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Analysis of Assessment Methods Used by ESL Teachers at Undergraduate level in Pakistan

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine language assessment practices of ESL teachers at the undergraduate level in Punjab (Faisalabad and Lahore). Objectives of the study were to evaluate current second language assessment methods used by teachers at the undergraduate level, to identify any difference between perceptions of teachers about their assessment skills and actual practices of teachers for second language assessment at the undergraduate level, to explore the factors affecting ESL assessment practices of teachers at the undergraduate level. To achieve the objectives of the study, a mixed-method research design was used, a variety of instruments were administered to collect quantitative data survey, and a language assessment knowledge test adapted from (Muhammad 2019) was used. The survey was divided into four parts first part inquired participants about their demographic information, second part inquired them about different assessment techniques they use to assess language skills, i.e., writing, reading, speaking, listening. Data were analyzed by conducting descriptive statistics through SPSS and thematic analysis. Findings of the study highlighted that teachers claimed to use various types of assessment techniques to assess their student's language skills like portfolio assessment, group discussion, note-taking but classroom observations indicated that they used only traditional pen and paper methods and limited assessment techniques like essay writing and multiple-choice questions.

Key Words: Language Assessment Methods, Assessment Knowledge, Assessment Training

Introduction

Assessment and evaluation are very closely related to each other and are often used interchangeably. Therefore, it is significant to differentiate between the two of them. These two terms are often utilized in place of each other, but in essence, they are different from each other (Jabbarifar, 2009). Assessment of students' proficiency and achievement is a significant part of the process of evaluation; it basically includes the evaluation of information regarding the learning achievement of students. Evaluation is not just about the assessment of language. It also emphasizes on using its results to make decisions in the future.

One more concept is of appraisal, which basically means the methods used to gather data about students' proficiency and knowledge (Ekbatani & Pierson, 2000). Assessment is the basic means to learn about the needs of students and to find out what students are learning and progressing and how the teachers are performing, so assessment is a process that helps to understand the relation of teaching and learning (Frank, 2012). Summative types of assessments are administered at the end, of course, to check what students have acquired and learned at that particular point of time (Brown, 2004). On the

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other hand, the formative assessment allows teachers to evaluate students learning on a daily basis and assess if their teaching method is successful or not or if they need to change their teaching method.

The Examination is an important part of the educational process. Learning is incomplete without Examination because it is the only way to measure a student's performance and achievement ([Shirazi, 2004](#)). Mostly in universities and in higher education, evaluation and assessment is achieved through Examination. It is a tool utilized to evaluate a student's skills, competence, and knowledge and also a teacher's skills and methods. Examination finds out what has been learned by students in a particular period of time how much knowledge he/she has gained, in other words, it can be concluded that Examination is a diverse way to evaluate the act of teaching and learning.

Through Examination, several things are evaluated like teachers' competence and students' learning achievement. It guides both the students and the teachers to improve the learning process as well as teaching instruction ([Malik, 2017](#)). There are various ways to assess the language skills of learners. Mainly objective-type items are used in Examinations like multiple choice questions, true/false, fill in the blanks, column matching, and some parts of Examination consist of subjective type questions, for example, composition and comprehension ([Brown, 2004](#)). In Pakistan, multiple-choice questions are used frequently to assess language skills like reading and writing.

There are various types of multiple-choice questions like sentence completion, error correction, fill in the blanks, column matching, and true-false exercises. Grammar is mostly assessed by using these multiple-choice questions. There are several other testing techniques like the use of subjective type questions like essay writing, letter writing, report writing, compositions, and comprehension. These types of techniques, especially essay-type questions, enable students to express their thoughts and opinions regarding any particular topic, and to practice critical thinking. These techniques are used to assess all English language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Literature Review

Assessment plays a vital role as it determines whether or not the goals of a particular course are met. There are different types of assessment like summative assessment, formative assessment, diagnostic assessment, norm-referenced assessment, criterion-referenced assessment, ipsative assessment etc. In summative assessment, students' performance in a particular course is evaluated at the end of the course and is compared with some benchmarks and standards.

