

Practices in Assessment for Learning in English Language Classrooms within Government Secondary Schools in Tanga City, Tanzania

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigated assessment practices in English language classrooms in six government secondary schools in Tanga City, Tanzania. Employing a case study design, the study involved 12 English language teachers and Form Three students. Specifically, the study aimed to identify assessment strategies employed by English language teachers, delineate the timing of assessments during instructional sessions and ascertain the language skills evaluated during the instructional process. The study findings revealed that teachers employ both oral and written assessment strategies. The finding also showed that assessment occurs systematically throughout all stages of lesson development. However, while writing skills and grammar received considerable assessment attention, speaking skills appeared to be relatively neglected. The study concludes by discussing its implications and highlighting a critical necessity for teacher training to enhance assessment literacy, particularly in assessing oral skills during instructional sessions.

Keywords: *Assessment for learning, communicative language teaching, secondary schools, classroom practice, Tanzania*

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ped.v42i1.10>

Introduction

Traditional language assessment has long been criticised for its teacher-centred approach, focusing on testing learners' mastery of segmented language elements like grammar and vocabulary through decontextualised test items (Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015). However, contemporary movements such as Assessment for Learning (AfL), Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA), and Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) have gained prominence, especially within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Fulcher et al., 2017). These approaches prioritise ongoing assessment

practices that inform teaching and learning processes, encouraging teachers to adjust their instructional practices based on student needs (Habib, 2016).

AfL, in particular, emphasises the importance of continuous assessment practices that inform teaching and learning processes. It enables teachers to adjust their instructional practices and make informed pedagogical decisions, ultimately enhancing the teaching-learning process (Mohammadkhan et al., 2022; Mai, 2021; Griffith & Lim, 2014). Research has shown that AfL improves student learning outcomes and contributes to notable learning gains (Mohammadkhan et al., 2022; Mai, 2021; Griffith & Lim, 2014). Further, AfL enhances student learning and performance across various educational contexts (Black et al., 2003; Black & William, 2013). By providing timely and specific feedback, AfL encourages students to take an active role in their learning process, leading to increased engagement and motivation (Black et al., 2003). Moreover, AfL helps teachers identify areas where students may require additional support or instruction, enabling them to tailor their teaching to meet individual student needs (Black & William, 2013).

Learning, defined as a process that leads to change resulting from experience and increasing the potential for improved performance and future learning, is complemented by assessment, which involves the systematic collection and analysis of information to enhance student learning (Ambrose et al., 2010; Stassen et al., 2001). AfL serves as a fundamental process aimed at gathering and interpreting evidence to guide learners and teachers in understanding student progress and informing instructional decisions (Broadfoot et al., 2002). Besides, feedback, a critical component of AfL, serves as a catalyst for enhancing understanding and learning. It is essential for identifying areas for improvement and refining teaching strategies. Classroom assessments designed to measure student understanding through various language tasks can help to identify misconceptions and provide valuable feedback for both students and teachers (De Vries et al., 2023).

AfL is a daily classroom practice involving learners, teachers, and peers, aiming to seek, reflect upon, and respond to information from various classroom tasks and activities to enhance the ongoing learning and teaching process (Klenowski, 2009). It focuses predominantly on formative assessments, emphasising the collection of diverse information from learners to tailor learning tasks accordingly (Ninomiya, 2016). This shift from transmission to interaction in the teaching approach, where learners play an active role, has been highlighted as a fundamental transformation facilitated by AfL, LOA, or CBA (Brooks et al., 2021). Authentic assessment of language skills necessitates the integration of language skills in real-world contexts to provide meaningful feedback (Brown, 2003). Real-world activities serve as the cornerstone of authentic language assessment, particularly in language learning

aimed at developing communicative competence (Griffith & Lim, 2014; Mugimu & Sekiziyivu, 2016).

The introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Tanzania aimed to improve classroom practices, including integrating assessment into instructional sessions in line with competency -based instruction principles (Abdala, 2020; URT, 2007). Tanzania's secondary education English language syllabus mandates teachers to assess students' abilities to provide specific information based on what they have heard, read, or observed (URT, 2005). Despite the emphasis on AfL and CLT, studies have shown that teachers lack proficiency in identifying appropriate classroom evaluation practices (Ahmadi et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022; Subheesh & Sathy, 2020). Most of the studies have paid much attention to the perceptions, conceptions, and attitudes of both teachers and learners regarding assessment practices and corrective feedback (Mohammadkhah et al., 2022; Liontoulou, 2021; Inbar-Lourie, 2017). However, little is known about strategies used in assessing learners, skills assessed, and the timing of classroom-based assessments in the Tanzanian context. Therefore, this study aimed to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon by examining the strategies, timing, and language skills that Tanzanian English teachers assess in their classrooms.

The study's objectives were threefold:

- i. To identify the strategies employed by English language teachers in assessing learners in their classes.
- ii. To delineate the timing of assessments conducted by teachers during English language instructional sessions.
- iii. To ascertain the language skills assessed by teachers during the English language instructional process.

