

The Practice of Assessment for Learning in Three Selected Primary Schools of Adigrat Woreda with Particular Reference to Grade 8 English Language Teachers

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Abstract

The principal intent of this study was to investigate the practice of assessment for learning in three selected primary schools of Adigratworeda. Descriptive method was employed to assess what was actually happening in the classroom in the practice of assessment for learning. The participants of the study were 3 English teachers and 140 grade 8 students. Random sampling technique was employed to select the sample students. Besides, for teachers' interview and class room observation available sampling technique was employed. This was because there were only three grade 8 English language teachers available in the school and all of them were involved in the study. To gather the necessary data, questionnaire, interviews and classroom observation were employed. The results were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The finding of this study indicated that the teachers' assessment practice was not intended to adjust and improve the students' learning rather to decide their final achievement.

Key terms: Assessment; Assessment for learning; Feedback; practice, English Language

INTRODUCTION

Now a day, emphasis of curriculum assessment shifts from summative (assessment of learning) to formative assessment (assessment for learning) to meet the dynamic needs of the learners. Thus, in assessment *for* learning, teachers use assessment as an investigating tool to find out as much as they can about what their students know and can do, and what confusions, preconceptions, or gaps they

might have. Therefore, investigation results provide the basis for determining what teachers need to do next to move student learning forward. In this regard, Okas(n.d.:4) cited in Thi Ho N.(2015) contend that:

Assessment for Learning shifts the emphasis from summative to formative assessment, from making judgments to creating descriptions that can be used in the service of the next stage of learning. Teachers craft assessment tasks that open a window on what students know and can do already and use the insights that come from the process to design the next steps in observation, worksheets, questioning in class, student-teacher conferences or whatever mechanism is likely to give them information that will be useful for their planning and teaching. Marking is not designed to make comparative judgments among the students but to highlight teach students' strengths and weaknesses and provide them with feedback that will further their learning.

Assessment for learning (Afl) was introduced as an alternative approach to assessment which might hold potential for assessment to nurture learning (Stobart, 2008).In reality, it is through classroom assessment that attitudes, skills, knowledge and thinking are fostered, nurtured and accelerated or stifled.

In much educational literature, the terms formative assessment and assessment for learning are used interchangeably. However, they are different in that while formative assessment focuses on the role of the teachers' decisions and the adjustments in their teaching practice. Assessment for Learning emphasizes the role of the student in their own learning (Broadfoot, 2007). Development of the learner's autonomy becomes one of the major aims in education. As this study focuses on investigating assessment for learning practice in primary schools, analysis of assessment practice is aligned with the term assessment for learning.

Much research conducted in primary and secondary schools in Western countries have found that Assessment for learning (AfL) has brought about a number of benefits for student learning (Blacket al., 2005; Black &Wiliam, 1998a; Willis, 2010). For example, constructive feedback can enhance students' outcomes, confidence and motivation in learning. Additionally, data from assessment helps teachers adapt subsequent teaching to meet students' diverse learning needs (Griffin, McGaw, &Care,

2012). These examples illustrate how assessment can be used to support and enhance student learning, as well as to improve teaching.

As to Hynes (1991) as cited in Black & Wiliam, (1998a), assessment for learning (AFL):

- uses to determine where students are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there
- helps teachers form a clear picture of the abilities and needs of their learners
- Measures what the learners can and cannot do at any given point in the learning process
- Helps to inform instructional decisions.
- allows teachers to provide immediate,
- descriptive or constructive feedback that guides learning

The term Assessment for learning (AfL) and its effectiveness are still contested in the education field, and many researchers recognized that while assessment can help to promote students' learning, a number of questions remain around how to effectively apply AfL in an era of accountability as well as in diverse socio cultural issues(Black & Wiliam, 2005)). Therefore, this study focused on the practice of assessment for learning in primary schools of Adigratworeda and specifically grade 8 in focus.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Assessment is one essential component of curriculum practice that has great contribution for effective curriculum operation and implementation. It is a process for obtaining information in order to make decision about students' learning. Also, assessment evaluates the progress of learners and improves their performance and it helps in determining if the student has completed the required grade or course successfully (Griffin, McGaw, & Care, 2012). "Assessment for learning is the process of

monitoring student knowledge and understanding during instruction in order to give useful feedback and make timely changes in instruction to ensure maximal students' growth.”