Formative assessment includes a variety of methods used by the teacher at a particular point and time during the course to improve and modify teaching methods according to students' needs. Diagnostic assessment pre-assesses students' weaknesses and strengths before the course. In norm-referenced assessment performance of students is assessed by comparing it to with the group and with other students of the same age, background and experience. In criterion-referenced assessment, students' performance is assessed with reference to a specific criteria, without referring to other students' performances. Ipsative assessment assesses students' performance based on his or their earlier performance ([Kennedy, Chan, Fok, & Yu, 2008](#)).

Assessment has played a fundamental role in the process of learning and teaching. Is not just play this essential role in the study of the English language, but it is necessary in every field of research. It is, in fact, one of the five fundamental components that ensure the quality of instruction given in the classroom. The other five include teachers, students, resources, and context. ([Yamtim & Wongwanich, 2014](#)).

In various learning scenarios, the assessment takes on a different mantle and it has become that one thing that has become more exacting in the last twenty years. At various stages, assessment has become a big part of a person's life, and we should be concerned about its authenticity of it. For learning, students don't need to always have the right answer ([Laufenberg 2010](#)).

A fundamental meaning of educational assessment is that it includes four exercises: planning freedom to accumulate proof, gathering proof, deciphering it, and following up on translations. In spite of the fact that programs that focus on the

improvement of instructors' appraisal proficiency cover a lot of this region (e.g., Stiggins et al. 2006).

Formative assessment can be defined as to a wide assortment of techniques that educators use to lead in-process assessments of students' understanding, adapting necessities, and scholarly advancement during an example, unit, or course. Summative assessment can be referred as the knowledge that students gain during a course and in most cases, done at the end of the semester ([Brown, 2004](#)).

Assessment includes the collection and utilization of exact information on the students to refine programs and further develop learning. It is in this regard that [Allen \(2004\)](#) focuses that assessment includes an assortment of strategies which is utilized to get data about the understudy, educational plans, projects, and approaches, among others, for direction. To get significant data for the motivations behind appraisal, careful consideration ought to be given to the evaluation methods to be utilized. Unmistakable among these appraisal strategies are objective and essay tests which can appear as paper-and-pencil tests, tasks, projects, and meetings. [Dikli \(2003\)](#) believes that traditional assessment systems allude to ordinary techniques for testing, normally basics, and use pen and paper with multiple choice and article things. [Dikli \(2003\)](#) adds that traditional assessment methods as a component of evaluating understudies, projects, educational programs, and strategies for independent direction have been exceptionally predominant in our instructive undertaking.

Alongside traditional methods, there are some other methods for assessment. These methods include assignments, presentations, poster presentations, an open book test, collaborative testing, performance-based assessments, Self-assessment and adding an option of explaining to a multiple-choice test. These methods are used for better learning and to improve the knowledge and mantle strength of students. Another purpose for using alternative methods rather than traditional is for students to directly participate in the assessment process. This also provides improvisation to the students to be creative in their answers. Teachers have always evaluated students' knowledge through

recall tests and by asking questions during class, but in the 21st century, the evaluation process has been changed for better results. This also helps the teachers to understand what student has been learning in the classrooms. ([Black & Wiliam, 1998](#); W. J. Popham, 2008).

In the process of assessment, there are some standers that one must have to follow to make the results worth it. These standards help to get accurate and goal-oriented results. These standards provide a solid foundation for the assessment process. A) Assessment purpose: assessment must have a clear purpose. Only then one can select the most beneficial method of evaluation for their studies. B) Learning expectations must be aligned with appropriate learning expectations and instructions for each student. C) Assessment Design: the type of method should be carefully selected. The purpose and level of students must keep in mind while selecting the evaluating method. Only by that one can achieve the learning goals. D) Students Engagement in Assessment: students should take active participation in the assessment process. This will enhance their learning abilities of them. E) Assessment Preparation: teachers and students must prepare enough for the evaluation process. Resources, time, and learning opportunities should be part of classroom assessment practices.

