Language Assessment of the Literacy Level of Ethiopian EFL Instructors: A Focus on South West Ethiopian Public Universities

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to investigate Language Assessment literacy (LAL) level of EFL instructors who are teaching communicative English language courses in three South West Ethiopian public higher educational institutions.

Approach/Methodology/Design: The study employed a descriptive research design, which involves quantitative data gathering tool. Accordingly, a questionnaire was used to collect the appropriate data. The target population of the study was 42 Male and 9 female totally 51 instructors who were teaching Communicative English Language Skills courses in Jimma university, Wollega university and Mizan Tepi universities, and all of these instructors were chosen as samples of the study through comprehensive sampling technique

Results: For measuring the instructors' Language assessment literacy level, an Assessment Literacy Test (ALT) consisting of 59 items with eight components was given for all 51 instructors. There score in assessment literacy test rests between minimum of 26 and maximum of 44.

Conclusions: Though their performance is average and low in some of the components of assessment literacy their overall performance is above average.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is a process of identifying and gathering information about learners, in order to seek ways of addressing needs and means of overcoming barriers to learning. It is vital to the education process because the information provides valuable feedback about the teaching and learning process. Teachers can respond to this information by adjusting their teaching and by planning further learning to meet their students' identified needs. They can also use information to involve the students in goal setting and self-assessment based on the feedback.

According to Green (2014) and Herppich et al. (2018) the assessment and results drawn from it have crucial effects on the test takers' lives. With this great role in language assessment, teachers' knowledge of assessment has a big impact on the quality of education (Malone, 2013). As a result, it is necessary for teachers to utilize assessment strategies to make decisions, to decide on the most suitable instruction for learners, and to get an idea about teaching and learning progress.

Having the knowledge of assessment is an indispensable part of being an EFL teacher since they always need to be sound and fair in decisions they make about the learners' progress and achievement (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018). Very recently, a new term, language assessment literacy, has flourished, and it is rooted in the term assessment literacy, but it has appeared as a distinct area from assessment literacy. The definitions of language assessment literacy vary in the literature. Malone (2013, p. 329) defined language assessment literacy as "language teachers' familiarity with testing definitions and the application of this knowledge to classroom practices in general and specifically to issues related to assessing language". Lam (2015) also defined it as "teachers' understandings and mastery of assessment concepts, measurement knowledge, test construction skills, principles about test impact, and assessment procedures which can influence significant educational decisions within a wider social context" (p. 172).

Stiggins (1995) emphasized that assessment literate teachers know "what they are assessing, why they are doing it, how best to assess the skill, knowledge of interest, how to generate good examples of student performance, what can potentially go wrong with the assessment, and how to prevent that from happening". Thus, assessment literacy covers the knowledge related to assessment and also application of this knowledge during assessment practices. However, research into language assessment literacy "is still in its infancy" (Fulcher, 2012).

Assessment is a key component in teaching practices, and it is in fact an effective and influential factor (Razavipour, 2013). In Ethiopian universities, assessment is a process that lecturers use to identify the learners' current levels of understandings and to target areas for further teaching and learning. In all Ethiopian public higher educational institutions freshman students take communicative English language I and communicative English language II courses. The assessment of these courses is mainly based on summative assessment, where the learners' abilities in memorisation and comprehension skills are being assessed. For both of these courses the mid exam is given from 30% and final exam is given from 50%. These exams are summative assessments. Other skills such as learners' presentation, analysis, synthesis and critical thinking are rarely considered important for evaluation. This is why the researchers were initiated to evaluate the language assessment literacy level of EFL instructors' at three south western public universities in Ethiopia. So, the study aims to answer the question; Do English language instructors' have the required level of language assessment literacy?

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Study Setting

The study was conducted on three Ethiopian public higher educational institutions that are found in the South West part of the country. These universities are Jimma University, Wollega University and Mizan Tepi University; and they are selected out of eight universities through simple random sampling. Because the universities are from the same part of the country the researchers believed they will have the same institutional culture and practice.

