Investigating the Practice of Alternative Assessment in English Classrooms: The Case of Selected Grade Nine English Teachers Assessment Practices

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Abstract

The study investigated the implementation of alternative assessment in the teaching of English in some selected secondary schools in Hawassa Zuria, SNNPR. Qualitative research design was followed. The study explored whether the participant English teachers understood the principles of alternative assessment and incorporated it in their English classrooms. It also intended to identify the dominant assessment types the teachers use on regular basis. To address the objectives, document analysis and key informant interviews were used. Data from the participant teachers' assessment package and key informant interview were analyzed qualitatively. Participants of the study were grade nine English teachers of three secondary schools in Hawassa Zuria. They were selected based on availability sampling. Both the document analysis and key informant interview data were analyzed thematically, discussed thoroughly and then interpreted. The outcome of the study informed that English language teachers do not give equal value to processes and products of their classroom teaching during assessment. Moreover, the study showed that participant English teachers did not give room for alternative assessment which gives a broad spectrum of assessment possibilities to address the different learning styles of their students.

Keywords: alternative assessment, implementation, traditional assessment, assessment type, principle.

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INTRODUCTION

The study focused on alternative assessment in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in selected secondary schools in Hawassa Zuria district, SNNPR. The objectives explore whether the participant English teachers understood the principles of alternative assessment and incorporated it in their English classrooms. It also intended to identify the dominant assessment types the teachers use on regular basis.

A great deal of development has been in the field of foreign language instruction and assessment over the last several decades. This has been the direct result of the global spread of English over the last 50 years. Hasman (2000, p. 2) points out that world-wide over 1.4 billion people live in a country where English has official status, and out of five of the world's population speaks English with some level of proficiency. It is not surprising therefore, that new approaches to language instruction have been adapted. Whereas the focus on language instruction was previously on the elements of language, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, the focus needed to shift to the teaching of communicative skills that could be used in authentic language setting. (Bachman, 1999, p. 27).

Traditional forms of language testing were unsuitable for measuring the performance of communicative skills. The usual tests such as multiple-choice, true or false, or fill-in the blank, asses the students' ability to recognize the correct answer rather than produce it (Popham 2003, pp. 81-82). It seems clear that as instruction methods changed in order to incorporate new principles, assessment strategies needed to be adjusted accordingly.

Cohen (1990, p. 47) views traditional assessment strategies as being inadequate as a measurement for the depth and scope of education that a student receives. He offers several complaints to explain his dissatisfaction with traditional assessment namely:

- Traditional assessment focuses upon products of learning, but rarely upon process of learning.
- Traditional strategies asses limited aspects of academic learning.
- Traditional assessment strategies provide some information about certain types of learning progress in some subject areas, but largely neglect crucial areas such as, divergent and creative thinking, as well as critical thinking and problem solving.
- Traditional assessment strategies can cause irreparable lifetime damage to individual students, especially to their self-images by providing negative feedback.
- Many (if not most) important educational outcomes cannot be measured, weighed, or counted, and in fact, assessment represents probably at best ten percent of the total impact of learning on students.

Torrance (1995, p. 1) faults traditional assessment with failing to stimulate students and stimulate their creativity. He champions a more practical, realistic and challenging approach to assessment than in the past. Alternative assessment, on the other hand, refers to strategies that are utilized to ask students to exhibit what they can do. According to Hamayan (1995, p. 213), "Alternative assessment refers to procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction and can be easily incorporated into the daily activities of school or classroom". From this we can deduce that it is possible to include alternative assessment into daily lessons. Alternative assessment focuses not only on the outcome but also on the process of teaching learning. Similarly, Huerta- Macias, (1995, p. 9) stipulated the fact that alternative assessment is "the situation in which students are evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they will reproduce or recall".

