Journal of English Language, Literature and Education
Vol. 7 Issue 1 (January - March 2025) PP. 21 - 45
ISSN: 2710 - 4923 (Online)
ISSN: 2663 - 3485 (Print)

AN ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS ABOUT THE EFFICACY OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN UNIVERSITIES OF CENTRAL PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Language assessment has been integral to language teaching for decades, and its importance has largely increased in recent years. As a result, research in applied linguistics has focused on developing more effective and efficient language assessment methods. This research aims to explore the relationship between English language teaching and classroom assessment, focusing on how language assessment can be used to improve language teaching and learning outcomes. The study was qualitative in nature; the data was collected through semi-structured interviews with English language university teachers and analysed through thematic analysis. The findings of the analysis showed that no assessment practice was inherently good or bad. The efficacy of any formative assessment technique was directly proportional to where, when, how and with whom to use it. The maximum benefit could be obtained only when the language assessment practices are situation-based and context-specified. There was nothing that can be called 'tested, tried and perfect' in all situations. Since applied linguistics and second language acquisition are expanding areas of research, the field is wide and open for future researchers to explore new dimensions of language assessment that facilitate language learning. The findings may be helpful, particularly for university administrations and policymakers who will gain insights into language assessment through this study and make improvements accordingly.

Key Words: Applied linguistics, English language pedagogy, English language testing, Formative assessment practices, Teachers' perceptions, Central Punjab, Pakistan

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.54672/jelle.2025.0701259

Introduction

Language testing and assessment has emerged as a promising field of research in the past few years. It has taken to the forefront in the field of Applied Linguistics (Bachman, 1998). As defined by Dhindsa et al. (2007), assessment is "a systematic process for gathering data about student achievement." Thus, assessment is not a random procedure for categorising and grading students' academic achievement. It is a vital part of the second language learning and teaching process, which is the real drive for students' learning (Sainsbury & Walker, 2007). The student's performance is not only gauged but also affected by assessment practices. The assessment practices gained the attention of researchers in the 20th century. Scriven (1967) highlighted the use of "formative and summative" assessment to distinguish between the roles of evaluation. Taken in this respect, assessment is meant to serve two primary purposes: the first one is informative, to improve instruction and is thus related to teaching pedagogy, and the second is summative, to quantify students' achievement (Scriven, 1967). The scope of assessment to classify, envisage, and sort has also broadened to advance the process of teaching and learning (Gordon, 2008). Studies have focused on ways through which classroom assessment practices can be improved to facilitate learning, such as the content and the features of assessment, utilisation of assessment outcomes, and incorporation of assessment as a course in teacher education and training programs (Goldman, 2008; Shepherd, 2000).

English language teachers use various assessment measures as per the ecology of language classrooms. They assess their students for various purposes. The process continues throughout the year, and the assessment literacy of language teachers and their perceptions regarding this important task are the key factors. It provides a base for assessment as the teachers have to make use of a variety of assessment practices (Alkharusi et al., 2011). The outcome of this process is equally beneficial for teachers and students, as it reflects what has been learned and what needs to be paid more attention. The results of the assessment guide further decisions, ranging from changes in course contents to changes in language policy. Students, too, get a clear picture of their learning and shortcomings. Second language assessment in the Asian context, however, presents its indigenous problems, such as lack of resources and large class size. Such factors are not faced by English language teachers in developed countries with advanced education systems (Ahmed, 2020; Balfakih, 2021; Guasch, 2018; Pham, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Formative assessment has gained increasing prominence in international educational discourse and practice as a promising way to promote student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Teachers, policymakers, and researchers are very much interested in this type of assessment as it reflects the learners' achievement (Wiliam, 2011). The Western world has increasingly taken up formative assessment as the way forward. Countries like the USA, Germany, New Zealand, Finland, Spain, Canada, and Sweden have emphasised the need for constant assessment through methods like feedback, questions, or portfolio assessment (Swaffield, 2011). Asian educational discourse still lags in emphasising the formative function of assessment practices (Kennedy, 2007). Researchers from Asia are trying to bridge this gap (Hialaya, 2014; Al-Bahlani, 2019; Omeman, 2019; Cano, 2020), but much remains to be done. Applied linguists in Pakistan are becoming increasingly interested in the scope offered by this dynamic mode of assessment in English language teaching.