Assessment is being implemented in schools mainly to improve teaching and learning process and to assess students' academic performance. For this reason, it has been implemented involving under the system of any school level of Ethiopian context.

English language is among the subjects that are given as a course in the primary and secondary schools in the education system of Ethiopia. Students are being continuously assessed their English language performance during teaching learning process so as to identify their academic level or potential and to give remedial solution for their academic weakness. This can be done by the regular efforts of the teachers in the teaching learning process, because assessment requires a commitment from the teacher in relying on its practice and implementation based on the strategies.

The important thing that motivated the researcher to focus on the practice of assessment for learning in English language is, though assessment is intentionally practiced to improve teaching learning process and to foster students learning, research finding has shown that there are still problems in its implementation. English language teachers in primary schools of Tigray have the experience of using traditional summative and more judgmental approach of assessment mainly tests and examinations. They do not give more focus on assessment for learning rather than focusing on short tests, assignment mid and final exams so as to decide their failure or success in their grade level. This is the basic issues that motivated the researcher to conduct the study taking 3 Adigratworeda primary Schools as a reference emphasizing on the practice of assessment for learning (AfL).

1.3. Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the practice of assessment for learning in the three selected primary schools of Adigratworeda.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

This study has the following specific objectives that are emanated from the general objective:

1. To find out the assessment for learning strategies being used by grade 8 EFL teachers in the teaching learning process.
2. To find out the feedback English Language teachers provided based on the result of assessment for learning;
3. To identify the factors those hindered the practice of assessment for learning in EFL class room.

1.4. Basic Research questions

This study is intended to deal with the following basic research questions:

1. What assessment for learning strategies do grade 8 EFL teachers use in the teaching learning process?
2. Do the EFL teachers provide appropriate feedback based on the result of assessment for learning?
3. What are the factors that hinder the practice of assessment for learning in EFL class room?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study can have multidimensional advantages. Above all, teachers can be benefitted from this study. As the study focused on the practice of assessment for learning, it is helpful for English language teachers of the three primary schools to examine their strengths and weakness on the practice of assessment for learning. It also helps to the woreda and regional supervisors to see the extent of English language teachers in using appropriate assessment strategies and feedback in the teaching learning process. The finding of this study is also helpful to the educational administrators and stakeholders to identify the main challenges that hinder the practice of assessment for learning. Moreover, the researcher believes that this study is significant for other researchers who are interested in conducting a further study on related title since they can use it as a springboard.

1.6. Scope of the study

It would have been good to conduct a study on the practice of assessment for learning in EFL classroom of all primary schools of Tigray Region. However, this is not possible. Thus, the study was delimited to the practice of assessment for learning in three selected primary schools of Adigratworeda with particular reference to grade 8 classes. The study mainly focused on the assessment strategies EFL teachers used; assessment feedback and the challenges faced in the practice of assessment for learning.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the practice of assessment for learning in English Language Teaching (ELT) with special focus to three primary schools of Adigratworeda. In this study, a descriptive survey method involving both qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed.

Scholars said a lot about descriptive survey method, For instance, Kumar (2006) stated that descriptive survey or study serves as direct sources of valuable knowledge concerning human behavior. Sharma (2000) also describes that a descriptive survey is helpful to identify present conditions and point to present needs. Besides, it is useful in showing immediate status of a phenomenon.

2.2. Sampling Techniques

The three primary schools are purposefully selected to be the setting of the study because they have the highest number of students in the woreda. They are also cluster centers. It is felt this highest number of students may help the researcher to have comprehensive data needed for this study. Tayie(2005) said that a sample is a subset of the population which is all individuals of interest to the research that is taken to be representative of the entire population. The following table depicted the total population and the selected samples of each school as target population.

