

English Language Teachers Beliefs, Practices and Challenges of Continuous Assessment: Some Selected Public Secondary Schools in Arba Minch town; Gamo Zone in Focus

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to investigate English language teachers' beliefs, practice and challenges of continuous assessment. The participants of the study were Grade 9 and 10 English language teachers. Thirty-one English teachers took part in this study. The participants were selected using comprehensive sampling technique. This descriptive survey study utilized quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze the data. The study used instruments such as questionnaires, interview, daily lesson plan, and assessment checklist. The findings indicated that the teachers had strong beliefs about continuous assessment, they attempting to implement continuous assessment with limitations due to challenges related to teachers themselves, students and school administrations and the relationship between the teachers' beliefs and their actual continuous assessment practices was positive statistically. The data obtained through triangulation indicated that teachers demanding to put their beliefs into practice, however they have faced challenges. Therefore, it is suggested that to overcome the challenges, supportive materials, serious follow up and professional support for novice teachers, and training directed to continuous assessment are critical.

Keywords: Continuous Assessment, English Language Teachers Belief, Challenges of Continuous Assessment

Introduction

Assessment is necessary part of teaching which teachers use to make a judgment about the level of skills or knowledge of their students (Taras, 2005). Assessment is to measure improvement over time and to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the students, to rank them for selection or exclusion, or to motivate them (Marshal, 2005). Furthermore, assessment can help individual teacher to obtain useful feedback on what, how much, and how well their students are learning (Taras, 2005; Stiggins, 1992). Assessment is also systematic process which helps to evaluate teachers teaching methods and gives opportunity to meaningfully reflect on how learning is best delivered. Marshal (2005) states that assessment includes gathering and interpreting information about a student's performance to determine his/her mastery towards pre-determined learning objectives or standards. According to Black and Wiliam (1998), assessment refers to all activities undertaken by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to change the teaching and learning activities.

We can categorize assessments under summative and formative form of assessment. The summative assessment in an educational setting used to assign students course grade at the end of a course or program. The second category, formative (continuous) assessment is an assessment for learning, ongoing assessment, or dynamic assessment (Stiggins, 2002; Derrich and Ecclestone, 2006). Teachers are motivated to use a range of assessment methods that are appropriate to learning

tasks of students in order to achieve on the primary objectives of learning that should be operated smoothly and effectively. Nowadays, in the world of education continuous assessment has been recognized as an integral part of everyday classroom instruction and a key tool to ensure quality learning. Accordingly, every educational institution in Ethiopia irrespective of its level has been using continuous assessment as a key to determine students learning achievement and identify their learning difficulties for special supports, to improve teachers' pedagogical practices, and to enhance quality of education in general (MoE,1994).

Regarding this, Kapambwe(2010) states that the objective of continuous assessment are two-fold: firstly, to promote the use of continuous assessment so as to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Secondly, establish regular system of equipping implementation for the program or curricula. However, it has such uses, there is mismatch between the expected objectives and the actual reality due to some problems.

Diamond (1998) describes that the fundamental problem in assessment practice is mismatch between the learning objectives established and the methods and the criteria teachers use to assess their students. The belief language teachers hold also plays an important role in many aspects of teaching. According to Kapambwe (2010), teachers make decision about their classroom practices based on the beliefs they hold about teaching and learning. What teachers think, plan, decide, and implicit beliefs are interwoven aspects that influence their classroom practices every day. The concept and the principles they need to follow and their beliefs learners are assessed inform their thinking and planning, and consequently, guide their classroom assessment (Black & William,2004).

In Ethiopia, continuous assessment has been introduced at all levels of schools since 1994 (MoE, 1994). However, some studies indicate that the assessment practices have not been freed from traditional assessment practices yet. For instance, Sintayehu (2016) conducted a comparative study on the practices of continuous assessment between Addis Ababa University and Unity University College and found that the institutions were still a leftover from traditional assessment practices. While discussing factors that affect assessment reforms, Black and William (2004) claim that the extent to which teachers implement new form of assessment and whether their forms succeed or fail depends on the teachers' beliefs and knowledge that they possess in terms of learning assessment and its relation to instruction.

Moreover, as documented by different national and international researchers, some of the problems found were that the entire practice of continuous assessment is surrounded by carelessness(Birhanu, 2013), the assessment methods that teachers use are not effective in promoting good learning(Black & William, 2004),teachers experienced difficulties in implementation of formative assessment(Derrich & Eccleston, 2006)., teachers are complaining that continuous assessment increases the workload for teachers(Mpapalika, 2013), etc. These all findings clearly indicated the existing deficiency in continuous assessment implementation. These difficulties might be caused by variety of factors related with teachers, students, curriculum, and institution in general. Though there were some studies regarding the practice and challenges of continuous assessment, empirical evidence that distinguish challenging factors as teacher-based challenges, student-related challenges, curriculum-related challenges and institution-based challenges was yet insufficient.