Regular assessment occurs daily in a classroom, where teachers listen to and observe their students continuously. They are able to sense with relative accuracy, which students seem to understand and which students appear confused. Assessment is a valuable tool for students and in teachers for many reasons. Firstly, teachers need to assess their students in order to monitor their progress. Teachers want to know that their students are paying attention and that they are on task. In addition to this, it is important for teachers to ascertain that their students have mastered material that has previously been taught before they advance to more comprehensive and complex subjects. Secondly, assessment is an effective diagnostic instrument for

identifying individual students who need help, but are either too uncomfortable or embarrassed to seek assistance. This implies that not only the lack of the mastery of objectives is identified, but difficulties in the process of mastery are also identified in the process. Thirdly, in addition to determining whether the learner passes or fails, assessment also has influence on possible admission to university study or certification.

Statement of the problem

The researchers observe from their long years of teaching that teachers usually implement the traditional assessment techniques. Even in the university that the researchers are currently teaching, though the modular curriculum encourages alternative assessment techniques (the continuous assessment), instructors prefer the traditional assessment because of its simplicity. So, a need exist to investigate English teachers understanding and implementation of alternative assessment in English classrooms. The key research problem can therefore be formulated as follows:

How do EFL teachers incorporate alternative assessment techniques into their assessment practices? The following questions facilitate the demarcation of the problem.

- Which assessment activities and methods do English teachers employ?
- Do teachers understand the principles of alternative assessment?
- What is/are the teachers' attitude towards alternative assessment?

Significance of the study

The study is significant to participant teachers and students. Teachers will get insight on how to assess their students' performance and on how to relate assessments and classroom teaching. Students, in like manner, will get awareness on the importance of alternative assessment and will consider it as an important part of learning. Furthermore, teachers and students in other schools can benefit from the result of the study. They may apply the practice of alternative assessment in their English classrooms.

School administrations and different segments of the MoE will also benefit from the result of the study and prepare a platform for schools to incorporate alternative assessment in their curriculum.
Following are some reasons for incorporating alternative assessment in the foreign language classroom:

- To capture complex outcomes. Alternative assessment goes beyond the assessment of knowledge and facts to the more complex goals of assessing and developing life-long skills of creative thinking, problem solving, summarizing, synthesizing, and reflecting. With authentic assessment, products and processes are equally valued.
- To address realistic tasks. With authentic and performance-based assessments, students are involved in tasks, performances, demonstrations, and interviews reflecting everyday situations within realistic and meaningful contexts.
- To include good instructional tools. Assessment and instruction interact on a continuous basis. Assessment can be used to adapt instruction and to provide feedback for monitoring students' learning. Alternative assessment focuses on the students' strengths, therefore enabling the teacher to get a more accurate view of students' achievement, of what they can do, and of what they are trying to do.
- To communicate what we value. Assessment and instruction need to be aligned. If we value oral proficiency but only assess through written tests, students infer that only the written language matters.
- To meet the students' different learning styles. Alternative assessment offers a broad spectrum of assessment possibilities to address the different learning styles. Some students might choose to demonstrate understanding by writing about something while others might prefer to perform, to display visually, or to create a timeline.
- To collaborate and interact with students. (ERIC Digest, 1999)

Objectives of the study

The study explored teachers' understanding of alternative assessment and found out how they incorporated it in their English classrooms. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

- find out how well EFL teachers in selected secondary schools understand the principles of alternative assessment;
- identify the types of assessment currently being implemented;
- investigate the reason/s teachers claim for using or not using alternative assessment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of the Study Area

This research was conducted in secondary schools in Hawassa Zuria. These include Leku, and Wondo Basha secondary schools. These schools are situated in Hawassa Zuria, SNNPR. Since they are not in a big city, the situations in these schools were not well researched. So, this study investigated the schools' English language teachers' assessment practices.

Study Subjects

The population of this study included all grade nine English language teachers teaching in the selected schools.

Study design (Study type, Sample size & Sampling procedure)

This study was an investigation of the extent to which English language teachers implement alternative assessment method in their classrooms. For this reason, qualitative research design was employed. All grade nine English teachers of the sample schools were used as participants using availability sampling. But only six out of eight English teachers were participated. The remaining two teachers were not in their schools due to personal reasons during data collection.