Table 1. Population of the study

Name of the school	Number of students			Selected samples			Sample size
	M	F	Total	M	F	T	
Agazi	129	131	260	26	26	52	20%
Welwalo	67	79	146	21	21	42	28.76%
MeidaAgame	72	105	177	20	26	46	25.98%
Total	268	315	583	67	73	140	24.01

As it is depicted in the above table, in this study sample of grade 8 students and all the English language teachers of the schools are involved as informants. For this reason, out of 583 grade 8 students of the schools 140(24.01%) students were selected in random sampling technique (Lottery method). The reason why the researcher used random sampling technique was due to the fact that they were learning in the same class under the same school curriculum. In addition to this, all the 3 English language teachers of the three primary schools were taken using available sampling technique as respondents. In general, the total number of respondents was 143 teachers and Students and the sample size was 24.4%.

2.3. Data collection instruments

Primary sources of data were collected through questionnaire, interview and classroom observation. All the three data collection tools have been employed because they were important for collecting adequate data and triangulating so that the validity of the data collection could be ensured.

2.3.1. Questionnaire

Closed-ended questionnaires were distributed to all the sample students. The 19 closed-ended questions were grouped in two tables in relation to the objectives of the study and had five likert points: strongly agree, agree undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaires were translated into the students' mother tongue (Tigrigna) so as to avoid unnecessary confusion on the students and express their idea freely and confidently. Furthermore, the sample students were given clarifications about the questions included in the questionnaire before and while they were filling it in order to avoid unnecessary confusion. Therefore, clearly stated questions were distributed to all the students' respondents. Questionnaire was distributed only for the students because the grade 8 EFL teachers were few in number, that was, only three.

2.3.2. Interview

Semi-structured interview was conducted with all the teachers. Dornyei (2007) claims that semi-structured interview is the most popular type of interview as it compromises structured interview and unstructured interview. According to him, the format is open-ended and the interviewees are encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised as much as they can despite a set of prepared guiding questions and prompts. As a result, this type of interview has been conducted by informing the

interviewees about the purpose of the interview and arranging convenient place and time. The reason for using interview as a data collecting tool was that the researcher intended to substantiate the findings of the students' questionnaires with the findings of the EFL teachers' interview.

2.3.3. Classroom Observation

In addition to questionnaire and interview, classroom observation was conducted in order to get adequate data about the study. Dornyei (2007) cited in Mkhonta,L.A(2003) said that observation is fundamentally different from questioning because of the direct information it provides. This implies that classroom observation is an appropriate tool to get first-hand information from the actual classroom. The researcher prepared structured observation checklists before entering class for observation.

The teachers were informed ahead of about the schedule for observation so that they could be willing to allow the researcher to conduct classroom observation. The three teachers were observed two times each in order to gather adequate information on the practice of assessment for learning.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

According to the nature of the data collection tools to be used in the study, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were applied. Thus, the data collected through the closed-ended part of the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS version 21 so that appropriate descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) can be generated and reliability of the obtained numerical data could be ensured. On the other hand, the data collected through interview and class room observation were analyzed using qualitative data analysis method.

3. Data Analysis and interpretation

Table-2: Assessment for learning as perceived by the learners.

No	Items	Response in	Alternatives					Mean(x)	S.Deviation
			S.Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S.Disagree		
1	My teacher encouraged me to practice and spent a lot of time doing portfolio assessments	Fr	7	6	7	79	41	1.99	0.98
		%	4.9	4.2	4.9	55.6	28.9		
2	My English teacher let me actively involved in the teaching learning process	Fr	30	58	18	27	7	3.55	1.17
		%	21.1	40.8	12.7	19	4.9		
3	When assessing, my English teacher used a lot of teacher assessment techniques	Fr	13	31	8	43	45	2.45	1.38
		%	9.2	21.8	5.6	30.3	31.7		
4	My English teacher emphasized students' language learning process more than their achievements.	Fr	4	9	54	39	34	2.35	1.01
		%	2.8	6.3	38	27.5	23.9		
5	My English teacher let students do practical exercises and perform self-assessment	Fr	26	-	8	39	67	2.07	1.08
		%	18.6	-	5.7	27.5	47.9		
6	In addition to grades, my English teacher gave students written descriptions on their report	Fr	7	22	-	86	25	2.28	1.08
		%	5	15.7	-	61.4	17.9		