Unless the source of challenge is clearly identified, it would become difficult to set out possible solutions to maintain effective implementation of continuous assessment at institutional level.

The researcher supposed that English language teachers of the focus area of this study were less-informed about the importance of continuous assessment, or their belief of continuous assessment was not identified, and challenges they faced during practicing continuous assessment was not discussed, and the assessment techniques they were using was not known. Actually, the assessment types the teachers use depends up on the objectives of the assessment. Teachers on the focus area of

the study were assumed as if only giving tests at the end of a week as a continuous assessment. This is directly related to their belief. Accordingly, Alemu (2015) conducted a study on Grade 11 and 12 English language teachers' beliefs and practices of using continuous assessment. He found that teachers had strong beliefs on continuous assessment, and the relationship between their beliefs and their actual practice of continuous assessment was statistically negative.

Above this, the challenges EFL teachers came across are the serious problems which prohibited them from continuous assessment. These are, students related challenges, teacher related challenges, leadership-related, and curriculum related challenges. Some students have lack of understanding about continuous assessment and its benefits clearly, absence of opportunities for absentee students to be assessed in another day, poor participation of students in different activities. Teachers' failure to provide special support for low achievers and failure to take remedial measures based on continuous assessment result that restrains the implementation of continuous assessment (Zelalem, 2018). Similarly, lack of commitment of teachers to assess learning progress, to use teaching and assessing tools, poor record keepings of continuous assessment results, large class size, overload etc. can be mentioned. Not using different strategies of practicing continuous assessment is also challenge. Researches like (Birhanu, 2013).

The researchers, therefore, decided to investigate secondary schools' English language teachers' beliefs, practice of continuous assessment and challenges they faced in practicing continuous assessment in grade 11 and 12 classrooms of Arba Minch town. Hence, this study sought to answer the following specific research questions.

- 1 What belief do English language teachers hold about continuous assessment?
- 2 How do English language teachers practice continuous assessment?
- 3 What is the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of continuous assessment?
- 4 What are the challenge English language teachers face during practicing continuous assessment?

Methodology

Research Design

The study required respondents to express their opinion and feeling, and describe their current classroom continuous assessment practices. To study such issues, researchers often use descriptive survey research design. As to Muijs (2004), survey research design is often used because it is highly flexible and efficient to collect large amount of data within a short period at a reasonably low cost and effort. To this end, mixed method research design was employed as it enables the researcher to study a single unit intensively for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units (Creswell, 2013). The participants of this study were **EFL** teachers in five selected government secondary schools at Arba Minch town, in southern, Ethiopia. Accordingly, 35 comprehensively selected English language teachers in five government secondary schools of Arba Minch town were involved in this study.

In order to collect data from EFL teachers regarding their beliefs, practices and challenges of continuous assessment, questionnaire was adapted from (Yehia, 2012). Some parts of the questionnaire were deleted and some parts were modified based on the research objectives. The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part consists 15 questions deals with beliefs of English language teachers about continuous assessment. The second part consists of twenty-two items deals with EFL teachers practice of continuous assessment. The third part consists of twenty-two items deals with EFL teachers challenges of practicing continuous assessment. Each part had different items to be responded on a five-point scale (1-5) with the extreme alternatives of Strongly Disagree

to Strongly Agree. The internal consistency reliabilities of each item was checked using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded 0.913 which refers to a high level of reliability.

Table 1. Reliability test result

No	Items	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Item on beliefs of English language teachers on continuous assessment	15	0.905
2	Item on English language teachers Practices of Continuous assessment	23	0.899
3	Item on challenges of using continuous assessment	21	0.934
Total		59	0.913

As it can be seen from Table 1 above, all the instruments used in this study were reliable since their Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.899–0.934, suggesting that the items have relatively found to be internally consistent (Creswell, 2012). Thus, calculated reliability of the items, Alpha result = 0.913 (excellent). The reliability test disclosed that the questionnaires which were tried out in this study have excellent reliability. Hence, the survey data were collected with valid and acceptable tools as it filled the international standard. Moreover, ample time was given to EFL trainee teachers to fill the questionnaire freely.