During the process of assessment, many challenges and questions were raised, how can one know that the test is effective? Is it dependable? Does it accurately measure what you want it to measure? These type of questions helps in identifying various principles for assessment. An effective test has to be practicable. It must have features such as a) low-priced, b) stay within the appropriate time frame, c) simple and Easy, d) scoring/evaluation procedure, which should be time-efficient. (Language Assessment, principles and Classroom Practices, by H. Douglas Brown)

A good language test should give consistent results ([Maduekwe, 2007](#)). For example, if a teacher set three tests for a term, a student must maintain similar marks in every test. If not, then we can say that test is not reliable. Validity is another basic principle of the evaluation process. It refers to the ability of the test to measure the objective and it

should have the ability to provide the required information, which must be valuable and appropriate. It also refers to the accuracy of assessment ([Brown, 2004](#)). Authenticity is also another fundamental principle of assessment. It means that a test should be original, reliable, and correct in the evaluation process. Authentic assessment is still a new approach in assessment as this approach relates learning with real and complicated situations and context ([Olfos & Zulanta, 2007](#)).

Classroom-Based assessment refers to the evaluation methods which are based on the learning taken place within classrooms. Classroom assessments are also known as teacher made assessments ([Hughes, 2003](#)). CBA has become a well-documented principle of classroom instruction about many strategies. However, it remains relatively difficult to define because it includes all types of classroom assessment, such as formal and informal assessment, formative and summative assessment ([Ketabi & Ketabi, 2014](#)).

Assessment in Pakistan refers to rote memorization. ([Warsi, 2004](#)) and (Kenan, 2006). It is a well-known fact that humans require testing to improve. In humans there is always a space for improvement as human brains get more and more efficient with knowledge. By assessing their knowledge, the human can improve their future learning. In language testing, teachers use different methods to evaluate their student's knowledge of what they have learnt from the course. Teachers used a variety of assessment methods for evaluation procedures. In Pakistan most commonly used methods for evaluation are pen-paper tests, multiple-choice tests, assignments and projects. Pakistan is still used some traditional methods of assessment as compared to other countries. But in recent years, Pakistan's Higher Education Commission made a guideline for assessment tools that can be used in the evaluation process. These methods can be picked by considering the grade of the student.

Language assessment literacy is one of the most important factors in the assessment method. It refers to the knowledge of the test maker and checker that whether they have enough knowledge to understand, create, conduct, and check the test in a valid and

reliable way. LAL is currently commonly known as the blend and use of knowledge, abilities, and standards for directing language assessment in the different instructive settings where it is required.

Researchers have conducted research to examine assessment methods being used by teachers to assess English language in Pakistan. In an article named "Evaluation of the assessment criteria of English language at higher secondary level in Pakistan", researchers evaluated the assessment criteria of English language in the first year and second year, their results showed that rote learning is used at this level and assessment methods do not assess the lower level of language skills. (Siddique, N., Mahmoud, M. A. & Abiodullah M. 2013). In another article named "Exploring the current classroom assessment practices of English Language at secondary level in a private secondary school of District Ghizer, Gilgit-Baltistan," the researcher explored assessment methods used in 9th and 10th grade classrooms to assess the English language. ([Dad, I. 2017](#)).

In addition to these, there is a plethora of literature available that explore the assessment methods employed by ESL teachers at various levels of education, which sets the paradigm for this study. A number of studies of the assessment practices used by teachers in regular classrooms have been undertaken in contrast, less is known about the assessment practices employed by instructors of English as a Second Language (ESL), particularly at the tertiary level.