Study Methodology

The researcher chosen a qualitative research design that comprised of document analysis and key informant interview. Since the aim of the study was to investigate how English language teachers understand and implement alternative assessment, it seemed appropriate to adapt a research design that would investigate the participants' own perspective on the subject (Popay, Rogers & Williams, 1998, p. 346). Document analysis is also valuable in an empirical study of this kind because it provides an understanding in context. The evidence in a document analysis presents a clear and tangible record of the subject being investigated (Grady, 1998, p. 24). The document analysis in this study was collected, analyzed and evaluated the assessment packages of grade nine English language teachers. This type of investigation can provide significant data that can be beneficial in order to identify the assessment that is used by the teachers.

Data Management and Analysis

Data analysis involves more than providing an explanation of the data that is collected. Qualitative data needs to be organized, so that related information can be selected and separated from information that is not directly connected to the study (Wiersma, 1995, p. 216). In order to produce the most effective results the researcher

should have the necessary skills in order to be able to condense, reorganize and collate related information from the data collected in the study.

The field notes of each interview session was hand- written and transcribed immediately after each interview. Measures were taken to ensure that all the data collected during the interview was reviewed and transcribed. The transcripts of the discussion went through careful analysis and interpretation.

In addition, all key informant interviews were audio-taped (with the consent of the participants). The tapes were listened to several times in order to transcribe them accurately. The transcripts were reread several times so that important information was not be excluded.

Data was organized into smaller units based on ideas, themes, categories and subcategories in order to shade light on the findings of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

In this section, data generated from analysis of the assessment package of grade nine English language teachers and key informant interview are presented.
The procedures for conducting key informant interview and text analysis are presented as follows:

Procedures for Conducting Key Informant Interview

The key informant interview for school 1 took place on 23rd April 2015 , the interview for school 2 took place after one week on 30th April 2015, and the interview for school 3 took place on 5th May 2015. Six grade nine English teachers were interviewed (two teachers from each school) altogether. The interview were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewee.

Procedures for Conducting Document Analysis

Document analysis was carried out of the assessment packages of six English teachers teaching in those three schools. To do the analysis, the researchers prepared two sets of checklists. One set of the checklist contain the criteria to determine whether alternative measures were incorporated in the teachers assessment packages and the other set determines the percentage distribution of the teachers' semester assessment packages against different tasks.

The ultimate goal of the document analysis was to show whether teachers incorporate alternative assessment into their classroom teaching and to find out the assessment method frequently used in the participant teachers' classroom.

Document Analysis and Discussions

The teachers understudy conducted four to five assessments but the researchers focused on four assessments uniformly. The following analysis will give us the composition of each of the assessment packages of the participant teachers.

Table 1: Analysis of Teacher's Assessment Packages

S/N	Items	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
1	Traditional questions such as multiple choice, matching, true and false, fill in the gap, essays & paragraphs	++++	+++++	+++++	+++++	+++++	+++++
2	Memorization or rote learning of isolated bits of information are required & encouraged	++++	++++	+++++	++++	+++++	+++++
3	Students are assessed on oral activity	++	+	+	+	+	+
4	Students are actively engaged in assessment	+	+	+	+	+	+
5	Opportunities for self assessment are provided	+	+	+	+	+	+
6	Opportunities for peer assessment are provided	+	+	+	+	+	+
7	Assessment encourages varied medium for assessment such as journals, projects, diaries, student logs, etc	+	+	+	+	+	+
8	Formative assessment encourages the improvement of work in progress.	+	+	+	+	+	+
9	Assessment exercises are based on the goals of instruction & class material.	++	++	++	++	++	++

Key: Evidence of the criterion in one semester (five lessons weekly over 4 months- approx. 80 lessons).
+ Minimal or no evidence in assessment package
++ Evident in 30% of the lessons
+++ Evident in 50% of the lessons
++++ Evident in 75% of the lessons
+++++ Evident in every lesson.

As can be observed from Table 1, traditional questions such as multiple choice, matching, true and false, fill in the gap were more evident in the participant teachers' assessment packages. Except T1 and T5 in which the assessment criterion used 75% of traditional questions, the remaining three teachers' assessment package depended on traditional tests for 100%.

