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Performance-Based Assessment in Language Teaching: Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes

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Abstract

Assessment is an essential component of English language pedagogy, and one of the biggest concerns that educators face. Historically, numerous educators have depended on tests as a means of evaluating learning, therefore, the performance-based assessment has become popular recently and its usage in the English language classroom is highly recommended to align with the requirements of the latest curriculum since it requires from the learners to apply their knowledge into real-life situations through various tasks, projects, solving a problem, demonstration task, etc. Given this circumstance, the purpose of this research is to explore teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and fairness of performance-based assessments compared to traditional assessment in measuring English language proficiency, as well as to shed more light on strengths and weaknesses of current assessment methods in language education, and how can these methods be improved to better support student learning and achievement. Information and data were gathered through a survey completed by 20 teachers who teach English in English Language School (ELS) at International Balkan University. With regard to performance-based assessment, the participants seemed to share good perceptions and attitudes towards this form of assessment. Also, the results revealed that the main strength of the way they assess their students is that it indicates which students are doing well during the lectures and which ones are doing poorly. On the other hand, the main weakness of the way they assess their students is that they are limited to give detailed feedback on specific aspects of the language.

Keywords: performance-based assessment, teachers, strength and weaknesses

Introduction

Assessment is an essential component of English language pedagogy, and one of the biggest concerns that educators face. It encompasses a diverse set of activities that include collecting and analyzing data so the quality of teaching and learning can be enhanced. Specifically, the main goal is to measure the learning outcomes and assessing whether the objectives have been fully attained.

Historically, numerous educators have depended on tests as a means of evaluating learning. However, a drawback to this method is that, while tests can gauge the extent to which a student has retained information, they frequently fall short in assessing how effectively a student can apply this knowledge to complete a task (Brualdi, 1998). For example, multiple-choice exams pose challenges in measuring language proficiency as they primarily assess recall rather than practical application of the subject matter, so, most of the time those type of exams cannot assess higher order skills and other skills that are important for teaching and learning process.

Therefore, performance-based assessment has become popular recently and its usage in the English language classroom is highly recommended to align with the requirements of the latest curriculum. This form of assessment enables the learners to apply the theory they have learned into real-life scenarios, so they can practice and understand various concepts and skills. Consequently, educators are encouraged to incorporate this assessment method into the process of teaching and learning. Given this circumstance, this paper seeks to obtain data which will help to address two research questions, as well as understand the views and experiences of teachers towards Performance-based assessment.

1. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of assessing students from the perspective of teachers?
2. What are teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards Performance-Based assessment?

Literature Review

Assessment is an important aspect of both teaching and learning. Through assessment, teachers can gather various information related to students, their needs, the way they learn, their knowledge, how much they have acquired the language, and

later decide which are the most appropriate instructional methods or techniques that he or she as a teacher can include in the class. Additionally, the term alternative assessment from traditional assessment has been distinguished. According to Latipah & Purnawarman (2019), they pointed out that traditional testing focuses on grading students based on the data they have gathered from individual test performances, whereas the sample of authentic performances that show the underlying thought processes, an examination of student learning developmental sequences, and the potential for more learning serve as the foundation for alternative assessment. Those tests which they used to call performance-based assessments are mainly considered as part of the authentic assessments (Salma & Prastikawati, 2021), because they focus on giving the students the opportunity to work on authentic settings and apply their knowledge through different real-life tasks as well as applying their critical thinking skills to solve various problems related to what the students have covered from the material in class.

According to Djoub (2018), Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) demands that learners complete an activity, in contrast to other type of exams and tests, where students usually choose the responses from multiple questions. Further, PBA has been described as an assessment where students think critically, solve real-world problems, check how they solved them, and see if the solution makes sense, and this can be done through portfolios, presentations, projects, simulations, role-playing, hands-on tasks, problem-solving exercises, etc., which according to VanTassel (2014), they emphasize what learners can do instead of what they cannot do. Thus, it will be easier for the teachers find out what are some problems regarding learning and teaching and what kind of improvements can be done so the students' success can increase. However, Norris (1998), mentioned that performance-based assessment has been used by English teachers for years, for example when they test writing ability through essays, job application, or through interviews which students might encounter later when applying for the job, university, to test speaking and listening skills.