N.B: fr =frequency, S.agree=strongly agree, S.disagree = strongly disagree, S.Deviation= standard Deviation

As it is depicted in the above table of item 1, 41(28.9%) and 79(55.6%) of the respondents (students) reported that they strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively with the idea that said, “My teacher encouraged me to practice and spent a lot of time doing portfolio assessments.” However, 7(4.9%) and 6(4.2%) of them decided that they agreed and strongly agreed with the item In addition to this, 7(4.9%) of them reported undecided. The mean score of this item($X=0.98$) and with little variation among them ($SD=0.98$) indicated that majority of the respondents’ answered strongly disagree and this revealed that the EFL teachers didn’t encourage their students to spent much time doing portfolio assessment. In conformity of this, as it was revealed in the teachers’ interview, it was deduced that the EFL teachers didn’t encourage their students to do portfolio works during their learning.

Scholars advocated the use of assessment unlike giving tests. For instance, as to Aggarwal (1999) cited in Yoseph (2014, p.31) said, “Assessment doesn’t solely depend on formal tests. Assessment is more than giving a test; it involves every decision made by the teacher in class to improve students’ achievement”. Therefore, assessment was not only testing continuously, it can take different forms such as formal questions given to students during class, informal questions, take-home assignments/exercises, group works, project works and other individual works and portfolio.

In item 2, 58(40.8%) and 30(21.1%) of the students reported that they agree and strongly agree respectively with the idea that said, “My English teacher let me actively involved in the teaching learning process.” On the other hand, 27(19%) and 7(4.9 %) of them reported that they disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with this item. Moreover, 18(12.7%) of the respondents replied undecided. The mean score of this item($X=3.55$) and with high variation among them ($SD=1.17$) indicated that

the English language teachers let the students actively involved in the teaching learning process. Results of the classroom observation indicate that there was no much effort of the teachers to let students actively involved in the teaching learning process by asking various questions.

In responding to item 3, 45(31.7%) and 43(30.3%) of the students replied that they strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively with the item that said, “When assessing, my English teacher used a lot of teacher assessment techniques.” Whereas, 13(9.2%) and 31(21.8%) of them replied strongly agree and agree for this item. Furthermore, 8(5.6%) of the respondents replied that they were uncertain about this issue. The mean score of this item($X=2.45$) and with high variation among them ($SD=1.38$) confirmed that the ELT teacher didn't use different assessment technique.

Results of the teachers interview and classroom observation indicated that the teachers didn't use different assessment techniques rather they use class work, homework and oral questions and they didn't use the result of assessment to adjust their methodology rather they used it for final decision either to pass or fail. In assessment for learning, students are given different assessment activities so as to assess their language progress. In conformity of this, Brown (1987) Heaton (1990); in Mbea, (2009, p.42) for instance said that:

As they progress through the various stages of learning, English Language students are usually given formal tests and examinations from time to time. But in addition to those formal kinds of test, the teacher can also give regular informal tests to measure the students' progress (p.8). Therefore, in c assessment for learning, students have the chance to improve if failure is encountered.

The findings in item 4, 39(27.5%) and 34(23.9%) of the respondents reported that they disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with the item that said, “My English teacher emphasizes students' language learning process more than their achievements.” However, 4(2.8%) and 9(6.3%) of them

replied strongly agree and agree respectively with this idea and 54(38%) of them reported undecided. The mean score of this item($x=2.35$) indicated that the EFL teacher didn't emphasize students' language learning process more than their achievements with high variation among them ($SD=1.01$). The researcher's observation also obtained that the EFL teacher's emphasis was on their achievement in grade 8 regional examinations rather than their progress they show in day to day learning.