Similarly, majority of the participant teachers used fragmented bits of information(not contextualized information) as contents of their assessment packages. These were grammar and vocabulary questions in which students were expected to respond by remembering the grammar rules and the vocabulary items they learned. Therefore, Table 1 clearly depicted that memorization or rote learning of isolated bits of information were required & encouraged in the assessment packages of the respondent teachers.

The third item in Table 1 was whether or not students were assessed in oral activities. Only 30% of the assessment package of T1's included assessment of oral activities. Assessment of oral activities was not evident in the remaining five teachers assessment packages. This shows that assessment of the students oral activity was not given a room in the majority of the participant English teachers' assessment package.

Item number four of Table 1 was whether the students participated in the assessment process. The data clearly showed that all the students in the participant teachers' classroom did not participate in the assessment process. Similarly, the data made it clear that participant teachers did not create opportunities for their students to participate either in self-assessment or in peer assessment activities

The data in Table 1 also depicted that the teachers' assessment did not encourage varied medium for assessment such as journals, projects, diaries, student logs, etc. Only the traditional assessment formats were

evident . Because of this, it is not possible to say "Formative assessment encourages the improvement of work in progress".

The last item (i.e. item number 9) of Table 1 was about whether assessment exercises were based on the goals of instruction & class materials. Therefore, it was evident from the data that about 30% of the continuous assessment tried to assess the objectives of the instruction and class material. As it was mentioned earlier, majority of the teachers' teaching and assessment was grammar and vocabulary based though the textbook included all the macro and micro language skills. So, it was assumed by the researchers that the grammar and the vocabulary (and some reading comprehension) assessment questions constitute 30 % of the instruction and class materials.

Table 2: Analysis of The Semester Grade Assessment Package

Semester Grade (100%)	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6
Reading Comprehension	10%	15%	15%	15%	10%	10%
Writing	10%	10%	5%	5%	5%	10%
Other project works (assignments)	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Oral Presentation	-	-	-	5%	5%	5%
Listening	-	-	-	-	-	-
Class works & Home works	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Grammar	60%	55%	50%	50%	60%	55%
Others	-	-	*5%	*5%	-	-

Table 2 provides the analysis of the participant teachers one semester assessment package The data was collected at the beginning of the second semester of 2014/2015 academic year. So, it indicates the first semester result of the 2014/2015 academic year. Accordingly, the teachers told to the researchers that formative assessment accounts for 70% of the semester total where as summative assessment accounts for 30% (i.e. this is the norm in all the three schools).

As can be seen clearly from the table, the maximum weight that reading skills (reading comprehension) hold in the participant teachers' semester assessment package was 15% (i.e. three teachers) and the minimum weight hold by reading skills was 10% (which was given by three teachers). What was fascinating about this issue was that all the percentages given for the reading skills were allotted during the final semester (summative) examination. Reading skills was not found in the participant teachers; continuous assessment package.

When we look at the semester weight given for writing skills assessment, we can found out that the maximum weight given to this skills was 10%, and the minimum weight accounted for 5%. Writing skill was not assed during the semester final (summative exam). It was assessed only during formative (continuous) assessment.

All participant teachers allotted 10% for assignments. The assignments were grammar and vocabulary assignments which the students were made to work in their learning groups (i.e. in groups of five). Only three teachers were found having the record of the students' oral presentation and the presentation was marked out of 5%. Listening was the most neglected skill. None of the six participant teachers included it in their assessment package.

Marks given for class and home works uniformly accounted for 10% in the teachers' assessment package. When we look at the attention given to assessing the students grammar ability, we can see an overwhelming percentage. It hold 50% or more of the overall semester point.

From this we can conclude that for the participant teachers, assessment is testing the students grammar knowledge. This can also inform us about their language teaching philosophy which probably say, 'teaching a foreign language is mainly teaching its structure'.