Methodology

Approach and design

This qualitative research employed a case study design, allowing for in-depth exploration within a natural setting where the English language assessments take place, namely, secondary school classrooms. According to Savin-Baden and Major (2022), qualitative research offers detailed explanations and analyses of the character of human experiences. It does not rely on experimental examination or measurement of data in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Similarly, Aspers and Corte (2019) assert that conclusions in qualitative research are not reached through quantitative or statistical procedures. In this study, the cases were the 12 English language teachers who were the unit of study and analysis.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Tanga City, known for its strong Kiswahili-speaking population, both among teachers and students, who are required to teach and learn English. Six secondary schools in Tanga City were purposively selected, focusing on government schools due to their affordability for most Tanzanian parents and the similarity in qualifications among teachers. Additionally, schools were chosen based on their performance in the 2022 NECTA examinations, with two schools selected from each performance category (best, average, and poor). NECTA is an organ responsible for administering final high- stakes examinations at different levels of education in Tanzania, such as primary, secondary and teacher education.

Participants of the Study

This study involved 12 English language teachers teaching Form Three classes, with two teachers selected from each secondary school. Form Three classes were chosen because they are not examination classes like Form Twos and Form Fours, allowing for a more natural assessment environment. These information-rich cases provided detailed explanations for answering the research questions of this study.

Methods of data collection

This study involved two methods of data collection, namely interviews and classroom observations.

Interviews

Teachers were interviewed to provide information on the strategies they employed in assessing learners, the timing of assessments during English language instructional sessions, and the language skills they assessed during the English language instructional sessions. Such questions were used as prompts to obtain responses from English language teachers:

Can I learn from you how frequently you assess your English language students? Can you tell me how assessment is part of your instructional strategies? Could you explain the strategies you use to assess students in the English language sessions? Would you share with me the language skills you assess in the English language classes? Why do you assess such language skills? Would you describe the timing of the assessment during the instructional sessions? Can you share with me why you assess the English language students during this time?

Classroom observation

These interview data were triangulated by classroom observations where students and teachers were observed during instructional sessions. Classroom observations

were conducted to gather data on assessment strategies employed by teachers, the timing of assessments, and the language skills assessed. Non-participant observations involved sitting in Form Three English language classes, with observations lasting for either 40-minute or 80-minute periods. The study used an observational protocol, which had descriptive and reflective parts. The descriptive part reported on classroom assessment practices observed, while the reflective part involved the researcher's comments about the practices, and they were put into parentheses [...]. Therefore, in this study, interviews with teachers and classroom observations provided additional insights into classroom assessment practices.

Data Analysis Technique

Both classroom observation and interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the model outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022). Firstly, recorded observations and interviews were transcribed into readable form. Secondly, related semantic chunks were grouped as initial codes. Thirdly, these codes were categorised into themes based on the objectives of the study. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they addressed the research objectives. Themes were named using an *emic* approach, deriving names from the data itself. Finally, the research findings were reported with detailed themes supported by relevant quotes.

Ethical considerations

The study adhered to all research protocols, including obtaining research clearance, securing participants' informed consent, and maintaining confidentiality in handling and documenting field information. Participants were told that participation was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw at any time, although none chose to do so. Prior permission was obtained from participants to record interviews and classroom observations using mobile phones.

Results

Strategies employed by English language teachers in assessing learners

The findings indicate the utilisation of both oral and written assessment methods as supported by interviews and observations of teacher-student interactions in Form Three classrooms.

Application of oral questions in assessing learners

Observational and interview data confirm that teachers frequently assessed their learners orally through question-and-answer sessions, a common practice in English language classrooms. Teachers posed questions to students, who then provided responses. This approach was prevalent in teaching and learning activities. For

instance, Extract 1 exemplifies how this strategy was implemented in the classroom:

Extract 1: T1

- T.** [Teacher enters the classroom].
- SS.** [Students stand up]
- T.** Good morning, class.
- SS.** Good morning
- T.** [Writes on the blackboard]. ENGLISH: AUTOBIOGRAPHY.
- T.** Sit down
- SS.** [Students sit down]
- T.** What is autobiography?
- SS.** [Silence]
- T.** Autobiography....
- SS.** [Silence]
- T.** Autobiography has something to do with your own life. I gave you an example from my own life, where I was born. This is your own story narrated by yourself. There is a biography. This is your story, as written by others. Is it understood?

In Extract 1, T1 writes “Autobiography” on the blackboard to indicate the focus of the lesson. Initially, the teacher introduces the lesson by assessing the learners’ comprehension of the concept of autobiography through oral questioning. However, the students remained silent for a brief period, prompting the teacher to repeat the question. Despite this, the students remained unresponsive. The silence observed among the learners could be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the students possibly lacked prior knowledge of the concept. Secondly, they may have lacked proficiency in the English language, inhibiting their ability to articulate their thoughts. Faced with this challenge, the teacher recognised the students’ difficulty in explaining the concept and decided to provide a clarification.

In Extract 2, T2 is conducting a lesson on intensive reading. The teacher reminded the English language learners that they had previously covered writing skills and were now transitioning to intensive reading for comprehension. The teacher utilises oral questioning as a means of assessing the students’ understanding, as illustrated in Extract 2:

Extract 2: T2

- T.** We have finished with writing skills. So, today, we are discussing intensive reading for comprehension. [Pauses for a short time]
- T.** Can anyone define Intensive reading?