According to Jones (1985) as cited in Shohamy (1995), there are three types of performance tests. The direct assessment where the students are put in real-life context, and the performance which students make by using the second language, is assessed based on how the activity takes place. The work sample type controls the task and compare how well people perform while keeping things realistic, and it is consisted of an authentic task in the classroom. The simulation type develops tasks and simulation environments that resemble the real-world environment. An

example of the simulation technique is "role playing", where the teacher and the learners take on different roles.

Advantages of Performance-Based Assessments

The advantages of performance-based assessment are that they can evaluate the ability of students to show something, boost their critical thinking and motivation, solve various problems, and more important they can increase students' confidence in learning the language and participation in class (Menggo & Gunas, 2022), which can further contribute in better results and retain the knowledge they have gained. Another advantage is that learners are encouraged to work in various groups by applying the learning in classroom to real-life situations, and they can include them in the pre-instruction phase, during the term/semester, and at the end of the course for summative testing (Shohamy (1995). Top of FormAnother important impact of PBA is that the learners can learn from the performances of the other learners and from teachers' feedback to improve their knowledge (Dinh, 2017). Also, it helps teachers improve their students' abilities, while also giving them a chance to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses.

As Wiggins (1989) pointed out, there are some key features that teachers should consider while designing PBAs such as being able to foster collaboration among teachers and students, assessing tasks regarding real-life experiences, and they should be clear and authentic so the students can easily comprehend. Therefore, when designing PBAs tasks, teachers should have in mind that those tasks should be based on need analysis, thus, according to Norris (1998), an in-depth description of the teaching context can be provided, the task, instructions to perform the task, as well as how will their performance will be judged, what rubrics will be used and how are they developed. Another important feature of PBAs task is that they should be authentic, and as Vo (2019) pointed out, they should provoke communicative interactions, and their goal should be to measure real-life experiences.

Disadvantages of Performance-Based Assessment

Despite all the advantages of PBAs, researchers and educators have also considered some drawbacks in terms of their usage and efficiency. According to some reviews, PBAs are difficult and expensive since they include test development, trainings for teachers, and they are more complicated than traditional assessments since they

require deeper information regarding students' learning in a short period of time which can be energy consuming (Salma & Prastikawati, 2021). In addition, PBAs contain a small number of questions which cannot be as reliable as they should be, since they cannot cover the whole material, and new questions should be developed each time. Other potential problems that can arise are that if we want to measure critical thinking skills, then we should be careful with the tasks, method, and scoring criteria since they can affect the results. In conclusion, a significant reason for reluctance in using PBAs is that teachers lack trainings and mainly their previous experience with PBAs.

Research Methodology

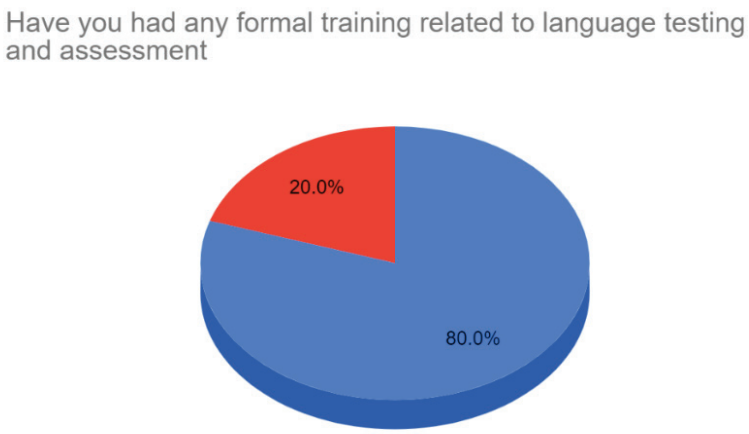
This study adopted a survey research design and the data was collected with the help of a questionnaire as a research instrument which was administered and distributed online to the participants. The questionnaire was adopted from Chinda (2014) and it was designed in a way so as to produce both quantitative and qualitative data. It consisted of 21 questions, 4 of them were multiple-choice type of questions, and 16 questions included closed-ended items such as Likert-scale items with 5 categories, as well as one open-ended questions requiring short answer. For the purpose of this study, I have selected four multiple choice questions, and nine Likert-scale items, since the other questions will be used for another and more extensive study. The questionnaire was structured to achieve the main objective of the current study: to obtain answers for the two research questions that were presented in the introduction. The participants in this study were English Language (ELS) teachers from International Balkan University in Skopje, North Macedonia.