Analysis and Discussion of Key Informant Interview

The key informant interview provided an insight into the participant English language teachers' beliefs about assessment. The report of this information has been presented as follows:

How Decisions on the Specific Types of Assessment Activities to be Used in a Classroom are Made

Participant teachers' response on this issue was almost similar. Among the six informants, four said they made decisions based on its suitability for correction. One informant said, "I am teaching around eighty students in a class. So, I prefer multiple choice, matching items , and true or false questions as they are easy for preparation and correction". These teachers mentioned large class size as a factor for choosing objective type questions as their assessment tool. The remaining two informant teachers, on the other hand, said in addition to objective type of tests, they sometimes give marks for the students participation. One of these two teachers, for instance, mentioned," I usually take record of students who actively participate during class and give them marks for their participation".

In addition to class size, participant teachers mentioned their decision of assessment type is influenced by the type of language skills they are going to assess. One key informant said," I prefer multiple choice and matching items when assessing grammar and reading comprehension. But I cannot use these if I want to test the students' writing skills". Similarly, another key informant teacher mentioned that she usually prefer giving writing as an assignments to her students. The other issue they raised as a factor that influence their decision on their choice of assessment type is time. All participants mentioned that they prefer objective item tests because they are not time consuming.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that teachers decide their assessment types based on its convenience for management. They prefer objective types of tests since they are easy to administer, easy to correct, and not time consuming. The objective type of tests reveal many traces of traditional assessment. So, from the responses of the key informants, it is possible to conclude that informant English teachers preferred to follow the traditional ways of assessment.

The Extent to which Participant English Language Teachers Still Use Traditional Assessment Methods and Test Items.

All the six key informants stipulated that they use traditional test items, like multiple choice, matching items, true-false questions, etc. more often. One informant said, "I usually use the traditional paper and pencil tests. But sometimes, I use writing assignments as an assessment tool". Reasons they give for their reliance on the traditional assessment is that it is best for average and particularly weaker students, and it is the format that the students are familiar with. Furthermore, teachers mentioned that since the national examination uses the same format as the traditional tests, students prefer it over other types of tests.

Dependence on traditional tests was confirmed in the assessment packages of the participant English teachers. This was evident in the tests, home works, and assignments as these were given in the form of multiple choice, matching, true or false, and fill in the gap.

To conclude, participant teachers mainly relied on traditional test types. This is unfortunate since traditional tests have many disadvantages for both teachers and students. It does not help the learners cognitive development. Furthermore it fails to address the preference of all students as traditional assessment misunderstood the connection between learning and assessment.

The Extent to which Assessment Practices Make Provision for the Assessment of all the Language Skills

Majority of the informants (i.e four) said that they mainly assess grammar skills as students are interested to learn grammar and to test their grammar ability. Two respondents on the other hand, said though they mainly test grammar, they also test their students reading comprehension and vocabulary skills during the mid semester and semester final examinations. Informant teachers also mentioned that they sometimes test their students writing skills by giving home taken writing practices.

The informant teachers stipulated the fact that listening and speaking skills are the most neglected skills. Majority of the respondents (five out of six) said they couldn't test these two skills due to large class size. Only one respondent said she sometimes test the students speaking ability. She said, "Although it is time taking, I sometimes test the students speaking skills. But one test usually takes more than a week".

It is evident from the interview that informant teachers failed to asses all the language skills. So, we can conclude that assessment practices of these teachers failed to make provisions of the assessment of all the language skills. Teachers mentioned class size as the major factor that inhibit them not to assess all the language skills.

The participant teachers assessment package confirmed that teachers did not assess all the language skills equally. It was evident from text analysis of their assessment package that listening skills was completely forgotten, speaking skills was also given minor attention by some teachers and completely forgotten by others. The weight given for writing skills was also 10% of the total semester mark. The skills that were given maximum attention (like grammar for instance) was also assessed using the traditional assessment format.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that participant teachers did not give equal attention to the macro as well as micro language skills during assessment. Furthermore, teachers were highly dependent on the traditional assessment format.

The Classroom Opportunities Students have to be Assessed by Engaging in Social Interactions in Authentic Settings & Situations.

Majority of the informant teachers said they give opportunities to assess their students in authentic situations. Some (two teachers) said they sometime ask their students to listen to news from a television and report their own version to the classroom. One teacher said, she sometimes ask her students to read news papers and magazine and present their report to the class. But when they were asked on the access of newspapers and magazines, they said that it is difficult to get newspapers and magazines as the school do not buy these things. So, the claim the teachers made on the issue of using newspapers and magazines seems unrealistic.