- SS.** Yes [in chorus]
SS: [Many of the students put up their hands]
T. [Points and says]. Yes, SS1, what is intensive reading?
S1. Intensive reading means reading [faces pronunciation difficult
Mhhmhh detail]
T. [Repeating it]. Speak louder!
S2. Reading in detail
T. Yaaa. Good try. [He looks in his notebook and reads]. It is reading
in detail for specific tasks. For example, when you get a reading
for comprehension in the exam, it is reading intensively. You read
for the purpose of understanding the text and answering questions
that follow. OK

In Extract 2, T2 engages learners in oral questioning regarding intensive reading. Unlike the scenario in T1's class, where students remained silent, the students in T2's class eagerly raised their hands, indicating their preparedness to answer questions and suggesting familiarity with the concept. However, one student encounters pronunciation difficulties with certain words, leading to hesitancy in speaking aloud due to feelings of shyness and a lack of confidence. In response, the teacher encourages the student to vocalise the word to identify pronunciation challenges and correct them accordingly. This form of assessment practice serves to enhance language learning. Observing the students' reactions to the question, the teacher acknowledges their existing knowledge of the concept and provides positive feedback, such as "good attempt," to motivate and encourage their participation. Ultimately, the teacher offers further clarification of the concept to reinforce student understanding.

Furthermore, T9, an English language teacher preparing to teach direct and indirect speech, initiates the lesson by reviewing the previous topic through oral questioning, as depicted in Extract 3:

Extract 3: T9

- T.** Good morning. What did we learn last week?
U. **S1.** About a CV
T. Sit down
S1. [Sits down]
T. What is a CV?
S2. You write about your education
T. Sit down. What else is included in the CV?

- S3.** Experience
- T.** Sit down. So, a CV is a written summary of one's educational qualifications and experience.
- T:** Where do you use a CV?
- S4.** For job application
- T.** Sit down
- S4.** [Sits down]
- T.** What things are included in your CV?
- S5.** Your personal information, skills, educational background and reference.
- T.** OK, sit down
- SS.** [All students sit down]
- T.** [The teacher introduces today's lesson]. **Direct and indirect speech.**
- T.** What is speech?
- SS.** [Silence]
- T.** Class, what is speech?
- SS.** [Silence].
- T.** Speech is a talk or dialogue. If we quote what one says, it is a direct speech. If we express with some few modifications, then it is as indirect speech, and it should be placed within quotation marks or inverted commas. You need to know the reporting verb.
- SS.** [Copying notes]
- T.** This is an example of active voice. "I will bring my sister to your house."
Said. Change it into an indirect speech voice. SS2, SS3, and SS5 come in front.

In Extract 3, T9 demonstrates a range of assessment practices during instructional sessions. Firstly, the teacher assesses students' retention of prior knowledge by asking them to recall the previous session's content, which a student successfully does, indicating understanding. However, when assessing the current lesson on speech, silence from students prompts clarification and supplementary notes. Finally, a task requiring students to convert sentences into indirect speech orally is assigned. A unique classroom practice observed is that students must stand upon the teacher's entry, with only correct responders allowed to sit, turning seating into a reward for accurate responses.

In language lessons, oral assessment methods are common for assessing comprehension or recalling prior knowledge. However, feedback provision varies, with some teachers using phrases like “Good Attempt” while allowing sitting. In contrast, others use practices that may be seen as a form of punishment for learning, such as withholding seating until a correct response.

Application of written strategies for assessing learners

The data indicate that teachers implement AfL by incorporating written tasks such as in-class assignments, homework, and quizzes. For instance, T1 employs a written assessment method in the classroom. In this grammar-related exercise, students are tasked with providing individual written responses. After students have presented their answers to the whole class, the teacher evaluates the responses and provides feedback. During the class correction process, students are encouraged to offer correct answers. This form of assessment serves to reinforce the development of linguistic skills among the learners, as depicted in Extract 4.

Extract 4: T1

- T.** The last sentence is: I have already gone. In this sentence, the negative will be I have not already gone. Is it right? Do you see where to put the ‘no’?
- S.** Yes.
- T.** The formula or rule for negation is: Auxiliary verb+ not; Do + not
- T.** Now. Eeeeeeh. Let us look at negative sentences. The process of converting affirmative sentences into negative ones is called **negation**. This is done by adding **not** to the auxiliary verb. The formula is **Negation= auxiliary verb+ not**
- T.** If an auxiliary verb is absent, then the dummy auxiliary is inserted. This is ‘do’, or its derivatives such as does did. Therefore, it will be: **do + not, does + not, did + not.**
- T.** [Writes on the blackboard]