In item 5, the students were asked to show their agreement or disagreement for the item, "My English teacher let students to do practical exercises and perform self-assessment." For this reason, 26(18.6%) and 67(47.9%) of them reported strongly agreed and strongly disagree respectively whereas, 39(27.5%) and 8(5.7%) of them reported disagree and undecided respectively. The mean score of this item($X=2.07$) and with high variation among them ($SD=1.08$) indicated that majority of the respondents disagreed as their teacher let them practice self-assessment. Scholars said a lot regarding the use and purpose of self-assessment. For instance, Baniabdelrahman (2015, p.50) said:

Self-assessment is an effective assessment which involves students and enables them to see their possibility for redirection of their own learning efforts. In addition, the primary objective for self-assessment is to improve the capacity of the individuals to understand and what and how they are learning and take responsibility for their own learning, also increase the understanding of the students of the subject matter being studied.

Therefore, as self-assessment enables learners to assess themselves, EFL teachers need to make learners engaged in directing their own learning. The result in item 6 revealed that 25(17.9%) and 86(61.4%) of the students reported disagree and strongly disagree respectively with the idea that said, "In addition to grades, my English teacher gave students written descriptions on their report." However, 7(5%) and 22(15.7%) of them replied strongly agree and agree respectively. The mean score of this item ($X=2.28$) and with high variation among them (1.08) indicated that English teacher didn't give students written descriptions on their report. Results of the classroom observation indicated that the EFL

teachers didn't give them written description on their note book except the total result they got in the exercise.

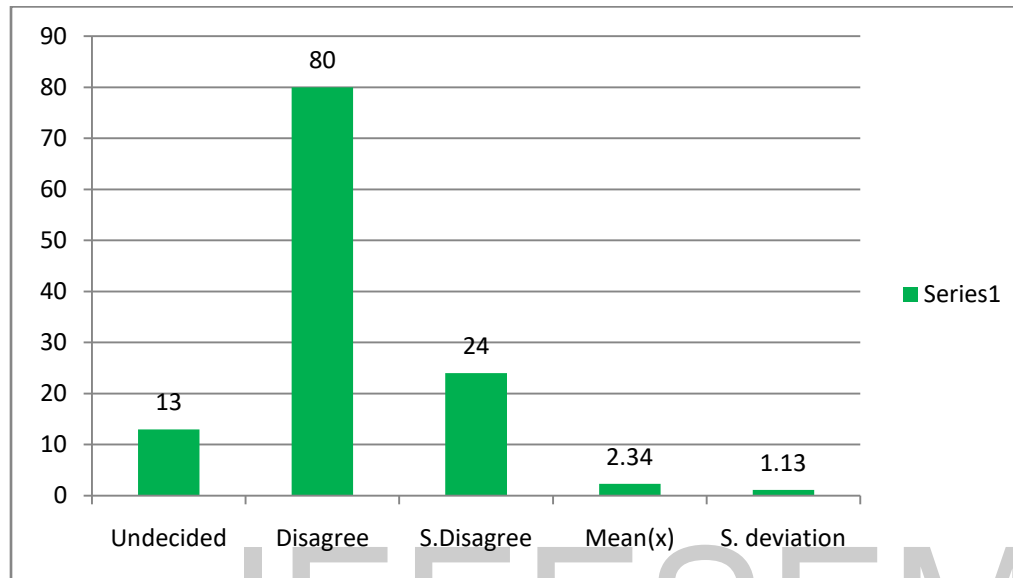


Fig.1. Teachers' encouragement and motivation of their students

As the data in the above figure indicated that the teachers didn't start students' comment with positive encouragement. For this reason 8, 24(17.1%) and 80(57.1%) of the students replied that they strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively with the item that said, "My English teacher starts off with a positive, encouraging comment in assessing us." . The mean score of this item($X=2.34$) and with high variation among them ($SD=1.13$) confirmed that the ELT teachers didn't start with positive, encouraging comment in assessing them.