Significance of Study

Language testing has a long history as a social practice but only a relatively short one as a theoretically founded and self-reflexive institutional practice. Learners face many problems while learning a language that is not their first language or the first language of their teachers. This study is significant as it would add a new chunk to the already existing scholarship on Formative assessment practices in undergraduate English language classrooms. By exploring English language teachers' views about ongoing language assessment practices, this study would reveal those formative assessment practices that contribute to students' learning. The findings would be a source of guidance for English language teachers, institutional administrations, and curriculum developers while charting out their strategies for the future. Since most of the existing literature comes from developed countries with well-knit academic fabric, it would be interesting to find out if and how the ideas ferment in a culture displaying diverse socio-economic conditions.

Research Objectives

This research was conducted with the objective to:

1. Know about the current formative assessment practices being used to assess undergraduate English language learners in universities of Central Punjab.

2. Investigate English language teachers' perceptions about the efficacy of formative assessment practices in the universities of Central Punjab.

Research Questions

This study attempted to furnish answers to the following questions:

1. What are the formative assessment practices being used in English language classrooms in universities of Central Punjab?
2. What are the perceptions of English language teachers about the efficacy of these formative assessment practices for undergraduate language learners?

Literature Review

Second language learning has been an everyday concern for people throughout history. In recent times, the English language has developed into a 'geopolitical influence' and a professional influence that sets the dimensions of foreign language teaching (Freeman & Freeman: 2008). As reported by Dyvik (2024), the number of people who used the English language either as a native language or as a second language rose to 1.5 billion people in 2023. Historically speaking, English language teaching started as an outcome of development in multiple fields, specifically linguistics, applied linguistics and Psychology of learning and education. English language teaching became a distinct profession in the twentieth century. This profession developed over time as Applied Linguists focused more on developing effective language teaching methods (Khansir, 2013). Forums like TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) guided and facilitated the practitioners of this newly defined profession (McDonough, 2017). It is also essential to integrate other subjects like Psychology, Sociology and Education with teaching of English as a second language. It is important to note that when an English language teacher wants to educate himself, he needs to be equipped with effective English language teaching and learning methodologies. It can only be achieved with the help of science, i.e. Linguistics, but more specifically, a sub-field, Applied linguistics, which offers practical solutions to language-related issues (Ghafar, 2023).

Myers (2005) opined that in almost every real-world problem, language is a central and critical issue. Simpson (2010) affirmed that applied linguistics is a problem-oriented field. He defined applied linguistics as a field that bridges the gap between theory and practice. Applied linguists made theory-based knowledge of language to make well-informed decisions in real-world situations. Popularly referred to as "applicable linguistics", "methodological turn", and "methodological awareness" (Bugarsk: 1987, Byrnes: 2013, Plonsky: 2017). Applied linguistics, "itself may be seen as an autonomous problem-solving discipline concerned broadly with language education and language problems in society" (McDonough, 2016, p.11). Considering the broader scope it enjoys, Lopes (2009) redefined applied linguistics as a field that seeks to break free from linguistics and survive as an interdisciplinary field with a primary focus on the enquiry of second language teaching and, sometimes, translation.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) alludes that, like Second Language Acquisition has acquired this status as it deals with real-world language issues and problems. Lantolf and Pavlenko (1994) concluded from their research that 'peer relationship' and classroom language teaching and assessment practices differently influence the process and outcomes of language learning of different individuals. Assessment is an important concept that received much attention in the twentieth century. Owing to the significance it has gained, the term "Assessment" has been defined by many in the relevant literature. Linn and Miller (2005) define assessment of student learning as an organised 'process of collecting information about student progress towards the learning goals'. Similarly, it can be defined as the careful arrangement of different procedures and techniques to obtain information regarding students 'knowledge, abilities and attitudes towards the learning process. Instruments used for assessment may range from traditional paper pencil and objective-type tests to critical and reflective tests and tasks (Marzano, 2009).

Huba and Freed (2000) argued that assessment is a practice of gathering and reflecting on evidence of students' learning and academic achievement. Assessment is a continuous and ongoing process which distinguishes it from testing. It is a more inclusive concept as outlined by Brown and Abeywickrama (2019). Green (2014) puts forward a very important distinction when he refutes the traditional approach by arguing that teachers can assess their students by residing in a much broader cycle of activities. In this respect, assessment can be considered an umbrella term "which includes both our daily classroom practices and large-scale testing, which is extremely

designed and administered to our students". Taking lead from this view, it can be expected that second language acquisition can achieve most of its learning objectives if diverse and numerous assessment techniques are used in language classrooms (Cheng & Fox, 2017).