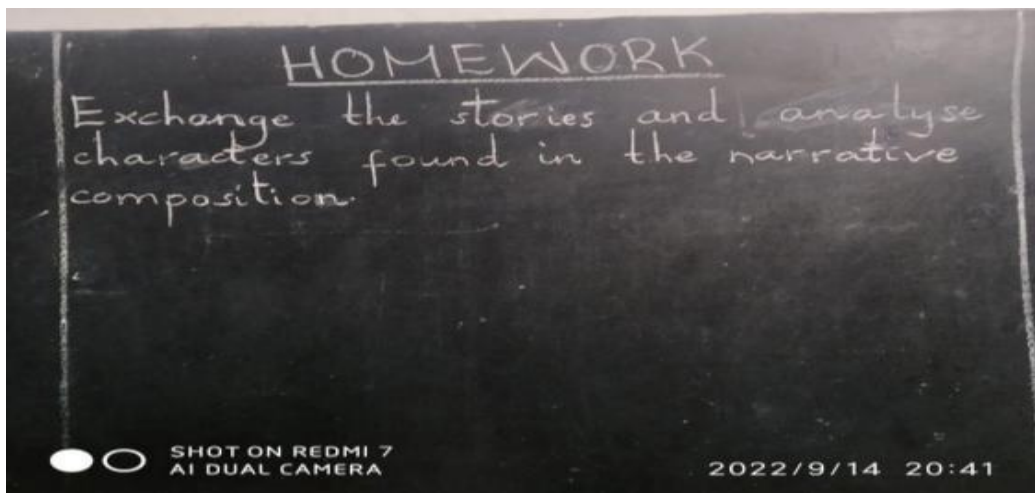


- SS.** [They start writing]
- T.** [Walks to each individual]. He asks every student in a low voice. Is it OK? Can you do it?
- SS.** Yes
- T.** [He starts marking individual student's works. He stops marking and announces]. Be very careful. You are confusing the place to insert "do", and some of you do not know which one to use, do, did or does.
- T.** Now, let us make corrections. Let us look at each sentence and change it into the negative [construction]. I said the process of changing negative to positive is called?.....
- SS.** [In chorus] negation.
- T.** Yes. It is negation.
- T.** The first sentence was: They are playing netball now. What is the negative form of it?
- SS** [Puts up hand]
- T.** Yes, you SS4
- SS.** They are not playing netball now
- T.** Is he correct?
- SS.** [In chorus] Yes
- T.** Yes, very good. Clap your hands for him.

T3 assigns the language learners a homework task to analyse characters in narrative compositions written by their peers. The objective of this task is to evaluate the language learners' proficiency in analysing narrative texts. Extract 5 illustrates this classroom activity:

Extract 5: T3

- T.** Group three comes in front of the class
- S.** [One student comes in front and narrates the story]
My story is about the day I received a letter from Mkwakwani Secondary School. I was very happy with that. I was happy because Mkwakwani is one of the biggest schools in Tanga. Although it is very far from home, I have been able to come early. I study hard so that I can pass my exams. Thank you.
- T.** Yes, Any questions to the presenter?
- S.** [Raises the hand]
- T.** Yes, please ask.
- S.** No title
- T.** Only title. What about other components of narrative composition?
- S.** The title is my first day at Mkwakwani.
- T.** Attention class. I want to emphasise that when you write a story, you should not forget these things. [He points at the blackboard where he has scribbled the characteristics of narrative composition].
OK. Now that we have finished the presentations, get back to your place.
- SS.** [They all return to their places]
- T.** [Writes on the blackboard].

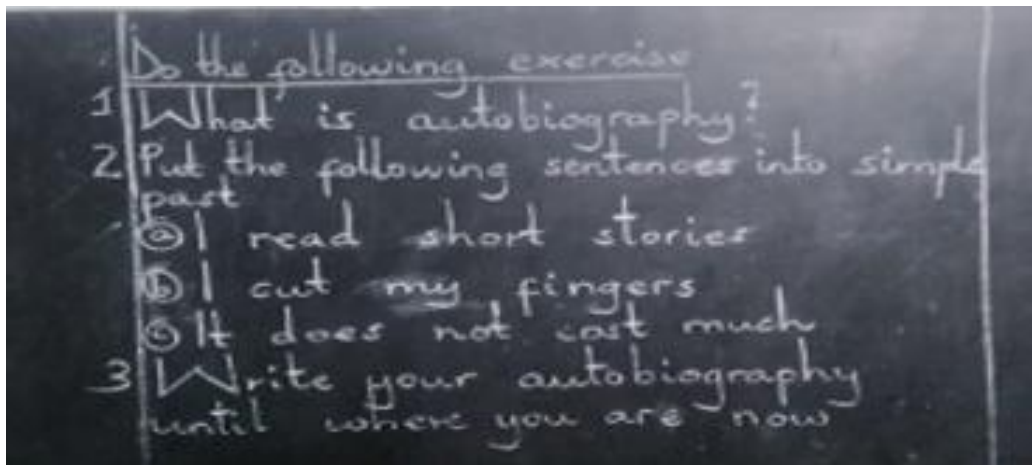


Similarly, T1 assessed language learners in the classroom through an exercise. This task involved individual learners defining autobiography, performing grammar-related tasks, and writing their biographies. This diverse exercise assessed various

aspects that the learners had covered during the session. Additionally, T1 evaluated language learners using in-class exercises that required them to provide written responses, as illustrated in Extract 6.