Furthermore, the studies done in the past in Pakistan have employed a limited amount of methods to inquire this phenomenon, some have employed only quantitative methods and used questionnaires to explore assessment practices, perceptions, and knowledge of ESL teachers and some have used only qualitative methods like an interview. The present study employed a variety of tools to compare assessment skill perceptions, assessment knowledge, and actual practices of teachers. The following research questions were determined for this study:

- a) What are the second language assessment methods used by teachers at the undergraduate level in Pakistan?

- b) What is the relation between ESL teachers' assessment knowledge, their perceived skills and their actual practices?
- c) What are factors affecting second language assessment practices of ESL teachers at the undergraduate level?

Methodology

Design

To achieve the objectives of the study and to investigate the assessment practices of ESL teachers in-depth mixed-method research design was employed.

Participants

The population of the present study was ESL teachers of different universities of Faisalabad and Lahore. The present study used convenience sampling to collect data from the population. The participants for the sample were selected on the basis of the English courses they teach, for example, English I (language in use), English II (communicative skills), English III (academic reading and writing). The sample size for the present study consisted of 110 ESL teachers of different universities in Faisalabad and Lahore (Punjab). Out of 110 teachers, 47 were male and 63 female. All of the participants had different years of teaching experience had different education levels i.e. MA, M.PHIL and PhD, taught at different private and government universities of Lahore and Faisalabad.

Instruments

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative tools for data collection, i.e., a) teachers' questionnaire, b) language assessment knowledge test of teachers, c) test evaluation task, d) teacher made assessment tests, e) classroom observations. The collection of quantitative data began with an assessment method survey, which was constructed by considering assessment methods suggested by (Brown, 2003; [Hughes, 2003](#)). This survey was constructed to explore the assessment methods used by ESL teachers to assess different language skills. The second part of the survey was about perceptions of teachers about their skills; this part was adopted by ([Cheng 2004](#)). This second part was used to examine

teachers' self-perceived assessment skills. The third part of the survey inquired teachers about the factors that influence their assessment practices. This tool was used initially by (Sewagegn, 2019) and then it was adopted by the researcher. The second tool was an assessment knowledge test that was adopted and adapted from ([Al Bahlani, S, 2019](#)) was used to investigate the assessment knowledge level of ESL teachers. Qualitative data was collected with the help of three tools, first, a written test also adopted from ([Al Bahlani, S, 2019](#)) was used, and teachers were asked to evaluate it. Second, classroom observations were conducted on a small number of teachers i.e. seven teachers, to investigate actual assessment practices of teachers. Third, tests were collected from the same 7 teachers and were analyzed to explore how teachers assess their students' skills.

Data Analysis Procedure

After collecting data, the data gathered with the help of a questionnaire was analyzed with the help of Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS 26.0). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data collected by questionnaire, frequencies and percentages of responses were calculated. The knowledge test was analyzed by first calculating the total score of the respondents, one mark was given on one correct response. The average of the total score and standard deviation were calculated. Then to see how participants performed on each item mean score of correct responses was calculated. As the test was constructed according to skills mentioned by ([Brookhart 2011](#)), it was then analyzed according to those themes and skills, examining the degree of assessment literacy. Test evaluation task was analyzed thematically. Participants were required to examine various characteristics like reliability, validity, clarity, authenticity, and practicality; they were also required to give an overall rating to test ranging from 1-5 i.e. weak to excellent. Therefore, teachers who successfully rated the test overall and examined all criteria correctly were regarded as more assessment literate. The quality of each teacher-produced test was examined according to a checklist. The checklist was made by keeping in mind (Brown, 2007) principle of constructing a language test. A checklist was used, according to which classroom observations were analyzed, the checklist was

adapted from ([Al Bahlani, S, 2019](#)), the checklist included type of assessment, purpose and source of assessment, feedback type and student involvement.