This shows that the teachers give no opportunities for social interactions which means students engagement in social interactions in authentic setting was absent from the teachers assessment. This in turn indicates that the teachers have problem in understanding assessment. A major element of assessment in a foreign language is encouraging students to engage in social interactions in the target language. Similarly, the assessment packages confirmed that teachers give no room for assessing their students in social interactions in authentic setting and situations.

The Assessment Methods and Activities that are Used on Regular Basis

No teacher confirmed that they use alternative assessment. All teachers said that they used traditional assessment (multiple choice, matching, true-false...) as it mirrored the type of examination their students face during national examination. One teacher, for instance, said "I use traditional paper and pencil tests due to many reasons. My students like to be tested in such a way because their national examination uses the same format. furthermore, these test types are easy to be administered".

The teachers' assessment packages clearly showed that teachers used the customary assessment techniques like multiple choice, matching, true or false, and gap filling more often than the authentic assessment.

From this we can conclude that traditional assessment is dominant in the classrooms of the teachers understudy due to different reasons. These reasons include its similarity with the national exam, and its convenience for the teacher and weaker students.

The Extent to which Students are Involved in Classroom Assessment

All teachers confessed that they did not involve their students in the assessment. One teacher said, "Why do I involve them since the assessment is meant for them?" The other teacher said, "I am not sure on how I can involve my students in the classroom assessment". Still another teacher said, "I don't think it is necessary to involve learners in the assessment for exam is a secret".

When they were asked whether or not they use peer assessment in their classrooms, majority of the teachers (i.e. five) said that they sometime made their students exchange their exercise books and check for each other's work. One teacher, on the other hand said," he do not use peer assessment as it leads learners to argument".

The assessment package also depicted that teachers did not involve their students in assessment except in some limited situations in which they made the students exchange their exercise books and correct each other's exercise book.

Therefore, it was clear from both the interview and the assessment package analysis that the participant English teachers did not involve their students in the assessment Process. Even when they involve learners in peer assessment, they did not take it seriously as an important assessment activity.

The Extent to which Assessment Activities Encourage the Improvement Work in Progress

Some teachers' replied that they sometime ask students to submit show the process of writing a paragraph and then write the paragraph. This means, students were expected to include their outline, drafts, etc. when they submit their assignment on paragraph writing. But, the teachers confessed that they couldn't give timely feedback on the students assignment due to the large number of students they teach in one class.

From the teachers' assessment package, it was evident that most of the assessments did not encourage the improvement of work on progress.

From this, we can conclude that although assessments should encourage the improvement of work in progress, the type of and frequency of continuous assessment used by the informant teachers were insufficient. They were not frequent and they were traditional type. The only evidence of formative assessment was the writing assignment in which students were asked to submit their assessment including all the processes they went through though they were not given appropriate and timely feedback from their teachers.

The Extent to which Teachers' Give Feedback on Students' Assessment

Majority of the respondents confessed that they did not let their students know the result of their assessment (feedback) timely. Two teachers mentioned time constraint as a reason for not giving timely feedback. The other three teachers took the class size as a reason. Only one teacher said, "I usually provide feedback within a day or two of the assessment".

This shows that participant (English teachers) were reluctant to give timely feed back to their students. This in turn indicates that the teachers are not aware of the importance of timely feedback for students' learning.

The Main Reasons why the Teachers are Reluctant to use Alternative Assessment

The key informant interview indicated that participant teachers were reluctant to use alternative assessment activities in their classrooms. Many teachers mentioned time shortage and large class size as reasons that made

them reluctant to try out alternative assessment activities in their teaching. One teacher, for example, said, "alternative assessment took much time and inconvenient for grading where as traditional assessment produced results quickly and easily".

Furthermore, three teachers mentioned that they could not use alternative assessment as their students are not interested in. They are not interested in alternative assessment activities because its format is different from that of the national examination. The remaining two teachers said that alternative assessment is not inclusive as weaker students do not benefit from it.