Extract 6: T1

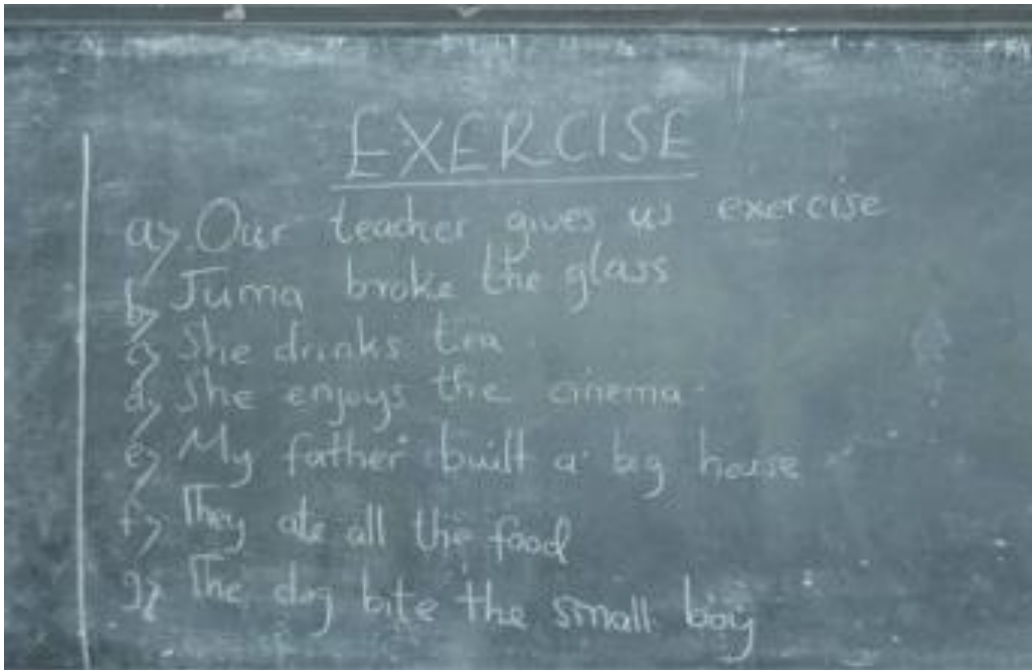
- T. [The teacher introduces] affirmative, negative and interrogative. Who can change this sentence into the past using these elements. Did I teach?
- SS. [Silence]
- S. Sir!
- T. Yes.
- S. What is affirmative, negative, and interrogation?
- T. Negative means not. It is attached to the verb. Affirmative is positive. Interrogative is question. Who can now try?
- SS. [Silence]
- T. The sentence did I eat? Is it an interrogative, or is it negative or affirmative?
- SS. [Silence]
- T. We will deal with it next time. But now do the following exercise
- T. [Writes on the blackboard]



Another teacher, T11, assesses learners through a writing task that involves groups. Each group is tasked with writing responses and presenting them before the class. This group assessment fosters collaborative learning as language learners engage in discussions and share their ideas during the session. They follow the instructions provided by the teacher to complete the task. Extract 7 exemplifies the dynamics of this English language class.

Extract 7: T11

- T. Now our time is..., is not enough.
- T. Form the groups.
- SS. [They form groups. There were four groups of 7-8 students].
- T. [She names the groups: one, two, three and four].
- T. In your groups, do the following tasks. [She writes on the blackboard].



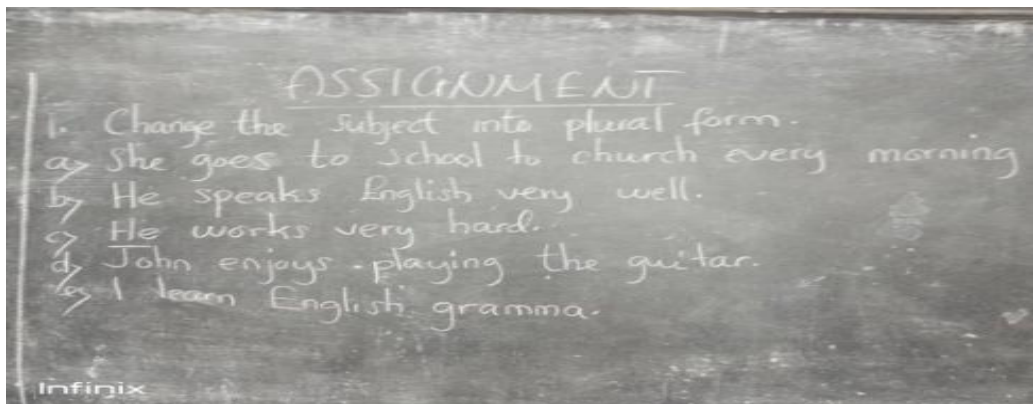
- T. Group 1 identify the simple present tense.
- T. Group 2 identify the simple past tense.
- T. Group three changed the sentence from simple present to passive.
- T. Group four changes the sentences in simple past into passive.
- T. These are the questions. Start working on them.
- SS. [They start the task in groups].
- T. [Walks around checking the groups].
- SS. [The class becomes noisy].
- T. [Goes in front of the class and tells them] stop talking. Concentrate on your questions.
- SS. [They become silent].
- T. [Goes to the middle of the class]. Time is up. Every group must choose one representative and write the answers here [Points to the chalkboard].