Assessment, in a nutshell, is a process of collecting and categorising evidence of academic achievement using certain methods and techniques to infer conclusions about the teaching and learning process on both micro and macro levels by referring to some established standards and criteria (Lamprianou & Athanasou 2009). This review leads to two self-evident purposes of assessment: evaluating students' learning achievements, demonstrating what the learners have learnt by far (assessment of learning) and affecting the whole process by enhancing students' learning itself (assessment for learning) (Reinholz 2016). The second purpose of assessment has given rise to nowadays popular assessment type; Formative assessment. Assessment for learning and formative assessment are often used synonymously (Wiliam, 2011). Formative assessment is based on the principles of assessment for learning, which makes assessment more of a shared activity between students and teachers (Cheng & Fox, 2017). Black and Wiliam (1998) defined formative assessment as a set of all those classroom related activities where teachers, students and all other stakeholders are involved to make the teaching and learning process more dynamic and to exterminate the hurdles to enhance learning. Therefore, formative assessment has become an essential part of educational processes involving teachers and students so that they consider and ponder their teaching and learning strategies to bridge gaps in future practices. Another significant development is considering formative assessment as 'core of teaching and learning processes'. Formative assessment is more than testing knowledge for the sake of promotion to the next classes. Due to its scope, formative assessment has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers and scholars since the last decades of the previous century (Begum & Ambreen, 2021).

As far as the perceptions of teachers and students about formative assessment practices and improved learning are concerned, studies both in Pakistani and international contexts showed a positive correlation between formative assessment practices and better learning of language learners. However, the research in the Pakistani EFL context is limited to research articles only. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no doctoral thesis has yet been produced to investigate the perceptions of English language teachers and learners about formative assessment practices.

This current study, thus, gleaned sound justification from existing literature as it deals with an essential aspect of the language learning and teaching process.

Research Methodology

This research paper is taken out of the researcher's doctoral thesis, where a mixed method approach was adopted using an explanatory sequential research design under which quantitative data precedes the qualitative data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Since this paper presents the qualitative analysis only, only qualitative research methods will be discussed here. The qualitative method offers a very different approach to 'scholarly inquiry'. The data being text or images, demands systematic steps in data analysis (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research offers scope for a deeper understanding and also encounters problems like transferability and case selections (Kelle, 2006).

Research Participants

This research was conducted in public and private sector universities of Central Punjab. The English language teachers of these universities served as the population of the study. Central Punjab is divided into four administrative divisions: Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, and Sargodha. The English language teachers in these Universities were contacted for data collection. The willingness of language teachers was sought earlier for qualitative data collection. University teachers (n=30) who gave their consent to be interviewed served as the sample for this study to collect qualitative data, so a convenience sampling technique was adopted for this qualitative study.

Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with university English language teachers. Semi-structured interviews have the ease of structured interviews but still demand suppleness and attentive listening to ask more questions, which may spring up during interviews within the predefined framework. The most significant advantage is the opportunity for reflection to develop a deeper understanding (Rose et al., 2020). The in-depth responses of teachers were collected by using a variety of questions related to classroom formative assessment practices. The teachers were asked questions about the efficacy of classroom assessment activities. The interview protocols outlined by Creswell (2014) were observed in letter and spirit. The interviews were audiotaped,

and notes were taken with the prior permission of the interviewees. The teachers were given ample time to speak their minds. The recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis Method

Kuckartz (2019) opines, "Qualitative data are far more diverse and complex than quantitative data. These data may comprise transcripts of face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions, documents, Twitter tweets, YouTube comments, or videos of the teacher-student interactions in the classroom" (p.183). Since the qualitative data is varied, the researchers employ different methods of analysis so that the research questions can be answered comprehensively. (Cohen et al., 2007). Considering the research questions, thematic analysis was considered suitable for analysing qualitative data for this study. Kampira (2021) states, "Thematic analysis is a data analysis procedure that centres on identification, description, explanation, substantiation and linkages of themes.". The analysis for this part was done by using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined a six-step procedure to conduct thematic analysis, though qualitative analysis is not a linear process that follows certain steps and one phase leads to another. It is rather a process that develops gradually. It signals constantly moving to and fro, advancing and going back the entire data set repeatedly, making it a "recursive process", where you move back and forth as required throughout the various phases. However, the above argument does not in any way lessen the importance of the phases outlined by Braun and Clark. The analysis conducted for this study observed the following steps in true spirit.

1. Familiarization of Data
2. Generating Initial Codes
3. Searching for theme
4. Reviewing the themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

After many revisions of the qualitative data, the comprehensive themes were generated and a clear thematic map was created. As mentioned earlier, this research article is based on one dimension of a doctoral thesis, presenting only one theme, i.e., the efficacy of formative assessment practices.