The result of the analysis of the assessment package supported the result of the key informant interview. The assessment modalities in the packages were mainly customary ones. Therefore, the key informant interview and the analysis of the assessment packages clearly indicated that teachers are resistant to use alternative assessment. Class time, class size, and national examination format are among the major reasons that made the teachers reluctant to use alternative assessment activities in their classrooms. Moreover, the teachers have problems understanding alternative assessment, as a result they are resistant to implement it.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the researchers summarize the study, highlight the major conclusions from the study and suggest recommendations.

As stated in chapter one, the general objective of the study was to explore teachers' understanding of alternative assessment and find out how they incorporate it in their English classrooms. The specific objectives that constitute the general objective include, to find out how well EFL teachers in selected secondary schools understand the principles of alternative assessment; to identify the types of assessment currently being implemented, and to probe the reason/s teachers claim for using or not using alternative assessment in their classrooms.

Instruments used to address these objectives include assessment package analysis (document analysis) and key informant in depth interview. The findings of the study provide insight on whether or not participant teachers implement alternative assessment and to identify the type of assessment that the teachers understudy depend on in assessing their students' language ability.

Summary of the Study

The researchers set out to investigate teachers' understanding of alternative assessment and find out whether they incorporate it in their English classrooms and why.

In chapter 1 the background of the study was discussed. Discussion included description of the research setting, investigation of the background of the problem, justification of the problem and formulation of the research objectives.

The second chapter was on materials and methods. In this section, description of the study area, the research design, the research methodology, the participants of the study, and data management and analysis techniques were discussed.

The purpose of the third chapter was to review the related literature. Accordingly, literatures related to the issue of assessment in general and authentic assessment in particular were reviewed.

Chapter four included the results of the empirical study. It incorporated the analysis of the assessment packages of the participant teachers and the analysis of the key informant interview. The analysis of the assessment packages and the in depth key informant interview indicated essential information on the participant English teachers assessment beliefs, and practices. The result has important implication on the practices of assessment in language classrooms in the study area. The result may be generalized to secondary schools with similar situations across Ethiopia.

The result of the data collected through interview and document analysis from six grade nine English teachers revealed that alternative assessment was not integrated in the assessment packages of the participant English teachers.

Major Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study were given as follows:

- Participant English teachers do not have a clear understanding of alternative assessment. They equate alternative assessment with testing. They have misconceptions about assessment in general and alternative assessment in particular. As a result they failed to understand the importance assessment to learning. Most importantly, they lack awareness on the concept of alternative assessment and failed to understand alternative assessment as an important means of promoting and encouraging language learning
- The type of assessment mainly used by the teachers were customary ones. these include multiple choice, matching, and true or false. Among the macro and micro language skills, the most assessed was grammar. It accounts for more than 50 % of the total assessment package.
- Participant English teachers were reluctant to include alternative assessment in their assessment package due to different reasons. They said alternative assessment activities are time consuming and difficult to be implemented in large classrooms. They also mentioned the national examination format forced them to use the customary assessment techniques than the alternative assessment They added that students are not interested to take part in alternative assessment as its format is completely different from the national examination format. Accordingly, it was evident from the analysis of the teachers assessment packages that grammar testing was given high importance compared to other major skills. This clearly shows the attitude participant teachers hold towards alternative assessment.
- Almost all participant teachers failed to include students in the assessment process. They did not understand the importance of formative assessment in encouraging the improvement of work in progress. As a result they did not assess the process of learning. They only focused on the product. Furthermore, they failed to give timely feedback for their students. This in turn, hampered the contribution of assessment to teaching.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were drawn:

- Training on the importance and practical implementation of alternative assessment should be given to teachers.
- There need be a change on the teachers' attitude towards alternative assessment. The teachers' attitude towards assessment appears to be significant obstacle to the implementation of alternative assessment.
- Teachers should get support in form of supervision, etc. They expressed their confusion regarding assessment.
- Schools and/or departments should include alternative assessment activities in the assessment packages of their teachers and follow-up its implementation.

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