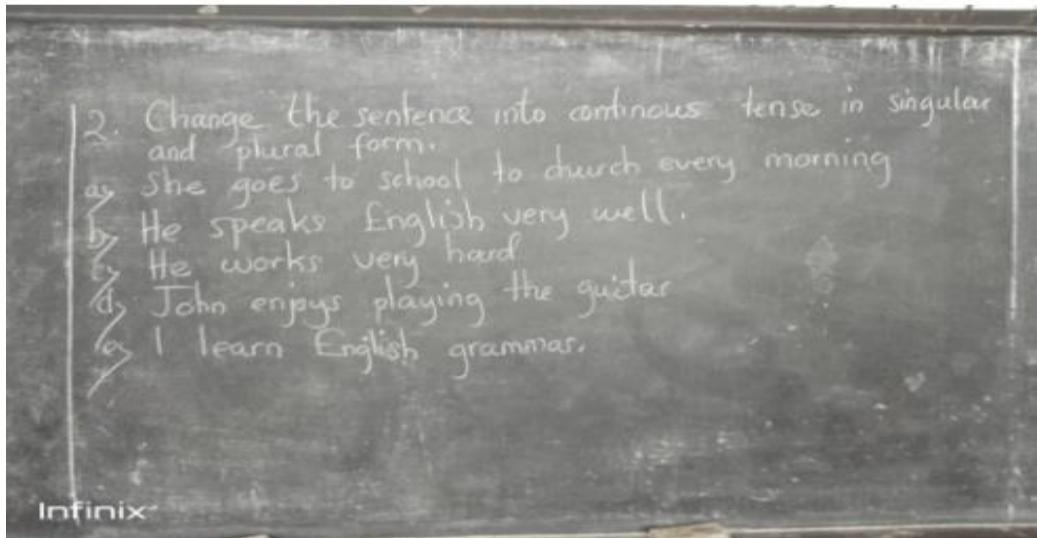
Remarkably, T11 employs a group writing task to assess learners, where each group selects a representative to present their answers to the class upon completing the assignment. Prior to the task, the teacher organises the learners into groups and assigns each group a number for better management. This group assessment approach allows learners to engage in discussions, share their answers, and receive valuable in-class feedback from both their peers and the teacher. Additionally, the oral presentations provide language learners with an opportunity to practice English, thereby enhancing their confidence in speaking before the class while reinforcing target language behaviour.

In another class, T7 assigns English language learners homework to complete and bring their exercise books the following day. This grammar task aims to assess the learners' proficiency in various aspects of grammar transformation. Through these assessment tasks, learners are expected to acquire language skills as they practice different language aspects. Extract 8 provides further insight into the assessment practices within an English language classroom in the study area:

Extract 8: T7

- T.** Are we together?
SS. [In chorus] Yes.
T. Is there any question?
SS. No
T. [Writes the blackboard]





T. Bring the exercises tomorrow [The teacher leaves]

Students are expected to submit this take-home assignment to the teacher the following day for assessment. This type of assessment offers students more time to revise, delve deeper into the topic, and engage in discussions with their peers. Therefore, such assessments play a crucial role in facilitating and enriching learning.

Interview data from participants support findings from classroom observations, where teachers confirmed assessing learners through two methods: oral questioning and written assessments.

For instance, T3 stated:

I assess them by giving exercises, mostly written. Oral questions are given to them when the sessions are in progress, through the question-and-answer session. After the lesson, I give them tasks so that when I return on the following day, they submit the homework to me. I use oral questions in the class to determine whether they have understood the lesson or to brainstorm to gauge how they have understood the topic.

Similarly, T11 reported during interviews that they assessed their students through “exercises, quizzes, tests, weekend tests, homework, class exercise. All these measure their understanding.”

In this context, another teacher remarked: “I have various methods of assessing the learners. I often use impromptu quizzes in class. During the first five minutes, I give them questions to write down. However, this isn’t very frequent. Additionally, as I teach, I pose questions to them, and they respond. This constitutes one of the

daily assessments.” Implicitly, insights from interviews also confirm how teachers evaluate learners using both written and oral methods. However, among the two, teachers tend to assess learners more frequently through written tasks. For instance, T2 explained that they primarily assess learners through writing because national evaluations also prioritise written assessments. Hence, classroom assessments seem to lean towards summative evaluations, indicating a significant influence of national examinations on language learning practices.

Principally, the skill that is mostly assessed is writing. Why? Because at the end of the day, these students are expected to go for [National Examination Council of Tanzania] NECTA exams. When NECTA are marking, they do not care about speaking or listening; they focus on writing. So, this is how I do it, and even my teaching focuses on writing.

Furthermore, T8 stated: “We mostly assess by writing; even for debate and dialogue, I give them questions, and they write a dialogue.” Similarly, T4 echoed similar sentiments, stating that “mostly, we assess them through writing.” These three teachers, T2, T4, and T8, illustrate that the primary method of assessing learners in the classroom is through writing. Even activities such as debates and dialogues, which are primarily oral, still require learners to transcribe their responses. This practice stems from two factors: directives from the syllabus and the nature of national examinations. English language teaching in Tanzania is heavily influenced by both the syllabus and national examinations, which dictate the methods of instruction and assessment.

Timing of Assessment for Learning in the English Language Classroom

This study identified a three-staged assessment for learning as follows:

Assessment at the beginning or introduction stage of the lesson

When it comes to assessment during the introduction stage, teachers primarily relied on oral questioning. For instance, in Extract 1, at the outset of the lesson, T1 assessed learners through an oral question regarding the components of an autobiography. Similarly, in Extract 2, T2 asked learners to define intensive reading. Likewise, in Extract 3, T9 assessed learners at the beginning of the lesson by prompting them to recall the previous lesson on “What is a CV?” before assessing their understanding of the current topic, “What is speech?” as they were about to delve into direct and indirect speech. Clearly, AfL predominantly occurs at the beginning or introductory phase of the lesson through oral questioning. In this context, T4 stated during an interview:

First is the daily assessment we do during the lesson. When we introduce a lesson, I need to ask them: Are they able to answer questions in the classroom? I am asking questions and observing whether they are able to answer them. If they cannot do what I need them to do, I extend the introduction. If they cannot, it means if I estimated five minutes for the introduction, then I will elongate it. If they fail to answer, you add more time; you continue asking [them questions] until when you are satisfied that they are OK. At every stage of lesson development, you do an assessment.