1. Analysis of Efficacy of Current Formative Assessment Practices in Undergraduate English Language Classrooms in Central Punjab:

The perceptions of English language university teachers about the efficacy of varied formative assessment practices and the outcomes they bring are presented in this section. Following current assessment practices were being used by English language teachers in the universities of central Punjab.

Question-Based Sssessments

Question-based assessments were being used by English language teachers to evaluate a learner's knowledge and understanding of English language through questions. Questioning was considered a fundamental skill by English language teachers that involved asking and answering questions to elicit, clarify, or extend information. In language learning, questioning serves various purposes, such as checking comprehension, inducing interest, promoting interaction, developing vocabulary, and enhancing fluency. However, it was also reported that such assessments were not always easy to conduct or effective in undergraduate English language classes, especially in contexts where students were not used to expressing their opinions or getting involved in challenging tasks. Therefore, if implemented appropriately and purposefully, question-based assessments could enhance students' motivation, critical thinking, and communication skills. Teachers used both open-ended and close-ended questions. Close-ended questions were mainly used for quizzes, whereas open-ended questions were used to generate discussions, brainstorming, and multiple other purposes. Essay-type and long questions were primarily reserved for tests and assignments. Teachers used these assessment techniques at their discretion, and the criteria were devised by management to maximise their benefits.

Some teachers went to the class with questions ready, but some preferred on-spot impromptu questions. A few asked questions at the end of the lecture when they had completed the topic and they wanted to know about students' comprehension of the topic, while the majority used questions to start their lecture. They asked questions to brainstorm and prepare students for the class lecture. Asking students questions about a particular topic before starting guided the teacher about the student's beforehand knowledge and understanding of the topic. The response of a lecturer would be relevant here; "when I ask those questions, some students pick them up easily and some take

time. It helps me to plan my strategy." The questions asked during the lecture were few and far between because they broke down the tempo and one question's answer could lead to another question. Teachers found it distracting and thus considered it better to make minimum use of it. One instructor, however, believed that these leading questions created interest among students and that they all remained alive during the lecture.

The most fruitful result expected from question-based assessment techniques, as gathered from the responses of English language teachers, was that it could improve students' communication skills. Communication skills were considered indispensable for effective language use in various social and academic situations. In language learning, communication skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Questioning might contribute to the development of communication skills by creating opportunities for interaction and feedback. For example, by asking students interactive questions encouraging them to respond to each other's ideas or opinions, teachers helped students practice their listening and speaking skills and fostered collaborative learning. The majority of teachers used close-ended, true/false, or short questions for quizzes. The purpose of checking factual knowledge and comprehension of learners was better achieved through quizzes. It was also reported that students felt very good about quizzes because they could score perfect marks, so it generally raised learners' confidence. Open-ended and essay-type questions were usually used in tests where the teachers wanted to assess the comprehension, analytical skills, and expression of students.

According to one of the respondents, the most significant benefit of quizzes in undergraduate English language classes was an increase in students' motivation to learn. Motivation was a key factor influencing students' engagement, persistence, and achievement in language learning. Questioning could affect motivation by providing students with opportunities to express their identity, meet their goals, and participate in meaningful activities. For example, by asking students open-ended questions relating to their interests, preferences, or experiences in English language classrooms, teachers might help students develop their self-expression and foster their intrinsic motivation. By asking students questions that required them to apply their English language knowledge or skills to real-world situations, teachers helped students enhance their extrinsic motivation. By asking students questions that challenged them to think critically or creatively, teachers introduced students to ways to improve their learning experience and increase

their satisfaction. Another benefit of questioning in undergraduate English language classes outlined by respondents was that it fostered students' critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking is referred to as the ability to analyse, evaluate, synthesise, or generate information logically and rationally found nourishment through questions. Critical thinking helps students comprehend texts, produce arguments, solve problems, and make decisions in language learning. Teachers used the questions given at the end of a paragraph for this purpose. However, critical thinking was not seen as a natural or automatic process; it required deliberate practice and teacher guidance. Question-based assessments were quite common and yielded results if appropriately implemented. Such assessments helped to improve students' confidence. It taught them how to present their argument. Therefore, English language teachers and learners pay more attention to the role and quality of question-based assessments in language classes and use various questions and questioning strategies to achieve their learning objectives.