Research Design

The study was conducted on three Ethiopian public higher educational institutions that are found in the South West part of the country. These universities are Jimma University, Wollega University and Mizan Tepi University; and they are selected out of eight universities through simple random sampling. Because the universities are from the same part of the country the researchers believed they will have the same institutional culture and practice.

Research Participant

Since the focus of this study was only on three (i.e, Jimma University, Wollega University, Mizan Tepi University) Ethiopian public higher educational institutions that are found in the South West region of the country, all 42 male and 9 female totally 51 active English language instructors who have been teaching Communicative English language skills courses in the three universities participated in the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Simple random sampling technique gives each element in the population an equal probability of getting into the sample; and all choices are independent of one another and it gives each possible sample combination an equal probability of being chosen (Kothari, 2004). Accordingly, among the universities found in the south western region of the country: Jimma, Bonga, Gambella, Asosa, Wollega, Dembidolo, Wolkitee, Metu and Mizan Teppi; only three (33%) of them were selected through the lottery method of simple random sampling technique. These are: Wollega University, Mizan Teppi University and Jimma University. The reason behind including only three universities in the study was in order to manage the study in terms of time. Since the number of English language instructors who were teaching communicative courses in the three universities was very few, the researchers used comprehensive sampling technique. Hence, the whole English language instructors who were teaching communicative courses in the target universities were chosen as samples of the study.

Data Gathering Instrument

Data were collected from English Language instructors about their language assessment literacy in the target universities through questionnaire. The questionnaire is a tool for collecting data from a large number of participants at a time (Creswell, 2011). Accordingly, the researchers employed this tool to gather data from 51 English language instructors who were teaching communicative courses in the target universities. For measuring the instructors' Language assessment literacy level, an Assessment Literacy Test (ALT) developed and used by Stiggins' and Chappuis (2014) in the Oregon State-wide (USA) assessment literacy project sponsored by State Education Department of Oregon was adopted. Originally, the test comprised sixty-four items which includes; six open-ended items, twenty items were multiple choice and thirty-eight dichotomous items. Changes made in the test after the pilot study and the items were reduced to 59 (fifty-nine items).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first section of the questionnaire contains seven items that were included to elicit the participants' knowledge about connecting assessment to clear purposes.

Table 1: Assessment Literacy Component 1, "Purposes of Assessment"

Statements	N	Mean	St. Dn.
Using assessment results to modify classroom instruction	51	.92	.272
Using students' self-assessment practices	51	.88	.325
It can help Students to set goals for learning	51	.90	.300
Communication of their results to students	51	.80	.401
These assessments must focus only on the learning outcomes of the course	51	.39	.493
The assessment must assess general learning outcomes	51	.69	.469
Whether the assessed content is aligned to the taught content	51	.63	.488
Cumulative results	51	.744	.9379

The above table reveals the mean scores of item 1, 2, 3, and 4 with their mean value of (.92, .88, .90 and .80) respectively, and shows higher performance of instructors on how to use assessment for different purposes of teaching and learning process. It shows that the instructors have higher literacy on the purposes of assessment which is about using assessment results to modify classroom instruction, how to use students' self-assessment practices, on how assessment can help students to set goals for learning, and about how to communicate the results to their students.

In addition it also shows that the mean scores of item 6 (.69) and 7(.63) which is an average level understanding of instructors about how the assessment must assess the general learning outcomes and the importance of making sure that the assessed content is aligned to the taught content. However, item 5 reveals that instructors don't know about the importance of assessing their students by focusing on the learning outcomes of the course.

The overall mean score (.744) represents a high performance of university instructors on connecting assessments to clear purposes of the course and the lessons which is very important. In relation to this Riaz (2008) stated that the central goal of classroom assessment is to collect reliable, valid and valuable information regarding students' performance and to modify classroom instruction to enhance students' academic achievement. It also provides evidence for the instructional, administrative and predictive (aptitude) decisions for the concerned authorities. It is thus critical that educators possess adequate assessment literacy to evaluate, monitor and track student learning (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; Koh, 2011; Koh et al., 2018). The above finding can convey us that communicative English language instructors have high understanding on using assessment for different purposes. This finding is also in line with many studies (e.g., Barnes, Fives, & Dacey, 2015; Bonner, 2016; Brown, 2008; Guskey, 2007; Gopal & Singh, 2020) concluding that teachers recognize assessment for learning to collect information about student learning and their active participation that would help to improve instruction.