Document was also analyzed to check EFL teachers' practice of continuous assessment Collecting data to investigate classroom practice including journals, lesson reports, portfolio observation and the like is very useful. Borg (2006) the famous researcher, beliefs and suggests that asking teachers directly may not be productive. Indirect strategies can be a good way to explore teachers' beliefs. " ... rather than asking directly, 'What are your beliefs?', to use a stimulus of some kind, e.g. a piece of teaching material such as a lesson plan from teachers' own work or an activity from a teacher own class and then use that as the basis of exploring the practice of continuous assessment". The researcher, thus, had looked at mark list and portfolio of five selected teachers to collect data about teachers' actual practice of continuous assessment to support data obtained through questionnaire.

Data Analysis

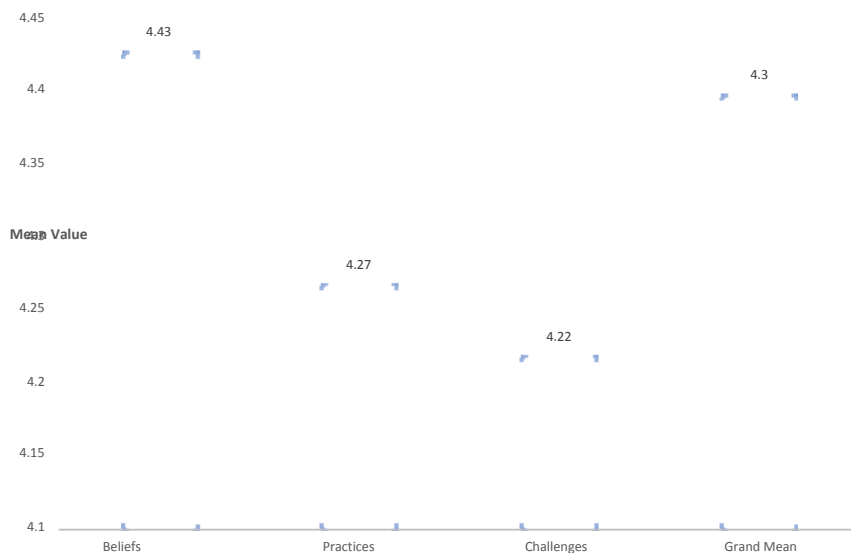
The closed-ended data gathered by using Likert-scale through the questionnaire was entered and analyzed by using SPSS version 20.

The quantitative data intended to answer the questions addressing the beliefs that English language teachers grasp of continuous assessment, practices and challenges that English language teachers face during practicing continuous assessment have been analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics of mean, frequency, and percent counts as well. The data obtained through interview by using checklist and document analysis were intended to answer the practice of continuous assessment by English language teachers. The responses given to interview have been analyzed qualitatively in parallel to the quantitative data, and could make the data acquired through questionnaire more reliable. Pearson correlation coefficient has been computed to see the correlation between teachers' beliefs and practices of continuous assessment.

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate English language teachers' beliefs, practices and challenges of continuous assessment in public secondary schools in Arba Minch town, Gamo Zone.

RQ1. EFL teachers' beliefs, practices and challenges of continuous assessment



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Figure-1 Mean Scores of EFL Teachers' Beliefs, practices and challenges of Continuous Assessment. Source: Author Survey, 2022

As it can be shown in the above Figure 1, EFL teachers believed that continuous assessment enhances student learning. The mean result of each dimension is above 4 points. For example, the mean score of teachers' belief towards continuous assessment is above 4.43.

On the other hand, the mean scores of EFL teachers' practices and challenges EFL teachers face in attempting to use continuous are 4.27, and 4.22 respectively. Furthermore, the grand mean is 4.3. These indicate majority of EFL teachers believed that continuous assessment played a great role in enhancing students learning. These result further checked through interview result.

Accordingly, the first interviewed teacher (T1) believed that continuous assessment increases students learning. He presented his view as follows.

"I believed that continuous assessment helps me to put my theoretical knowledge into practice. In addition, he stated that via continuous assessment I develop my professional identity. Hence, continuous assessment enhances my skill of testing students and it has a positive impact on my professional skills."

The second (T2) interviewed EFL teacher also stated his feeling as follows.

"Continuous assessment showed me a direction on how to plan and deliver the lesson properly during my teaching practice. In addition, it helped me a lot to see myself as a teacher and how to test my students. Moreover, it helped me to reflect on my own teaching. In contrary to this, I also faced challenges like regular checking of students work with limited time, students' absenteeism from the class regularly are the case in points. Though there were problems, continuous assessment paved the to see my way of testing and checking my students work regularly".