Observation

This particular formative assessment technique was attributed to great significance by the majority of respondents. They were fully cognizant of the benefits yielded by this hassle-free technique, which saved time. It, however required a connection between the teacher and the learner. The teachers engaged in this assessment technique needed to be attentive and watchful to every move and gesture of students. During the interviews, many teachers realised the extent to which they depended on observation to assess their students' comprehension and learning. One of the respondents believed that "observation is a powerful tool in the assessment kit of English language teachers, especially at the undergraduate level, where the learners are grown-up individuals and are not as dependent on the teacher as young learners are."

Based on the experiences of teachers, it was elicited that observation helped to assess student's learning in a short period. Observing the students during a lecture helped to know whether the students were getting the point or not. Sometimes, the confusion reflected so convincingly on their faces, or a question was so obvious in their eyes that a vigilant teacher stopped immediately and encouraged them to clear this confusion and ask questions that created ambiguity. According to an experienced professor: "observation helps a teacher mark the strengths and weaknesses of students. If he has an observant eye, a teacher can notice what a student is going

through, who is struggling to learn, and who is habitual to avoid learning. These insights help nourish students' language learning process."

Another teacher shared how he got to know about students' learning through observation. He stated that those students who understood the topic well felt excited, as if they had found a treasure and were eager to answer the questions related to the topic. Whereas those students who did not understand the topic tried to avoid eye contact with a teacher. They tried to hide behind other students to evade questioning. He furthermore said that "if the majority of students exhibited the latter behaviour, that was a signal that I should either repeat the topic or change my teaching methodology." Observation provided teachers with an opportunity to identify problem areas in students' learning and correct them with their valuable feedback. The problems students face, however, might have an origin outside academics. A teacher said: "I think a teacher is intentionally and unintentionally observing each student in the classroom and when he evaluates quizzes or other assessments, he has one of these in his mind." So, a teacher was ever ready to know the cause of his students' poor performance. Most often, the problem area was within the domain of academics, as another English language teacher shared her experience of helping one of her students who was unaware of her lack. Targeted and focused observation made her identify and address the special needs of that student.

Likewise, a teacher could identify the area where a student was doing well and appreciate him with positive feedback. Through observation, a teacher knew better about the calibre of students and thus could boost their confidence by bringing out their hidden talents. Only one respondent believed that classroom observation was an observation of students' classroom behaviour and, therefore, could not be an index of their learning. She opined that: "sometimes, there is such a student whose classroom behaviour misguides the teacher…the student is unassuming, not paying attention, nor participating in class activities, but his exam performance brings a pleasant shock." However, the overall opinion gleaned from the qualitative data considered observation a very useful formative assessment tool in the hands of English language teachers who taught at the undergraduate level. It provided teachers an insight into the progress of this whole process of language learning and teaching. Through this technique, a teacher could also judge his instructional method. Using this technique appropriately could be highly beneficial.

Self and Peer Assessment:

As gathered from teachers' responses, most of them saw Peer assessment and Self-assessment as two effective yet less frequently used assessment techniques being used in English language classrooms to enhance the learning experience of undergraduate students. Self-assessment enabled students to take ownership of their learning by assessing their knowledge and understanding. It provided a structure for them to reflect on their work, what they had learned, and how to improve. In peer assessment, the learners acted as critical friends and supported each other, which could help students develop self-assessment skills. To make any judgments, students must have grasped the learning and standards of work expected of them, making it a difficult task. Students sometimes became over-critical and sometimes they deliberately ignored the mistakes of their friends, which made it an unfair assessment technique. A few teachers considered self and peer assessment non-productive and time-consuming, while some others considered peer assessment profitable. Self-assessment, however, was not approved by a majority of teachers, while very few practised it in their classes regularly.

The qualitative data suggested that students took more responsibility for their learning through self and peer assessment. According to one respondent, it helped the learners to assess their progress objectively, set learning goals, recognise their understanding, think about what they did not understand, ponder over the reasons, grow in confidence, and take their learning forward. In this way, they became in charge of their learning. Within the class, it fostered respect and collaboration. Comments from co-learners sometimes proved more effective than those from the teacher because they acted as a stimulus to complete work and to raise standards.

Some students appeared more receptive to comments from their peers. It was also perceived that group feedback commanded more attention than that of an individual. It gave the teacher space to concentrate on what was not known. The learners felt fully absorbed in what happened in the class because they knew they were a vital link in this learning process. As perceived, it was no more teacher-centred, but a collaborative experience where they all learnt from each other. While sharing her own student life experiences, an assistant professor recalled those days when her teachers used peer assessment in the class. As a student, she thoroughly enjoyed being a judge of other students' learning, which made her feel it was a heavy responsibility. Carrying it forward, she frequently made use of peer assessment in her English language classes.