Results and Discussions

Data collected by both qualitative and quantitative methods provided ample Examination of different universities' ESL teachers' assessment knowledge level and their needs. The survey's first part presented information regarding the assessment techniques used by teachers to assess English language skills. The second part of the survey provided information on teachers' self-perceived assessment skills. Language assessment knowledge test and test evaluation task provided information regarding assessment knowledge of teachers. Classroom observation and evaluation of teacher produced tests offered a comprehensive understanding of what were the actual assessment practices of teachers. Classroom observation and teacher-produced tests evaluation allowed to explore the type of assessment methods used, purpose of using assessment, source of assessment tasks, type of feedback given by teachers, and student involvement in assessment.

Self-Perceived Assessment Practices of Teachers

The findings of this study regarding the first question manifested that teachers tended to regard themselves as competent in conducting various types of assessment techniques to assess their students' language skills and giving feedback. They claimed to use different techniques for assessment of different skills like "essay writing", "letter writing", "paraphrasing", objective type questions" for writing, "comprehension", "paraphrasing", "cloze test" and "scanning technique" for reading, "oral presentation" for speaking and "comprehension" and "dictation" for listening. Writing is an effective and dynamic method of boosting the abilities of students. Teachers generally use subjective type of tests to evaluate students' writing skill. The assessment techniques usually used for writing are paragraph writing, essay writing, letter writing, email writing, and as the results of this study highlight, teachers prefer to use subjective type tasks like creative writing, short and long essay writing.

The notion of using subjective type questions to assess writing skill is also reinforced by Davis (1993). It is fascinating to note that the reason why teachers use subjective type of assessment is that universities compel teachers to assess their students' skills in a certain way i.e. in form of written papers, mostly for final term and midterm. The same situation happens with reading skills; results revealed different methods used to assess reading like "comprehension", "paraphrasing", "cloze test," and "scanning techniques". [Parveen ET. al. \(2011\)](#) states that objective type of tests items are better to evaluate reading skills.

This is also custom to use multiple-choice questions to assess reading skills in the majority of universities. Asking students to write a summary of a text or paraphrase a text is also a frequently occurring question in university exams. For that reason, the assessment of only reading and writing skills in universities is obvious because during the semester only written summative exams i.e., midterm and final exams are conducted. Teachers in the questionnaire claimed that they assess listening and speaking skill through methods like note-taking and oral presentation, in our universities teachers do take presentations in their classrooms not to assess speaking skill, but rather to check their understanding of a certain concept or topic. Students are allowed to code switch during their presentations. Same happens to assessment of listening skill teachers claimed to use a variety of methods like checking notes of students but in universities teachers don't usually assess listening skill and never checks notes of students to assess their listening skill. In contradiction to our findings ([khan, 2011](#)) study declared that teachers don't prefer to use mcq's and cloze test to assess reading.

Relation between Teachers Self-Perceived Skills Assessment Knowledge and Actual Practices

The findings highlighted that teachers perceive themselves as highly competent in assessment skills, they perceive themselves assessment literate with regard to using rubrics, conducting and developing different assessments, and using results of assessment for the betterment of their students. Assessment knowledge is regarded essential to conduct sound assessment. ([Stiggins, 1995](#)). The

majority of the studies done in the past about assessment knowledge of teachers have constantly arrived at the conclusion that teachers have restricted knowledge of assessment. ([Mertler, 2004](#); [Xu & Brown, 2017](#)).

The findings of this study are in line with past studies (Davidheiser, 2013; Kagan, 2016; Mertler, 2003; Perry, 2013; [Plake, 1993](#)) that highlighted a much lower level of assessment knowledge. In this present study majority of teachers scored 4-7 out of 19 total marks. It is apparent that although teachers considered themselves as highly capable in assessment and they claimed that they use various assessment techniques to assess, they have very restricted amount knowledge about assessment.