The third interviewed (T3) EFL teacher forwarded his views as follows.

Being a teacher is all the result from assessing students properly. To be a teacher one must apply continuous assessment properly. I started learning how to assess students continuously since my first day of employment. I developed my skill of testing via continuously assessing my students. All in all, I have positive outlook towards continuous assessment. He added that in ups and downs of assessing my students continuously, I faced many problems like large classroom size, lack of professional commitment, lack of understanding to bring into line continuous assessment methods with course objectives etc. With all these problems, to me continuous assessment is the course blue print to check and recheck students learning.

The fourth interviewed (T4) EFL teacher expressed his feeling as follows.

“I really enjoyed continuous assessment, but the problem was the large classroom which was not appropriate for continuous assessment. As a teacher, I tried to implement continuous assessment with all these pitfalls. I continuously checked my students with different means in order to enhance learning. Hence, I feel comfortable using continuous assessment to enhance my students learning”.

The fifth interviewed (T5) EFL trainee teacher had also positive view towards the practice continuous assessment. He explained his feeling as follows.

I have a positive insight towards continuous assessment. Because, without continuous assessment it is impossible to address the learning goal. To be a teacher continuous assessment is mandatory. continuous assessment helps me to put the content knowledge into practice through continuously testing my students. Hence, I believe that continuous assessment helps me a lot to follow my students learning. Similarly, (T6, T7 and T8) expressed their feelings positively towards continuous assessment. They feel that due to continuous assessment, they identify themselves as a teacher. They also added that though there are challenges related to teachers, students and administrators, scarcity of resources, lack of experience, lack of professional support and training, they attempted to put our beliefs into practice

As indicated in the interview data above, EFL teachers believed that continuous assessment enhances students' learning and helped the teachers to check and recheck their assessment techniques they employed to test their students. In general, the finding from quantitative data were highly supported and triangulated with the findings from interview, document analysis, assessment checklists and daily lesson plan.

Table 2 Pearson Product-Moment Correlation on English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practice of Continuous Assessment

Correlations			
		Belief of respondents mean	Practice of respondents
Belief of respondents mean	Pearson Correlation	1	.533**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	31	31
Practice of respondents	Pearson Correlation	.533**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	31	31

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of continuous assessment

Table 2 shows the relationship between English language teachers' beliefs and practices of continuous assessment. Accordingly, significant positive correlation was found between the two variables. Openly accessible at <http://www.european-science.com>

riables ($r=0.53$, $n=31$, $p<0.01$). This implies that the English language teachers' beliefs of continuous assessment increase, the practice of continuous assessment also rise. All in all, as indicated in the above table there is a statistically significant positive correlation between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices of continuous assessment. ($r=0.53$, $n=31$, $p<0.01$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate English language teachers' beliefs, practices and challenges of continuous assessment in public secondary schools in Arba Minch town. In addition to this, it was to identify the association between English language teachers' beliefs and practice of continuous assessment. Concerning English language teachers' beliefs of continuous assessment, they felt that continuous assessment is applicable in ELT classroom.

In the same line of discussion, they believed that continuous assessment has great contribution in order to judge students' progress in learning language aspects such as listening, reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary and grammar. Enhancement of continuous assessment on students' English language learning and success was actually believed by the participants. In addition to these, usefulness of continuous assessment to students in order to identify their progress as well as teachers to alter their teaching method was believed by the participants. However, some respondents remained indecisive to the issue, and others have strong belief on the importance of continuous assessment. It is possible to say that they have no reservation on the importance of continuous assessment in English language teaching. Along with this, it was found that they have great belief on the importance of assessing English language learning continuously, and it is possible to implement in their ELT classrooms. This finding is congruent with other few related works (Alemu, 2015, Sintayehu, 2017).

The second research question was related to English language teachers' practice of continuous assessment. Accordingly, the result disclosed that the teachers' actual practice of continuous assessment was almost good as their responses indicated. However, it is congruent with the findings from interview, the assessment checklist and daily lesson plan. Above this, there was a gap to use all the assessment tools that were appropriate to get complete information on students' English language learning progresses. This gap indicated students were not assessed in all components of language learning activities to be performed, and this showed that some language skills were given less emphasis. As a result, students speaking and writing skills became weak. Students should be allowed to access all the activities of language learning in English language classrooms. (www.fluentu.com). This indicated as the challenges assessed in this study, teachers were not committed to use exhaustively all the tools to be applied in their English language classrooms. The reasons assumed were the challenges revealed in this study.

