RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY ON THE PRACTICE OF CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT IN COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH SKILLS COURSE: THE CASE OF AMBO UNIVERSITY, ETHIOPIA

MOTUMA HIRPASSA MINDA

Assistant Professor, P.O. Box: 19, Ambo University, College of Social Science and Humanities,
Department of English Language and Literature
Ambo, Ethiopia
Email: maldamercy@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the practice of continuous assessment in communicative English skills course classes at Ambo University. The participants of the study were 32 EFL instructors and 302 first year students at Ambo University. In the view of the mixed research design, data, which gathered through questionnaires, interview and document analysis, were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings of this study revealed that instructors and students believe that continuous assessment is beneficial for all groups of student. However, the instructors have not been implementing continuous assessment in adequate way for various challenges they face in implementing continuous assessment in the course. The challenges were categorized into six major themes: the demanding nature of continuous assessment, teachers-related, student-character, resource constraints, teachers' and students' perceptions and complex nature of the course. As the result of these challenges, the instructors and students use continuous test rather than continuous assessment which is the same with the traditional assessment in its process from designing to recording the results. Moreover, as the instructors were hardly implementing continuous assessment in the course, they failed to provide the needy students with appropriate remedial activities. Therefore, the solution to the problem lies in bringing about improvement on these challenges.

Key Words: Practice, Continuous Assessment, EFL Classes.

Introduction

Teaching and assessment are highly interwoven (Nunan, 2009). Where there is teaching learning process, there is also assessment (Banta, Joes & Black, 2009). The impact of assessment on teaching and learning is highly influential (Adeoye & Okpala, 2005). Higher education in particular has been facing radical changes from traditional assessment (TA) methods to continuous assessment (CA) methods to align the assessment approach with active learning methods (ALM) approach in many countries around the world, for example in Thailand (Chinda, 2013), in Morocco (Benzehaf, 2017), in Nepal (Shrestha, 2014) and in Scotland (Davies, 2013). This is because any teaching act is the result of a decision. There is no doubt that there is essential link between the methods of teaching and methods of assessment (Fives & Nicole, 2013; Guttulo (2010). For this reason, the change from TA to active CA is

attributed to several factors including the rise of the theory of communicative language teaching (CLT) and lifelong learning strategies (Adeoye & Okpala, 2005; Davies, 2008).

While the changes have been effective since 1970s in different counties, the concept of active leaning method (ALM) and CA in the Ethiopian context became officially operative after 1994 following the implementation of the Ethiopian Educational and Training Policy (ETP) by Ministry of Education (MOE, 1994; 2004; USAID, 2010, 2011). However, the change from TA to AA to assess the students' CESC at tertiary level has been challenging in the Ethiopian context in general and in Ambo University in particular. On top of others, the implementation of CA in CESC has been confronting both the students' activities and the teachers' practices in the universities, which form this study. CESC is given to all students in all fields of study in Ethiopia. Yet, the course has been designed for all first year students to integrate the six major components (four language skills as well as grammar and vocabulary) and to align the ALM and CA techniques through a communicative language teaching approach that enables students to construct their knowledge (Alemu, 2009; MOE 1994; 2004; 2017). The integration of the six components of CESC as well as the ALM with CA implies the communicative nature of the course (Yorke, 2003). Despite its nature, several studies have confirmed that CA is more relevant to assess CESC than TA for its distinguishing features (Burger, 2008; Heritage, 2011).