4. Major Findings of the study

The principal intent of this study was to investigate the practices of assessment for learning in three selected primary schools of Adigratworeda. Besides, it is aimed to find out the assessment for learning strategies being used by grade 8 EFL teachers in the teaching learning process; to find out

the feedback English Language teachers provide based on the result of assessment for learning; and to identify the factors those hinder the practice of assessment for learning in EFL class room. To achieve these broad and specific objectives, the study was conducted with 3 EFL teachers and 140 grade 8 students of the three selected schools. Regarding the students' participation, out of 583 grade 8 students, 140 that were 24.01% of the students were selected in random sampling techniques as respondents of the questionnaire. For the teachers' interview and class room observation available sampling technique was employed. This was because there were only three grade 8 English language teachers available in the schools and all of them were involved in the study.

To gather the necessary data for this study, closed ended questionnaires containing 19 items were administered to the sample grade 8 students of the schools. In addition to this, 5 semi structured interview questions were prepared and all the EFL teachers were interviewed. Furthermore, apart from the data obtained from the respondents through questionnaire and interview, class room observation was carried out based on the prepared checklist to see the practice of assessment for learning of using various assessment techniques, the way feedback was given and the .

After analyzing all the data, the following results were obtained the EFL teachers didn't give their students timely feedback in the teaching learning process and they didn't give students written descriptions on their report. In addition to this, they didn't use feedback to identify the students' strength and weakness in their language skills and to improve their methodology. They use the assessment result to decide the final achievement of the learners. Therefore they used "assessment of learning instead of using assessment for learning .In addition to this, they focused on product assessment which focused on evaluating the result or outcome of a process. Moreover, the English teacher didn't integrate assessment for learning as part of teaching.

The findings of this study also indicated that the grade 8 learners weren't given the opportunity to discuss the assignment, and comments and EFL teachers didn't start with positive, encouraging comment in assessing them. Moreover, the teachers didn't use peer assessment techniques and they didn't use a lot of classroom observations to obtain information about students' performance. Furthermore, the EFL teachers didn't use task based assessment than paper and pencil besides they used more summative assessment than formative assessment.

Furthermore, the finding that was gained from this study indicated that lack of students' interest, lack of awareness; high work load; large class size, teachers' lack of adequate knowledge and skills about the implementation of assessment for learning, shortage of time were the major impediments of the practice of assessment for learning. Moreover, as it was said by the EFL teachers, there were no more trainings and workshops regarding the implementation of assessment for learning. The researcher also confirmed in the classroom observation that, the number of students in each class was above 50 and above and this can also be a factor that can impede the implementation of assessment for learning.

5. Conclusion

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is essential to promote students' learning. However, the English language teachers' AfL practices in the three surveyed schools were mainly controlled and directed, and the teachers' assessment practice was not intended to adjust and improve the students' learning rather to decide their final achievement or to score good result in the regional examination. Therefore, the examination-oriented learning still has dominance in the schools. Although there are many strategies of assessment for learning, the EFL teachers used very limited number. The common ways that the teachers used was questioning as common strategy to assess students' current

knowledge. Besides, they used class work, homework, tests, quizzes and group assignments. Therefore, they didn't use the other assessment for learning strategies. Furthermore, they didn't have also daily record of the students' progress and weakness in order to set up new goals for their learning.

6. Recommendations

The English language teachers need to get training on the principles, purposes and on how to implement assessment for learning. Besides, the teachers should use the result of assessment to improve and guide students' learning and teachers' instruction as this is the prime objective of assessment for learning.

From the results of the investigation, it was realized that the English Language teachers used limited number of assessment for learning strategies to assess their students' learning. Therefore, to collect valid data and to make sound decisions based on the data regarding the students' learning, the EFL teachers should employ a wide range of assessment strategies to assess their students learning progress. They should also have daily record of the students' progress and weakness in order to set up new goals for their learning.

The English language teachers should also give their students timely feedback based on the result of assessment and they should also use assessment for learning as part of teaching. They should give to their students written descriptions on their note book what their mistake and what they did fine. In addition to this, the teachers should record their students' assessment results as immediately after assess them.

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