When we consider the findings of the knowledge test, we see that majority of teacher answered the question about encouragement of self-autonomy but analysis of observations reveal that teachers just passively involves their students in assessment. They don't promote self-assessment in their classrooms. In perceptions survey teachers perceived themselves competent in ensuring validity and reliability and other principles of assessment but test evaluation task's results indicated that teachers were not much literate in terms of reliability, validity, authenticity. Many previous studies (Brown, 2005 [Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010](#); [Coombe et al., 2007](#); [Fulcher, 2010](#)) debate the difficult and complex nature of principles of assessment, all these studies back up and explain present study findings.

Regarding actual assessment practices, there is very little amount of studies conducted on assessment practices of ESL teachers in universities. ([Cheng, Rogers & Wang, 2008](#)). In case of actual practices, teachers didn't used much variety of assessment task as they claimed in first part of survey. They mostly used traditional assessment methods i.e. written papers and in those papers didn't used much tasks just essay writing and comprehension mostly. They didn't used any feedback except giving grades to students on their test, yet in questionnaire they claimed that they use various feedback type like they give verbal feedback to students, use a checklist to give feedback, conduct a meeting especially to convey feedback to students.

While there claims regarding the purpose of assessment and skills assessed in classrooms were right as they used assessment to know explore students' progress and they mostly assess writing in their classrooms. Regarding comparison of perceptions and actual practices, teachers claimed that they know how to conduct alternative assessments like portfolio assessment, task-based assessment but they only conduct test based assessment.

In the perceptions survey majority of teachers perceived themselves competent in conducting classroom observation and using result of observation to improve their teaching or treat weaknesses of students, yet classroom observations indicated that they don't conduct observations at all. The findings of first and second questions show that teachers show constructive behavior toward use of various assessment methods, they regard themselves highly knowledgeable but didn't scored well in knowledge test and majority didn't evaluated the test properties correctly, and didn't used variety of assessment methods and mostly stick to traditional methods of assessment, these findings are consistent with many past studies that also described this clash between perceptions and practices. ([Mertler and Campbell 2005](#); Siegel and Wissehr, 2011; Yilmaz-Tuzun 2008).

Factors Influencing Second Language Assessment Practices

The findings of this question indicated that teachers held various factors responsible for their assessment practices. Those factors can be divided into types i.e. a) factors at institutional level b) factors at teachers' level c) factors at state level. Majority of the factors mentioned in the questionnaire are at institutional level i.e. larger amount of students in classroom, lack of incentives, lack of resources, focus on just securing grades instead of learning, insufficient amount of time, excessive load of work.

Regarding all institutional level factors all of the teachers agreed with all of them that all these factors are responsible for their assessment practices.

Like larger amount of students make it impossible for teachers to conduct various types of assessment this factor is related to inadequate

amount of time and excessive load of work, because of connection of these three factors teachers opt for much easier to conduct and much less time consuming ways of assessing and giving feedback and focus more on summative assessment rather than formative. Likewise, lack of resources and lack of incentives also influence assessment practices, teachers should be provided with proper language labs and other technological facilities to promote alternative assessment methods. A little encouragement goes a long way; institutes need to provide incentives to teachers to motivate them to work harder and better.

In addition to all these factors, state level factors have also great influence on assessment practices , state-level factors mainly include assessment training programs, teachers need to learn much diverse ways of assessing students and they need to learn to operationalize principles of conducting and developing assessments. There are many past studies that emphasize the importance of assessment

training and influence of lack of training on assessment practices and knowledge of teachers. ([Mertler, 2004](#); [Stiggins, 1995](#); Taylor, 2009). Regarding the third type of factors, i.e., at teacher's level includes their negative views about many assessment practices, teachers are mostly wary about some alternative assessment practices because of their negative experience with standardized tests. ([Davies, 2008](#)).

Conclusion

The results of present study concluded that ESL teachers are in dire need of professional assessment training programs that could help them ace in building a strong beneficial relationship between assessment and learning, they also need to upgrade their assessment methods and practices to assess language effectively and improve their assessment knowledge as it is very strongly connected with conducting a sound assessment in classroom.

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