Table 2: Assessment Literacy Component 2 "Clear Learning Outcomes"

Statements	N	Mean	Sd. Dn.
CLO improves assessment method	51	.9608	.19604
CLO assists students in understanding the learning expectations	51	.9412	.23764
CLO helps in planning assessment	51	.8824	.32540
CLO helps to achieve intended learning outcomes	51	.8431	.36729
Read aloud with acceptable fluency	51	.5686	.50020
Identify the properties of English language pronunciation	51	.4314	.50020
Applying voice in academic writing	51	.2549	.44014
Describing a concept with appropriate vocabulary	51	.2941	.46018
Fluently speaking in English language	51	.2745	.45071
Writing a story	51	.3922	.49309
How to apply various listening strategies to listen effectively	51	.2549	.44014
Students would be able to write in English as academically and socially appropriate	51	.6275	.48829
Students would be able to understand relative clauses in English and apply it in their writing	51	.6078	.49309
Students can use English with reasonable level of fluency and accuracy	51	.5882	.49705
Cumulative results	51	.5658	.10101

Questions raised in exams play an important role to test the students' overall cognitive levels (Omar et al., 2012). Efficient exam questions should cover various difficulty levels to refer to

the different capabilities of learners (Leeds, 2000; Black, Harrison, & Lee, 2003; Chin, 2004; Jones, Harland, Reid, & Bartlett, 2009). That's to say, the questions presented on a paper determine whether the examination manages assessing the learners' performance or not. A good assessment requires an exam paper that covers different cognitive levels to accommodate diverse capabilities of learners (Jones, Harland, Reid & Bartlett, 2009).

Table 2 illustrates the performance of communicative English instructors on the second component of assessment literacy which is about properly clarifying achievement objective expectations. Item 1, 2, 3, and 4 represented higher mean scores of (.9608 .9412 .8824 and .8431) respectively which are about as having CLO improves assessment method, as it assists students in understanding the learning expectations, as it also helps in planning assessment classroom itself and as it helps to achieve intended learning outcomes. On the other hand, the mean scores (.2549, .2941, .2745, .3922, and .2549) of item 7,8,9,10 and 11 represents low level understanding of instructors on how to meet the clear learning outcomes and learning objective in assessment through preparing the questions based on the learning domain it represented.

However, item 5, 6, 12, 13, and 14 with the mean scores of (.5686, .4314 .6275, .6078 and .5882) respectively represents an average level understanding of instructors on how to properly follow and use the learning targets for assessment. Generally, the overall mean result (.5658) indicates average level performance of communicative language instructors on the functional assessment tools to measure students' both learning and critical thinking skills according to the six stages of the Blooms taxonomy.

Table 3: Assessment Literacy Component 3 "Sound Design for Students' Assessment"

Statements	N	Mean	Sd. Dn.
Selected response/short answer: multiple-choice, true/false, matching , fill in the blanks	51	.6667	.47610
Essay/ Extended Written Response (EWR)	51	.7451	.44014
Performance assessment (presentation): assessment based on observation and judgment	51	.1765	.38501
Personal communication: asking questions in class, conducting individual students' conference and interview, conducting class discussions and conducting oral exams	51	.7843	.41539
Selected response/short answer: multiple-choice, true/false matching , fill-in-bank	51	.5294	.50410
Essay/Extended Written Response (EWR)	51	.7647	.42840
Performance assessment: assessment based on observation and judgment	51	.7451	.44014
Personal communication: asking questions in class, individual students' conference and interviews, class discussions, oral exams, reviewing journals or logs	51	.8431	.36729
Cumulative results	51	.6568	.4466

There are different types of tests which can be employed for different purposes (Bachman & Palmer, 2000; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Hughes, 2003). In other words, different kinds of tests can be utilized depending on the purpose of assessment. In this regard, instructors should be knowledgeable in these test and testing types including the purpose they serve for, the differences between them, and the situation they should be used so that they can determine the most appropriate type of test and testing for their context.