In order to respond to the problem of the mismatch between the assessment and teaching techniques in CESC in Ambo University, the study employed communicative language teaching (CLT) lens as a theoretical framework (Benzehaf, 2017*;* Davies, 2013). Theoretically, a phrase 'communicative approach' aligns three inseparable theories (Burger, 2008; Wood, 2011): theory of communicative course design , theory of active learning methods (TALM) and theory of continuous assessment (CA) in teaching CESC (Coombe & Hubley, 2011; Janisch, Liu, and Akrofi, 2007). This theoretical framework has been reconstructed to reveal how the courses has been designed,

teaching (ALM) and assessment (CA) are aligned (Davies, 2013). The following figure depicts how communicative approach aligns the three theories (Brown, 2012; Coombe & Hubley, 2011).
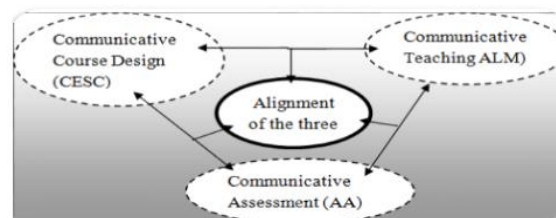
Figure I: Theoretical Framework: adapted from Benzehaf (2017) & Wood (2011)

On the theoretical basis for a communicative approach to align the course design, language teaching and assessment, the principles and applications of communicative approach has globally been employed by textbook writers and by language teaching specialists (Chinda, 2013 & Marrow, 2018). Chinda (2013) argues that the principles of CLT are compatible with many of the assumptions of ALM and CA. The main dimensions of these principles are related to the authentic course design, classroom activities and meaningful communication, creative construction of knowledge and integrative language teaching activities as in CESC (Burger, 2008 & Marrow, 2018). The applications of CLT are based on the purpose of CA in CESC, the roles of the teachers and the students in the implementation of CA in CESC (Puppin, 2007; Wood, 2011).

The applications of communicative assessment encourage "students' freer practices" and the use of "holistic practice", rather than "practicing individual skills one piece at a time" (Janisch, Liu, and Akrofi, 2007; Sastre, 2011). These include the use of multi-assessor strategies, variety of assessment tools, comprehensive, progressive and relevance assessment activities to fit the components of AA to the components of language domains in the CESC (Marrow, 2018; Morgan, 2007). Thus, this theoretical framework serves as the foundation for conceptual framework of the study on the practices and challenges of implementing CA in CESC (Burger, 2008; Chinda, 2013; Wood, 2011) as states in the methodology section of this study.

MOTUMA HIRPASSA MINDA

Prompted by the stated advantages of CA over TA, Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MOE) has been urging the Universities to implement AA techniques to reduce TA drawbacks in communicative English skills course (CESC) (MOE, 1994, 2004). To this end, MOE (2004) has developed guidelines and directives on the implementation of ALM) and CA as a part of quality education package. Besides, frequent trainings have been given for both teachers and students on how to use ALM and CA in CESC. However, MOE (2017) confirmed that there is still observable problem of aligning CA with ALM methods in CESC particularly in Ambo University. EFL teachers and students of the university have been resisting the implementation of CA in CESC, for various reasons (Alemu, 2009; Desalegn, 2004; MOE 2017). They prefer the use TA to CA in CESC because they think that the use TA is easy to administer, objective to measure students knowledge, economical and time saving. In fact, advocates of CA, for example Chirimbu (2013), questions the trustworthiness of a measure consists of its credibility and auditability. However, Burkaitien & Margarita (2008) argue that the use of CA is relevant and vital to the nature of the CESC to integrate its components (four language skills, grammar and vocabulary). This integration, which leads to align CA with ALM, implies the communicative nature of the course.

However, MOE (2017) has confirmed that the implementation of CA in CESC has been challenging in the three universities. Various studies have identified that the challenges of the implementation of CA in a CESC relate to any constraints, difficulty, complexity, problems, obstacles, factors, inconveniences that confront both the practices of EFL teachers and the activities of students (Davies, 2013; Hughes, 2003). These challenges affect the EFL teachers' planning and implementation of AA as well as giving relevant feedbacks in CESC for the students (Wei, 2010; Woodrow, 2005). Similarly, the challenges confront the students' activities in responding to their teachers' AA methods in CESC (Heritage, 2011; Wei, 2010). In general, the scholars have identified six potentially plausible challenges of implementing CA