Results

The following section provides teachers' responses. Regarding the first question, where the results can be seen from the figure 1 below, it intended to explore whether the participants have had any formal training related to language testing and assessment. As it can be seen from the figure 1 below, the majority of the participants, that is 16 teachers (80%) answered this question positively, whereas 4 participants (20%) answered negatively.

Figure 1

Participants' formal training regarding language testing and assessment



The figure 2 below indicates that according to the majority of the participants, 40% of the teachers believe that the main strength of the way they assess their students is that it proves to them which students are doing well and which ones are doing poorly. On the other hand, 25% of the teachers said that finding out how well he/she has taught her students is the main strength of assessment, whereas 25% of the other participants believed that the main strength of assessing their students is that it represents the language abilities of the students. The rest of the participants, one of them agreed with all the statements, and another teacher said that assessment helps him/her to focus on his/her teaching.

As the figure 3 below shows, 35% of the participants approved that the main weakness of the way they assess their students is that assessment doesn't allow them to give detailed feedback. Whereas 20% of the teachers believe that the results obtained from the assessments are unreliable. In addition, 15% of the participants said that the main weakness of assessment is that it allows for a great deal of cheating, and the other 15% agreed that it takes too long to score. The rest agreed that not being able to provide students with detailed feedback and students' cheating is the main weakness of assessment, as well as one of the participants said that we assess students' reading comprehension skills and writing skills, but not the other skills, which doesn't make the assessment process complete.

Figure 2

The main strength of assessing students

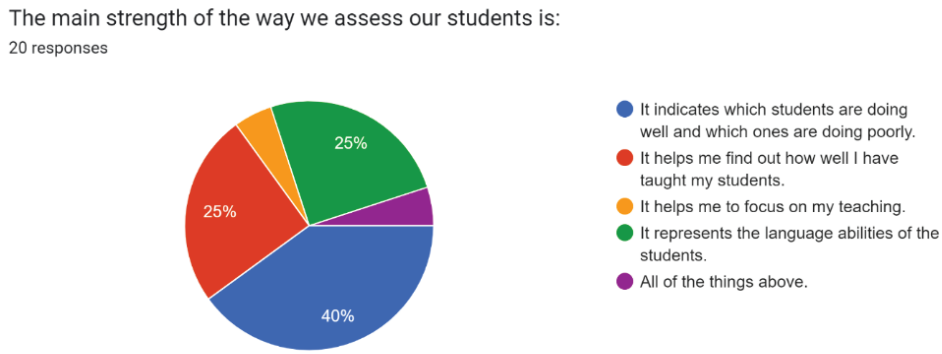
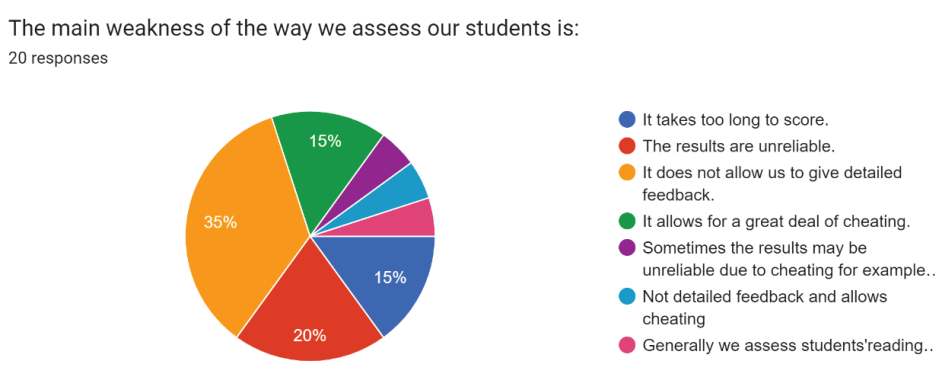