The data indicate that teachers utilised questioning as part of AfL during the introduction stage. Teachers continued to pose questions until they were content with the learners' understanding levels. In cases where students' knowledge was unclear, the teacher extended the introduction phase to assess their prior knowledge regarding the topic being addressed. Once the teachers were confident in the learners' understanding, they proceeded to the next stage of lesson development.

Assessment for learning when the lesson was in progress

The data indicate that teachers did implement AfL practices during ongoing lessons, utilising both written and oral formats. Observations revealed that teachers assessed learners while lessons were underway through various tasks. For instance, as seen in Extract 4, T1 conducted AfL during the class, followed by task evaluation and corrections. Subsequently, the lesson continued as usual. Similarly, in Extract 7, T11 assigned a group task where learners had to complete written tasks within a specified time. Afterwards, each group selected a representative to present their work to the class, after which the lesson proceeded to the next stage.

Post-instructional assessment for learning

Regarding post-instructional AfL, data from classroom observations and interviews suggest that assessments took place at the conclusion of the lesson to gauge the competencies acquired. For example, as described in Extract 5, T3 assigned homework requiring students to exchange assignments and compare their answers in alignment with the day's lesson. Furthermore, at the end of the session, as shown in Extract 8, T7 assigned homework due the following day. Post-instructional AfL was primarily conducted in written form, with oral assessments being less common. T9 elaborated on post-instructional evaluation for learning, stating, "As soon as I finish a subtopic, for example, I have just finished teaching direct and indirect speech. Today, I called and asked, 'What did I teach?' She said, 'Direct/indirect speech.' 'What did I say?' She explained, 'You said so and so.'" Similarly, T7 mentioned, "I frequently assess them. Every time I finish teaching a topic, I have to assess them. I assign homework or classroom exercises. I have asked them to bring their exercise books tomorrow. If they

perform well, I will proceed; if not, I will review.” Additionally, T11 stated:

Every time, I have to ask them questions related to what I am teaching. I can also ask them questions at the end of sessions. But most of the time, I give them assignments based on what we have been learning in that particular period. This is done daily. The assignments are done either in the classroom or at home. Also, they can be group assignments or individual tasks.

The interview data show that AfL was a common feature in all three phases of lesson development.

Language skills Assessed in the English language Classroom

In terms of the language skills assessed in the classroom, this study found that instructors primarily emphasised grammar, writing, and reading.

Exclusion of speaking skills

However, speaking skills were notably excluded from the assessment. Teachers explicitly stated that speaking abilities were not evaluated, which reflects the standards set for national exams. Consequently, speech assessment is generally omitted from classroom assessments and national examinations alike. Regarding this, T4 commented:

Our syllabus does not direct us to assess oral skills. The oral assessment is rare. This is how the syllabus directs us. No syllabus directs us to assess our students orally. All the exams are written. All the exams are written, and there are no oral exams. Therefore, we focus on the examination mode of assessment. We never give them oral assessments because, in the end, they will have to write. There is a weekly test. These tests help when they are reading for examinations.

The data indicates that since there are no nationwide assessments for speaking skills, language teachers consequently avoid assessing them at the school or classroom level.

Assessment of Grammar

In grammar lessons, language learners underwent assessment on various topics, including direct and indirect speech, active and passive voice, and affirmative and negative structures. These assessments involved tasks that required learners to define linguistic terms and perform linguistic transformations, such as converting

sentences from direct to indirect speech, active to passive voice, and affirmative to negative forms. Learners were also tasked with identifying different types of tenses. Despite the English language syllabus of Tanzania (2005) not explicitly outlining the teaching and assessment of such grammar items, these teachers favoured assessing grammar proficiency among their learners.

Assessment of writing skills

In terms of writing skills assessment, language learners underwent evaluation through various writing tasks. These tasks encompassed defining and composing an autobiography, following the teacher's model, and crafting a CV. Additionally, learners were tasked with creating a narrative based on an interesting event from their lives. Through these narrative compositions, learners were evaluated not only on their writing mechanics but also on the content of their stories. Regarding reading skills, learners were assessed on their comprehension abilities, particularly in intensive reading. The teacher initially gauged learners' understanding of intensive reading by eliciting their prior knowledge of the subject. Subsequently, learners were tasked with reading a passage about the HIV pandemic and responding to questions based on the text through writing. However, according to teacher reports, speaking skill assessments were not administered in the classrooms.

In English-language classrooms, effective AfL practices entail providing learners with authentic language tasks focused on skills, grammar, or vocabulary. Teachers utilise oral or written strategies to evaluate learners and deliver feedback through teacher, self, or peer assessments. This approach fosters the enhancement of learners' language proficiency, thereby facilitating the attainment of communicative competence. However, this study did not address strategies aimed at enhancing learners' attainment and mastery of communicative competence in English-language classrooms.

