telling	-	-	18	7.9	208	47.8	226	100
Singing	22	-	40	-	164	72.7	226	100

Accordingly, T5 of them gave details that most advisably using variety of assessment techniques to assess the students’ performance should be practiced in teaching learning process: like tests, group work, individual works, presentations, quizzes and etc. But in the selected schools the one’s teacher practice is different from the other even in the same grade level. In line with this three of them replied as follows: “We mostly use tests and sometimes quizzes or oral questions because the testing time and format is already scheduled by the school administrator. And also it is not comfortable to conduct other strategies because of the shortage of time since we always rush to complete or cover the text book portion.”

On the other hand, another interviewee (T1) responded as follows: ‘I used tests to assess my students, but did not use quizzes, group work, class work, project work and assignments many times because of workload and shortage of time. In large class it is difficult to mark quizzes, group works, project work and assignment.’ T2 shared T1’s idea. ‘I gave tests many times; especially

this year I gave tests per month and I did not give assignments. During my class I was not giving class work and did not give a chance of working in group. This year I did not use different assessment such as assignment, quizzes, written tests and others instead I used tests and mid examination.’ T3 and T4 explained the following points, “We mostly use tests and sometimes oral questions because the testing time and format is already scheduled by the school administrator. From the data given above we understand that most of the respondents are keen to put in to variety of strategies to assess their students’ performance, however, they do not put it into practices in actual classrooms.

The objective of the current study was to investigate the Extent to which Continuous Assessment Techniques are practiced in EFL Classroom at Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School. To achieve the intended objective, 226 students were selected out of 520 students through simple random sampling technique to gather data through questionnaires and five teachers were

participated via purposive sampling for semi-structured interview. This was done to investigate how often the different continuous assessment techniques were practiced EFL classrooms. Continuously assessing a language is multidimensional job for language teachers since it requires assessing four main basic skills of English language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each skill has different assessment tools, approaches and techniques in an educational setting. So, it is the teacher's job to decide when and how to use those tools and techniques.

Findings of this research revealed that almost all teachers believe that the implementation of variety of continuous assessment techniques in EFL classrooms improves the students learning status. Even though most English language teachers perceive continuous assessment as strategy that to use different techniques, they have difficulties not to fully put into practice due to various pushing and pulling factors. Most teachers didn't include a variety of continuous assessment tools in their plan and did not use in the class room activities. As a result, the status of continuous assessment practice is far from what is needed, and they concentrated on few tools like oral questions and tests. On the other hand, assessments like homework, class work, assignment, observation, fieldtrip, project work and storytelling were not regularly used in English language classrooms at the target school.

### Recommendations

It is the focus of educational leaders and researchers to create favorable condition for the good implementation of continuous assessment in schools. In this regard, the Purpose of this study was to investigate the Extent to which Continuous Assessment Techniques are practiced in EFL Classroom at Bombe Secondary and Preparatory School. Taking the findings of this study in to account, the researcher has forwarded the following recommendations to the stakeholders.

Continuous assessment is meaning full when it is implemented in plan. Teachers should implement varieties of continuous assessment strategies consistently and should think that assessment is not a matter of accumulating either tests or examinations. Teachers should always try to implement effective continuous assessment in the actual teaching learning process; teachers use their plan effectively to cover the course. Even using different continuous assessment techniques may be one way to cover the large portion in a short period of time. That is distributing different tasks for

students and making them present in the class and giving comments.

Teachers who teach in the same grade level should communicate in while assessing their students and exchanging information with their colleagues in order to evaluate equally all grade ten students through varieties of assessment strategies because invigilating needs cooperative work of others.

Teachers should crosscheck whether students grasped the lesson or not through varieties of assessment strategies rather than rushing to finish the syllabus or the content.

Teachers should be busy in implementing continuous assessment to evaluate all language class rooms. Moreover, they need to encourage students to take part in different activities. Further research should be conducted especially implementation and challenges of using variety of continuous assessment techniques.

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