Although teachers' questionnaire result concerning continuous assessment practice showed that teachers had attempted to use continuous assessment in their classrooms, the data obtained through mixed methods such as students' questionnaire, assessment checklist and interview indicated that the teachers could not implement continuous assessment properly. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Abiy, 2013) findings. The third issue was related to the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of continuous assessment. Accordingly, significant positive correlation was found between the two variables ($r=0.53$, $n=31$, $p<0.01$). This implies that the English language teachers' beliefs of continuous assessment increases, the practice of continuous assessment also rise. This finding is congruent with other few related works (Alemu, 2015; Birhanu, 2013). The fourth issue was related to the challenges which hinder the practice of continuous assessment.

Accordingly, the results indicated that lack of teaching and assessing experience, directed that teacher in their college or universities didn't take adequate skills of assessment or lost it through their long duration. Lack of professional support from the concerning bodies specified that this issue was left to teachers only and there was no meaningful provision from nearby universities or colleges, lack of understanding to bring into line continuous assessment methods with course objects indicated that students were assessed outside the desired objectives.

Considering continuous assessment as offering many tests: related to this issue there is no doubt of offering many tests but if it is paper-pencil only, it may not give chance to assess other skills. The intention of teachers using assessment only for marking purposes indicated that teachers didn't understand long lasting of language skills of students for future use in their lifespan. Regarding lack of using different assessment methods, there was a big gap of using all the tools. This indicated that there was either skill gap or reluctance of English language teachers to use all the tools.

From this we can understand that English language teachers were tempted to identify their students' progress of English in all language aspects actually. The other challenge discussed in this study related to students' s absenteeism. Most of the time students were absent to school due to their personal and economic problems which may need related research. Concerning this issue, teachers in generally and English language teachers particularly are imposed by the school directors to fill mark to students' weather they attend or not because of miss interpretations of the education and training policy and intended to make zero failure of student by the school administrations.

Increasing misbehavior of students or cheating during every assessment indicated that students were not manifesting the real progress in the area of English language learning, not wanting to work by themselves simply copying from their partner, and reluctance of students to participate in every activity still challenging English language teachers to practice assessment effectively. Specially, cheating nowadays is the bigger challenge in all the education system of the study area that the case needs other study. Most of the students are engaged in this killing activity. They cheat in home take assignments, tests, quizzes, final exams, project works without having their own knowledge. From this point we can understand that the real changes of students' English language learning were not assessed, but it became not convincing and could not represent the students' language potential efficiently.

Thirdly, administrative problems were also assessed in this study. The most dominants were large class size, lack of adequate teaching materials, lack of continuous follow up of department heads and school, and no one verified the correctness of performed continuous assessment had adverse influence of practicing continuous assessment in the areas of this study. However, teachers' responses and checklist findings indicated that they had been felt good about the importance of continuous assessment in ELT classrooms and attempted to practice it, the responses founded from students in accordance to practice of continuous assessment had disparities of the reality. This fact made the researcher not to say the English language teachers in the study area were practicing continuous assessment effectively efficiently. These findings confirm previous work (Sintayehu, 2017).

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate English language teachers' beliefs, practice and challenges of continuous assessment in public secondary schools in Arba Minch town, Gamo Zone. To conduct this study, some data gathering tools such as questionnaire, interview, daily lesson plan and assessment checklist were employed. The data obtained through these instruments are established as follows: the questionnaire data result shows that the teachers have strong beliefs of the use of continuous assessment in teaching and assessing English language. Many of the surveyed teach-

ers believed in the use that continuous assessment contributes to student learning. They expressed that continuous assessment helps students' English language learning and serve teachers to get in immediate feedback about teaching and learning.

Concerning continuous assessment practice, the finding through teachers' questionnaire indicates that the teachers have attempted to apply continuous assessment in their English language classroom. However, the result of the student questionnaire suggests that continuous assessment is not fully practiced yet. In fact, both teachers and students agreed that teachers have made use of some forms of continuous assessment, but not proper and whole. Above this, concerning the relationship between the Beliefs of English language teachers and their practice, significant positive correlation was found between the two variables. This implied that the English language teachers' beliefs of continuous assessment increase, the practice of continuous assessment also rise. Regarding the challenges of practicing continuous assessment, the participants of this study stated that they faced problems either by their own or by external factors. These were teacher related, student related and administration related problems. Generally, this study has great contribution to improve the way English language teachers use to assess their students' English language learning progress, to formulate remedial of teaching methodology, to give immediate feedback to students, and organizing appropriate documents which can give full information about students' English language learning.

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