As illustrated in table 3, the communicative language instructors appeared to have an average performance in Component 3 which is about applying proper assessment methods. The mean value of item 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 (.6667, .7451, .7843, .5294, .7647, .7451, and .8431) respectively is high. From this we can understand that communicate English language instructors have high understanding about how to design questions and assess students' mastery of content knowledge and Personal communication. Additionally, they are also proficient in using different methods of assessment in order to assess students' content knowledge. However, the result also revealed communicative English language instructors low understanding about assessment based on observation and judgment where the mean score is (.1765).

Achieving valid, reliable and accurate, assessment demands a strong grasp of assessment knowledge and skills (Veloo et al., 2016). The overall mean score (.6568) also represents average level literacy of communicative English language instructors on designing of assessment and the selection of the appropriate methods of assessment.

To conclude majority of the respondents, have average understanding on how to design assessment and what type of assessment practice is required to be adopted for measuring different type of students' learning.

Table 4: Assessment Literacy Component 4"Assessing Achievement Goals"

Statements	N	Mean	Sd. Dn.
Giving an oral presentation in class	51	.4314	.50020
Writing a brief conclusion about passage	51	.6471	.48264
Assuming and playing out a dramatic role play	51	.7647	.42840
Using subject and object pronouns correctly	51	.5490	.50254
Cumulative results	51	.5982	.3453

Table 4, reveals the fourth component of assessment literacy which is about 'assessing achievement goals.' There are four items under this component. The mean scores of items 2 and 3 with their mean value of (.6471, .7647) respectively shows that the respondents of the study have performed more than average level performance. However, item 1 and 4 discloses instructors mean score of (.4314 and .5490) respectively which is average understanding of instructor's assessment literacy. The overall mean score (.5982) indicates average level of communicative language instructors' performance on how to assess the achievement goals of students at different level.

Table 5: Assessment Literacy Component 5"Approach in Mcqs (Multiple Choice Questions), Observations, and Question Answering"

Statements	N	Mean	Sd. Dn.
Make all multiple-choice questions which have the same number of responses	51	.5686	.50020
Keep reading level low unless assessing reading proficiencies of students	51	.4510	.50254
Limit use of all of the above and none of the above options	51	.5882	.49705
Always use a 1 to 4 scale from below basic to exceed standard when assessing work	51	.4510	.50254
Assess students best piece of work	51	.2157	.41539

	N	Mean	Sd. Dn.
Students should be provided the criteria by which responses will be judged	51	.7647	.42840
Take into account student ability and effort when assigning scores	51	.8431	.36729
Focus on broad question to encourage divergent thinking	51	.7451	.44014
When someone fails to respond, wait 2-3 seconds before calling on another student	51	.7451	.44014
Call on non-volunteers sometimes	51	.6863	.46862
Call on the respondent and then ask the question	51	.8039	.40098
Ask students to paraphrase each other' question and answer	51	.8431	.36729
Cumulative results	51	.6421	.5058

Popham (2003) divided classroom test construction into three steps: teacher's determining the instructional decision to be made by tests, identifying test based inferences to support the decisions going to be made, and constructing tests which bring forth valid inferences. The fifth component of assessment literacy is about developing quality assessment exercise, scoring criteria and sampling appropriately.

As indicated on table 5, the respondents of the study have average understanding about using selected response items in their assessments. For instance the mean value of item 1, 2, and 3 reveals instructors mean score of (.5686, .4510, .5882) respectively. In addition there response about conducting performance assessment i.e., assessment based on observation and judgment result also reveals that they have average level understanding about which work of the students to assess as indicated on item 4 and 5 with a mean score of (.4510, and.2157) respectively. Contrary to this, their performance of item 6 and 7 with a mean score of (.7647 and .8431) respectively indicates that communicative English language instructors have a high performance about the importance of providing criteria by which responses will be judged for the Students and the importance of taking into account student ability and effort when assigning scores. Similarly, for items regarding the importance of gathering evidence of learning via question and answers during instruction, as indicated on item 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 with a mean score of (.7451, .7451, .8431, .8039, and .6863) respectively communicative English language instructors reflected higher literacy. Generally, overall mean score of (.6421) indicates an average level performance of instructors on using different type of items for different assessment purposes.