Figure 3

The main strength of assessing student

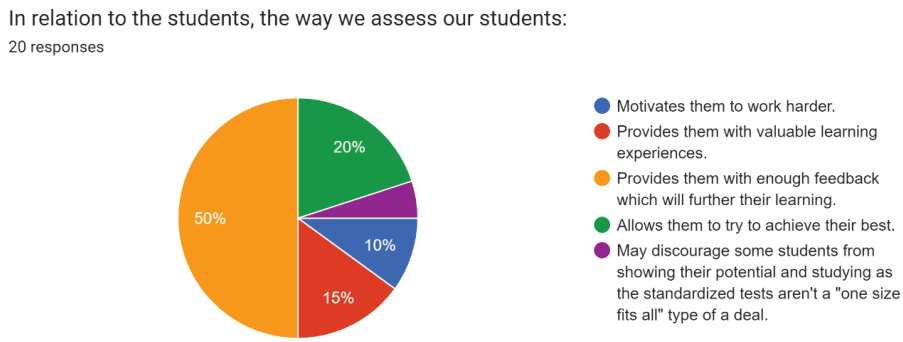


In relation to the students, the figure 4 below indicates that 50% of the participants said that the way they assess their students, provides them with enough feedback which will further their learning. On the other hand, 20% of the teachers believe that the way they assess their students in fact it allows them to try to achieve their best. Further, 15% of them said that assessment and the way they assess their students allows them to gain valuable learning experiences, while 10% agreed that students are motivated to work harder from the way they are being assessed. However, one of the teachers believe that the way the students are assessed actually can

be discouraging and some students can be restricted to show their potential and study as the standardized tests aren't a "one size fits all" type of a deal.

Figure 4

Assessment in relation to the students



As the table 1 below shows, we can see that statement one and two (1 & 2) indicate the largest agreement of the teachers to this point, meaning that the majority of the participants, 75% agreed that performance-based assessment creates competition among students, as well as motivates them to learn. However, there were also those who were uncertain with these two statements, which signifies that teachers have different attitudes regarding Performance-based assessment. Therefore, the next statement (3), 55% of the participants agreed and 30% strongly agreed that performance-based assessment highlights each student's strength and weaknesses. Also, as we can see from the data gathered on statement four (4), 45% of the teachers, believe and strongly agree that performance-based assessment is better than traditional final/midterm exam. On the other hand, 15% of participants neither agreed neither disagreed with this statement.

Further, regarding statement five (5) 50% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement that performance-based assessments help to improve student's learning. In addition, on statement six (6), 55% of the teachers agreed that there are clear performance criteria for the oral performances, but 15% of them disagreed with this statement. Moreover, statement seven (7) shows that teachers in general agreed and strongly agreed that students learn something useful from

doing the projects, but as the last statement indicates, 55% of the teachers agreed that most of their students are anxious about the projects, while a small percentage were uncertain and disagreed with the statement. The last statement (9) in this presented table below shows different attitudes of teachers whether the scoring for the oral performances is balanced and fair. As we can see 65% of the teachers agreed whereas 25% of them were neutral, i.e. neither agreed nor disagreed with what was being said and they were uncertain about the statement.

Table 1

Teachers' views toward Performance-based assessment

	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Performance-based assessments create competition among students.	15%	75%	10%	/	/
2	Performance-based assessments motivate students to learn.	15%	75%	10%	/	/
3	Performance-based assessments highlight each student's strengths and weakness.	30%	55%	15%	/	/
4	Performance-based assessment (i.e. written& oral tasks/projects) is better than traditional final/ midterm exam.	45%	40%	15%	/	/
5	Performance-based assessments improve students' learning.	50%	45%	5%	/	/

6	There are clear performance criteria for the oral performances.	10%	55%	20%	15%	/
7	Students learn something useful from doing the projects.	45%	55%	/	/	/
8	Most of my students are anxious about the projects.	15%	55%	20%	5%	5%
9	The scoring for the oral performances is balanced and fair.	10%	65%	25%	/	/

Discussion

The findings in the present study indicate that the majority of the teachers have had formal training regarding language testing and assessment, which proves that teachers are equpped with the necessary skills and knowledge to distinguish between various forms of assessment, additionally differentiate the main strengths and weaknesses of assessing students. As the results above indicate, teachers believe that by assessing students they will have more information regarding their performance, and they are able to distinguish between various learners and their development in class. However, when teachers were asked about the main weaknesses of assessment, the majority of them agreed that assessment is limited in terms of detailed feedback, which contradicts the preconceived notion that assesment indicates which students are doing well and which ones are doing poorly. Also, some participants agreed that the results we obtain from the assessments are unreliable due to a variety of reasons, such as cheating, being limited to assess everything that is covered during the lectures, focusing more on student's reading and comprehension skills, as well as writing skills, but neglecting other skills such as speaking and listening.