Discussion

This study found that AfL is conducted in English-language classrooms. AfL is currently highly advocated in the world (Muñoz-Restrepo, 2017; Griffith & Lim, 2014) because it enriches and improves the teaching and learning process and shows how a learner progresses towards acquiring the competence required (Black et al., 2003; Griffith & Lim, 2014); enhances and promotes meaningful learning in the language classroom (Lee, 2017). Besides, it heightens learners' higher-order thinking skills (Hosseini & Nimehchisalem, 2021). Furthermore, the study found both written and oral strategies are applied by teachers in their language classrooms. The use of written assessment is contrary to Griffith and Lim (2014), who expound that paper-and-pencil tests cannot be applied in assessing competence unless one is evaluating writing skills. The use of written assessments for evaluating language skills is, however, not recommended, as it may impede learners' oral proficiency and adversely affect their

speaking and listening skills. As such, teachers need to be AfL literate to assess each language skill appropriately, as the full reliance on the written AfL can undermine other language skills. Frequent use of written strategies, such as homework, assignments, and quizzes, may only improve writing abilities but affect other equally important language skills, including speaking skills and articulation.

Additionally, it was found that AfL is embedded in the instructional sessions at each stage of lesson development. In this regard, questions were directed to either groups or individual learners during the English session. Indeed, this concurs with Muñoz-Restrepo (2017), who commented that the AfL must be embedded in the teaching and learning process. That is, it should be part and parcel of the teaching and learning of the content within a particular session. The study is also in line with Griffith and Lim (2014), who theorised that formative assessments should be frequent and specific. This was observed in the language classroom, where teachers assessed learners at every stage of lesson development. This is crucial because integrating assessment and teaching, which is a pedagogy-assessment connection, fosters language learning (Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2019). Yet, they were hardly ever graded for assessing development and, accordingly, illuminating the strengths and weaknesses of the learners' linguistic aptitude.

Teachers gave feedback by either marking assignments or giving students the task of exchanging assignments and evaluating each other's performance based on standards shown on the blackboard. Peer assessment, defined as practises where students assess their friends' accomplishments, learning outcomes, or performances (Sebba et al., 2008), has been shown to be beneficial for language learning because it enhances writing abilities (Meletiadou, 2021), helps students learn new concepts, writing styles, and assessment techniques (Smyth & Carless, 2020; Bryan & Clegg, 2019), helps students develop self-control and responsibility for their own assignments (Fan & Xu, 2020; Zamora et al., 2018), and culminates in meaningful and successful learning experiences (Topping, 2017). By means of peer evaluation, language learners can discern their weaknesses, close those gaps through assignments with their peers, and modify, accordingly, for the upcoming language classes.

On the other hand, this study found no classroom assessments for fostering speaking or listening skills, even though the syllabus includes speaking and listening tasks. This finding reflects the same case in certain countries where language teachers do not incorporate them into their daily instructional and assessment practises (Koizumi, 2022; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2019) because their focus is on vocabulary and grammar (Giraldo, 2019; Ozdemir-Yilmazer & Özkan, 2017) even when teaching materials include speaking and listening tasks (Nguyen & Le, 2012).

Aside from a heavy emphasis on vocabulary and grammar, speaking is not evaluated in Tanzanian classrooms as it is not covered in final exams. As a result, assessments in the classroom are impacted by final examinations. Implicitly, Tanzanian English teachers are examination-focused, favouring instruction that would help students pass examinations. The practice impacts language instruction and learning. When material is taught based on test content, students are forced to focus only on those subjects. In this instance, examination efforts are prioritised over language or communication abilities. In consequence, language learners get high pass marks in examinations but have a low ability to apply the language for communication purposes.

The English language syllabus for secondary school (2005) mandates that language instructors assess all four language skills, which conflicts with oral skills in language assessment. The syllabus suggests that teachers should make sure they evaluate their students' achievement in all language abilities (URT, 2005, p. viii). Moreover, "using appropriate English to communicate in a variety of settings" (URT, 2005, p.

v) is one of the general abilities language learners should achieve at the conclusion of the four-year secondary school cycle. Furthermore, (URT, 2005, p.v) insists: "Express oneself in both spoken and written English and communicate effectively with other speakers of English both inside and outside the country." Secondary education aims to develop student's language skills, particularly English, so that they can become proficient users and writers. However, oral communication skills are often neglected in classrooms despite their importance in both spoken and written communication. These skills are essential for successful communication, but they are not evaluated or tested. The foundational language abilities, speaking and listening, are not adequately developed without proper instruction and evaluation in these areas.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while AfL practices are prevalent in English language classrooms, significant challenges persist in the evaluation of speaking and listening skills. Addressing these challenges necessitates a re-evaluation of instructional priorities to ensure that assessment practices align with curriculum objectives and promote holistic language development. Even when English language assessment for learning methods incorporate embedded assessment processes, peer or self-evaluation, and well - executed oral and written approaches, the assessments often neglect essential language skills such as speaking. This instructional gap sheds light on why Tanzanian students' proficiency in English remains low. Further, the study identified the omission of speaking and listening abilities in favour of grammar and writing as a major obstacle to effective learning assessment practices, leading to inefficiency in education.

Implications of the study

This study has the following implications: Firstly, NECTA has to introduce the assessment of oral language skills to enhance the mastery of these skills. This will reduce the washback effects in English language teaching and learning. Secondly, English language teachers should prioritise oral communication skills alongside writing and reading. The teachers can better prepare students for effective communication in diverse contexts, fostering language proficiency and competence. Thirdly, teachers require training to enhance their assessment literacy. This can be done through in-service training and teacher professional development using the AfL-based approach as a way of improving English language learning.

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