Table 6: Assessment Literacy Component 6 *"Effective Communication Practices"*

Statements	N	Mean	Sd. Dn.
Providing only descriptive feedback on practice work	51	.3529	.48264
Giving students a small amount of corrective feedback at a time	51	.7059	.46018
Using feedback to emphasize strengths in students work	51	.9020	.30033
Using feedback to point out what students need to work on	51	.9020	.30033
Cumulative results	51	.7157	.09920

Table 6, reveals the performance of Communicative English language instructors on the sixth component of assessment literacy which is about 'communication of assessment results.' Except for item 1with a mean score of (.3529) all the mean scores shows high performance of Communicative English language instructors. It reveals that they understand how to communicate assessment results to their students and how they follow appropriate means and methods for the communication of assessment results. The overall mean score (.7157) also

shows that Communicative English language instructors have high literacy on communicating student achievement effectively.

Table 7: Assessment Literacy Component 7 *"Feedback, grading and students' score"*

Statements	N	Mean	Sd. Dn.
B+. Good Work	51	.4902	.50488
Your work is consistently above average	51	.4118	.49705
You keep eye contact with the audience in your entire presentation	51	.7451	.44014
Deducting points from a student's work because he/she is usually late to classes	51	.8235	.38501
Inviting students to assign their own grades	51	.6275	.48829
Weighting assessments differently in assigning grades	51	.3922	.49309
Factoring students efforts into grades	51	.4314	.50020
The student earned a score like that of a fourth grader in the norm group	51	.2353	.42840
The examinee got 13 out of 16 items correct	51	.6863	.46862
The student outscored 75% of the norm group in examination	51	.3137	.46862
Cumulative results	51	.5157	.3875

Table 7 shows the mean scores of Communicative English language instructors' performance on the last components of assessment literacy which is about using assessment as an instructional intervention. The mean value of item 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, and 10 (.4902, .4118, .3922, .4314, .3137, and .2353) are low respectively. This shows that Communicative English language instructors' have no significant understanding about how to give descriptive feedback, how to transform students' performances factors into grading and nature of scores obtained from assessment results. With regard to item 3 and 4 with mean value of (.7451, and .8235) respectively indicates Communicative English language instructors' high performance on those items. However, item 5 and 9 with mean value of (.6275 and .6863) shows that they have average level of understanding on how to assign student's grade. The result also tells that Communicative English language instructors were of the view that students may be involved in grading their own performances. Generally, the cumulative mean scores of this component are (.51) which reflects average level literacy of communicative instructors about how to give feedback and grade their students properly.

Table 8: Assessment Literacy of Communicative English language instructors'

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Assessment Literacy	51	26.00	44.00	36.5098	4.80988

Table 8 shows the overall Assessment Literacy of Communicative English language instructors in three south western Ethiopian public higher institutions. The total participants of the study were 51 active Communicative English language instructors. There score in assessment literacy test rests between minimum of 26 and maximum of 44. Though their performance is average and low in some of the components of assessment literacy their overall performance is above average. Their overall mean score (36.5098) also shows that the instructors have above average understanding on language assessment literacy.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Table 8 shows the overall Assessment Literacy of Communicative English language instructors' in three south western Ethiopian public higher institutions. The total participants' of the study were 51 active Communicative English language instructors. There score in assessment literacy test rests between minimum of 26 and maximum of 44. Though their

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RECOMMENDATION

On the basis the findings the following recommendations can be forwarded. Firstly, Communicative English instructors must properly prepare assessments that are developed based on clearly articulated purpose and with appropriate achievement targets. Secondly, they must also properly prepare assessments' that can accurately measure students' achievement and that can yield result that can be effectively communicated to their intended users. Finally, they must address all the contents of the courses, and give proportional values for each content when they prepare mid and final exams on them.

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