On the other hand, as the results revealed, most of the participants believe that the way they assess their students enables them to receive enough feedback about their own learning, what needs to be improved from their side, and what is their

overall success. However some of the participants said that assessment can be considered as a motivator, since the students can be motivated to work harder for the next tests/exams they will have, and will encourage them to put more effort and achieve their best. However, assessment doesn't work the same for each indvidual, and as it was alluded from one of the participants, some learners can be discouraged from the way they are assessed and from the results they gain, since not all the learners are able to show their full potential in a written exam.

Hence, the study provided answers to the first research question.

RQ1: What are the main strength and weakness of assessing students from the perspective of teachers?

According to the participants, the main strength of assessing students is that the teachers can easily recognize whether their students are doing well or the learning is not taking place on individual level. Sometimes teachers lack feedback from the students, hence, assessing students can provide the teachers with necessary information regarding the material, the level of the difficulty of a particular aspect of a language, students' abilities and their own teaching skills, so they are able to find out how well they have taught their students and if learning has taken place.

On the other hand, the main weakness of assessment as it was presented in the result section above is that the majority of the participants see assessment as a tool that doesn't allow them to give detailed feedback. Usually, tests are those that are compiled so most of the time there is no opportunity for detailed feedback, hence, teachers need to adjust their assessment tools so they can provide students with necessary feedback regarding various aspect they have worked and the degree of importance. In addition, some of the participants believe that the results are usually unreliable, which is another complex issue which can be solved only if we employ a diverse array of assessment methods rather than relying exclusively on a single form of evaluation or on traditional testing.

As mentioned in the literature review, performance-based assessment (PBA) serves as a motivator for learners to do better and improve their skills where necesssary, but the current study found that the competition that is created from PBA is actually what motivates the learners to work harder, achieve better results than their classmates, and improve their learning. Hence, with respect to the second research question:

RQ2: What are teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards Performance-Based assessment?

The vast majority of the participants believe that performance-based assessments create competition in classroom. It is well known that in most of the cases, students learn better if they are competing with each other, they feel motivated and they are encouraged to do better than their classmates. Hence, as it is perceived by most of the teachers, performance-based assessment implemented through various projects, presentations, or tasks that require practice, foster competitive environment in the classroom, which further can highlight individual achievement of the students and differentiate the level of performance among the other students. Also, teachers mainly see performance-based assessment better than traditional tests/exams, since it can provide them with more information regarding their students' performance throughout the semester, as a form of ongoing assessment which is more effective because we as teachers will have more time to adjust and make changes regarding the syllabus, teaching methods, what aspects of a language to focus more, are the students learning and if they are not what can be done differently so the progress can take place, etc. In addition, they believe that the scoring for the oral performance is balanced and fair.

On the other hand, as it was indicated from teachers' responses, performance-based assessment can have negative consequences. Performance-based assessments often seek from students to use their knowledge and abilities in real-world situations, projects, and presentations thus, anxiety might naturally arise from the pressure to perform well. Students may be afraid of making mistakes, speak in public, or being judged by peers and teachers, which can lower their academic performance and lead to a lack of engagement and motivation. Hence, it can be beneficial to balance the demands imposed on students and to incorporate a range of assessment methods, such as written assignments, collaborative projects, and traditional assessments. By avoiding assigning high-stakes, performance-based assignments all the time, a mixed approach helps protect students' anxiety levels.

Conclusion

Performance-based assessment is considered to be a practical method apart from traditional type of assessment. They tend to provide us with various and important information about the students and their learning, as well as they help to boost students' motivation and engagement in various tasks that are implemented in the classroom which help the learner to improve mostly speaking skills. On the other hand, based on different studies, Performance-based assessments are very

time consuming and they require a lot of energy and hard work to implement, as well as sometimes they cannot be reliable. According to some researchers, schools or universities that are willing to include PBAs in their curriculum, should provide trainings for teachers and educators, since most of them lack key information about this method of assessment and because of that they are skeptical whether they should implement it in their classroom or continue with traditional assessment. Hence, more future research is needed in this area so we can fill in the gaps that exist in the literature of English language and to shed light into such a complex and important issue.

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