The experience of another teacher, however, was opposite to it. She could see no benefit and believed that students did not take it seriously. They considered it just another game of tick mark and cross. This created further problems instead of facilitating the process of assessment. The students, too, complained of favouritism. According to that teacher, it was hard to maintain objectivity and fairness in peer assessment. A very valuable opinion suggested that peer review adds to the knowledge as thirty or forty minds sitting in a class brimming with multiple versions of the same idea gave their views about their colleague's work, which sometimes brought something new to the field. A new idea might also spring up to the teacher's pleasant surprise. Thus, peer review could be very helpful if regulated to avoid any type of assessment bias and discomfort among learners. Teachers also shared that sometimes they avoided sharing marks in the class to save students who were not doing so well from the critical remarks of others. This situation could also be improved through peer assessment, where a student somehow considers himself responsible for another student's learning.

A comparative study of the data suggested that though both techniques were used in undergraduate English language classrooms, peer assessment was more effective than self-assessment. The views of an experienced teacher about her practices are quite relevant who considered "peer assessment is more practical and more beneficial than self-assessment which is time-consuming and more demanding." Another respondent categorically denied the significance of self-assessment and stated that she had never done it in her class, nor planned to do it in the future. She thought it to be just a "waste of time" and believed that everybody was interested in the mistakes of others. Nobody wanted to highlight his own mistakes. She asserted that our education system was not designed to accommodate such innovative ideas. The system supported the old traditional methods of assessment. On the other hand, a senior professor believed that self-assessment increased self-consciousness, nurtured autonomous learning, improved self-discipline, reduced language learning anxiety, and helped increase confidence in learners, reflected in their classroom assessment performance.

The data showed that both peer and self-assessment developed a sense of responsibility among students who took ownership of learning. The students learnt to communicate and collaborate. They learnt to spot their problem areas and ponder over the solution. However, teachers needed to tell them the purpose of these activities and how the students could benefit from

them. The students must also be provided with rubrics and checklists in both self and peer assessment. These strategies could not be conducted haphazardly. These strategies need to be carefully crafted under the constant vigilance of experts. English language teachers perceived such assessment methods as completely guided assessment activities. A young lecturer opined that "while conducting any such activity, it is essential to create an atmosphere of mutual trust, make the learning objectives clear, explain criteria for assessment, give clear instructions, encourage students to listen to others, ask questions on points that they do not understand and contribute ideas and opinions. They should also be guided to use language suitable for the classroom environment, which will also develop their social skills."

Group Activities:

It was reported by English language teachers that group activities were also being used to elicit proof of students' language learning. These group activities took place in many forms, like group presentations, group projects, group poster displays, role-playing, enactments, and so on. As per the perceptions shared by teachers, these activities improved students' social and communication skills. They learnt to work as a team in collaboration with their peers. These activities, however, had their drawbacks too, which were also reported by teachers and are duly discussed in the following paragraphs. As reported by the qualitative data, teachers recently started preferring to use assessment methods that focused on the practical implications of the linguistic knowledge the students acquired in their English language classrooms. Such assessments did not require memorising and reproducing on paper the rules of the use of language or marking the correct answer. The focus here, in the words of a respondent, was: "to engage learners in more meaningful and relatable tasks". The group study was reported as a joy for students who worked as a team. They coordinated and collaborated well. A senior professor considered these groups a miniature society in which everybody performed his allocated and pre-defined role.

Group presentations turned out to be very popular among English language teachers. The respondents shared that it saved a lot of time and students also felt confident as every learner did contribute as per his expertise. One of the respondents stated: "Group presentations help to reduce anxiety among students which improves their performance. Owing to the backup and support system of a group, they feel comfort and present their ideas with ease." Another respondent shared

his views that "with individual presentations, we are bound to the course contents only, but in the form of group, we know they can attempt difficult things too." The scope of learning seems to be enhanced with these group presentations, but this view, too, was contested by a few teachers, which will be discussed later. Chart presentations and poster presentations were also used by teachers in place of individual oral presentations. As reported by teachers, the language learners made excellent use of their creativity by sharing and receiving ideas. They displayed their knowledge of the language through words, colours, and images.

Role-playing was also used as an assessment strategy to teach functional English. One of the respondents attached great value to it as she stated that: "strategies like role-play can be effective and fun simultaneously to practice English language in the class. Students perform their roles according to different situations as in real life, such as mock interviews, dialogue delivery, ordering food, or calling someone on the phone". The respondents perceived role-play as highly effective, providing language learners with an opportunity to showcase their language skills in multiple contexts outside the classroom. It built the confidence of students and improved their speaking skills. In the words of another respondent: "It is a great strategy for language acquisition. Learners apply their knowledge of language through actively participating in class activities. It also makes learners bring out their creativity, collaborate, and understand the non-verbal communication of their co-actors as well." Only one respondent shared that such activities were time-consuming and futile in the case of shy students.

The data, however, suggested that group activities were not always fruitful. They had their demerits and shortcomings. A senior teacher with twenty years of experience shared that group activities posed many problems, especially in the earlier semesters of undergraduate classes where students were unfamiliar with each other and most often did not carry on well in the groups. They frequently complained about unequal responsibilities, differences of opinion, and non-cooperation. He believed that "if any teacher tries group activities in earlier semesters, much of his time is wasted in sorting out these issues, but in senior semesters where the learners have established their companionship, they make groups in their comfort zones and such complaints as discussed above are few and far between."

Another respondent shared his resentment that during group presentations in his class, only one group member would take the lead while the rest would stand behind him. He did not consider

it right. In his opinion, group activities facilitated those who were unwilling to work, and their work was done by others, and just by being a part, they shared the credit with other group fellows. Likewise, another teacher solved this problem by assigning different portions to different group members. He did the same for group projects where each student had to mention his name against the task done by him. The students, though they worked in a group, were assessed individually based on their share of work. In this way, every student displayed and presented his ideas, which made it easy for the teacher to assess his learning in communication skills. It also saved group members from the damage caused by an unexpected absentee. The views discussed here, however, did not demean the significance of group activities. Most teachers believed in the benefits like tolerance, self-control, co-existence, and sharing of ideas yielded by these activities.

Student Engagement: Sharing Rubric and Asking for Input:

As gathered from the qualitative data, learners' readiness and autonomy mattered a lot. When a learner believed himself to be part and parcel of his instructors and that his voice mattered, he felt responsible for his learning and the whole class as a community. A senior professor serving as head of the department of English at a public sector university shared his valuable perspective: "It is a pity that students who are very important stakeholders in the process of language learning are kept out of the process of developing and constructing language assessments. I tell my teachers to mind what Benjamin Franklin said, 'tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn'. Involving students is very significant you see." English language university teachers responding to the interview guide emphasised the need for involving students directly in classroom assessment; they considered that "classroom at least is a venue where the teacher and the students can benefit from experimentation and innovation through student-centered language assessments". However, the techniques and the extent of involvement varied from teacher to teacher.

It was gathered from the qualitative data that the student-centered assessment approach was used by English language teachers for the active involvement, engagement, and autonomy of learners in the evaluation of their language learning. They believed that if students were involved in designing assessment activities, they, while helping to map assessment activities, focused on and differentiated between their strengths and weaknesses. It was hoped that if the assessments in language classrooms were student-oriented, teachers could achieve learning objectives and fulfil the purpose of language learning. One of the key practices of student-centred assessment, as

reported by respondents, was sharing rubrics and criteria with students. As defined by respondents, rubrics are: "you can say, checklists that describe the criteria and levels of performance for a given task or assignment. It lets students know what is expected of them". Sharing rubrics with students might help them understand the expectations and standards of quality for their work and provide them with feedback and guidance for improvement. One of the respondents serving as semester coordinator shared: "I think, our students, do have the right that they should be explained how their tasks would be assessed."

There was only one voice among respondents who considered learners' attitude did not consider this practice any important. She held that: "No, no, sharing rubrics makes no difference at all. They are going to perform the same way as before." Though teachers generally emphasised the need to share rubrics with students, they also reported that, unfortunately, this practice was not common in English Language Classrooms in Pakistan. Another important student-centred assessment strategy, 'students' input,' received a mixed response from English language university teachers. A few teachers favoured it and thought it essential that students should have a say on what and how much the contents of assessments should be. They felt that consulting students gave them confidence and they participated in co-designing and co-constructing assessment activities, rubrics, and even content. This step was expected to enhance students' motivation, sense of ownership, and self-regulation.

A senior professor believed, "I think they(students) should also be a part of the assessment." Most of the respondents favoured the limited involvement of students in terms of co-designing assessment plans. Their perspective was based on their classroom observations and experiences. One of them believed that students in the earlier semesters of undergraduate programs were usually not mature enough to utilise this opportunity for their benefit and tried to run away from it. Owing to their fear of the English language, they wished to highlight their strength and did not understand how assessment would be used to overcome weaknesses. Considering it, the respondent disapproved of students' involvement beyond sharing rubrics: "I think that they must be instructed that these are the ways they will be assessed, but nothing more than that."

A senior English language Assistant professor with twenty years of experience commented very interestingly. She gave an example of Winston Churchill, who wanted to be examined in history and literature only during his first year at Harrow. He did not want to be tested in

Mathematics and Latin. Likewise, if given a chance, our language students would chalk out the easiest way out. She, therefore, stated: “We are not here to take up the choices of students. We are here to assess what we have taught and what is beneficial for students. There must be some involvement of the students, no doubt, but not completely.” The thematic analysis brought forward difficulties and warnings attached to this practice of taking student input for designing language assessments, just as a teacher pointed out that if learners’ opinion was considered, they tried to control every step of the assessment like content selection, designing assessment and even marking. As per his perspective, student input should have neither been asked nor accommodated in English language classroom assessments. However, language teachers’ perspectives were analysed collectively, suggesting that this approach needed to be implemented carefully and effectively so that it met the needs and interests of students and teachers. It was also gathered that a teacher’s role is significant, as the teacher steered assessment activities in a balanced way. One respondent voiced The same view: “So, a teacher should know when to, what to and how to assess…when to inform students and when not to inform students … a teacher can have surprise assessments too but not very often. So, a teacher must balance when to involve students and when not to.”

Discussion

This study, through its findings, endorses the role of formative assessment practices in amplifying language learning by developing language skills and improving critical and analytical skills. A boost in language learners’ motivation and confidence was also reported as a by-product of effective and inclusive language classroom assessment. Learner engagement and participation created a conducive environment for learning. Flexibility in classroom assessment as per students' language abilities and needs was also seen as a significant hallmark, missing in summative assessment. It was also deduced from data that classroom assessment practices also helped enhance language learners' academic achievement as it enabled them to perform well in final examinations. Classroom learning prepared learners for high stake final exams. The study emphasised importance of question-based assessments like quizzes and tests, which were considered very useful by the participants of this study. With the rise in the level of students, classroom assessment became a more serious concern and teachers resided more on quizzes and objective tests. Observation was also found to be a useful tool, though most teachers used it unconsciously and without realising

how much they got out of it. Group activities like projects, group presentations and role-play were considered significant and result-yielding but hard to conduct. The findings align with Aravinthan et at., (2010), who also highlighted that quizzes made assessments effective and helped improve academic achievement in final exams. Likewise, Saneewong (2020) considered questioning as a frequently used classroom assessment technique. He viewed observation as a useful tool to determine student learning in a short time. The findings also endorse Flores et al. (2014), who state that frequently used assessment methods in higher education are written tests, group presentations, and group projects.

English language education has seen many trends in the past and it has become increasingly difficult for researchers of applied linguistics to map out a practical path of second language acquisition that is clear and straight. Every trend in language education had its fair claims, only to be done/confirmed years later (Dewaele, 2022). In recent times, the potential of formative assessment has been emphasised for its effectiveness in language education (Karacop & Inaltekin, 2023). This study was delimited to Central Punjab only, which is the limitation of this study. The other parts, like Northern and Southern Punjab, may have different opinions.

Conclusions

This current study is based on the perceptions of both male and female teachers. Teachers from both public and private sector universities were interviewed for this study. English language teachers shared several formative assessment practices in their classrooms. Some of them were traditional, while a few were quite innovative. This should also be kept in mind as an experience of general practice, as one practice may be fruitful for one instructor but turn out to be futile in the case of another instructor. The analysis of data showed that English language teachers in the universities of Central Punjab are ready to experiment with new formative assessment techniques. A few methods are considered time-consuming and too innovative for the Pakistani context, but the teachers did not outright reject any such assessment technique.

Based on the perceptions of English language teachers, this study highlighted that every classroom is an Indigenous unit and so is every culture. A language teacher should know the dynamics of his class. Language learning and teaching cannot be carried on in isolation. Formative assessment practices doing wonders in the West may turn out to be unfruitful in the Eastern

context. The findings indicate that it remains a teacher's call to use an assessment practice effectively by embedding it in the context of his learners. The findings also imply that policymakers must pay heed to developing such a curriculum that aligns with our socio-cultural conditions, thus making language learning and assessment an activity that is well integrated into our social fabric.

Institute administrations should also provide space and flexibility to English language teachers. This study focused on formative assessment practices in undergraduate English language classrooms in universities in Central Punjab. The findings of this research study can be dis/confirmed by future researchers using other populations and enlighten about the impact on language classroom assessment induced by a change in socio-culture scenario.

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