in CESC (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Kapambwe, 2010) at other sites. The challenges include: 1) Perception, 2) Teachers Character, 3) Resources Constraints, 4) Student Character, 5) the demanding activities of AA and, 6) the complex components of CESC.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There has been a growing concern for improving the quality of students' English language ability at the university. This concern is ensured through ALMs and CA (Piper, 2010 & Banta, & Palomba, 2015). However, there was problem a mismatch between how the communicative English skills course (CESC) is taught at the university and how it is assessed (Ambachew, 2003). Thus, although most Ethiopian Government Universities have started implementing CA practices in English classrooms (MOE, 2017); there are debates at Ambo Universities to solve the problem of alignment between learning and assessment methods particularly in CESC because the assessment of CESC differs from testing in other language areas. In this university, even today the most commonly used method in deciding students' level of understanding in CESC is paper-pencil tests, which is a bitter reality (Piper, 2010 and MOE, 2017).

On top of others, most of the time, most students in Ethiopian in general and in Ambo University in particular were complained that they are not competitive users of English. A number of reasons can be given for the problems that the students face in English courses and other subjects. Among these, the kinds of assessments which are used in class and the ways they are taken place can be one factor. This is because assessment lies at the heart of teaching-learning process. Even though it has a very short history, continuous assessment has been applied in Ethiopian educational institutions especially at tertiary levels. Especially, it seems that EFL instructors at tertiary level are emphasizing the use of continuous assessment rather than other types of assessments. This is because no one wanted to be labeled as traditional teacher. However, most of the time EFL instructors of the university complain that they face a number of

challenges that hinder them from properly applying continuous assessment in CESC.

As communicative English skills course is a common course for all students in university, almost all teacher teach the course every year. Hence, it has been common concern that CA, which accounts 60% of the students' grade, usually designed and administered to their respective students by individual teachers separately. However, the final examination or summative assessment, which accounts 40% of the students' grade, is managed by the course coordinating committee. As a result, the researcher observed that the way different instructors assess their students and the methods of assessment they use seem to be different. These have created discrepancy in the assessment among different instructors in course at Ambo University. Therefore, the researcher believes that the presupposed challenges of the implementation of CA in CESC, and the practice of assessment should be investigated and appropriate remedy should be taken. To this end, the study has intended to address the following basic research questions

The research Questions

1. What are the assessment methods or tools EFL teachers use in communicative English skills course classes?

2. To what extent do the EFL instructors use continuous assessment in the communicative English skills course?

3. What are the major challenges EFL instructors and students face in using continuous assessment?

Research Design and Methodology of the study

This study was grounded on pragmatism as a research paradigm aligned with a mixed research design (Cresswell, 2014; Shannon-Baker, 2016). In continuous assessment ontological, the research questions in the study were trying to solve the problem of mismatch between how to teach and how to assess the course (Shannon-Baker, 2016). Epistemologically, this study required the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the research problem (Cresswell, 2014; Shannon-Baker 2016). To conduct the study, descriptive survey design was employed. To achieve the purpose of this study, the target population was EFL instructors, and students who took communicative English Skills in the academic year 2017/2018. All communicative English skills course instructors included based the available sampling technique because their number (32) is manageable, and 15% (302) of 2010 first year students were used as a source of data.

In relation to sampling techniques, Ambo University has been selected purposively because the researcher had experienced the problem in the course and first year students have been selected purposively because all of them took communicative English skills course at their first year. Then, 15% of the students were selected from each department employing stratified sampling technique. From those 302 students, 18 students were randomly selected for interview. All instructors teaching the course were purposively selected for questionnaire because their number is manageable from which nine of them were randomly selected for classroom observation and were observed for three times each, along with, pre and post observation interview. Similarly, all the nine instructors' assessment documents were used as the sources for the document analysis.

Data collection Instruments

Regarding with instruments for data collection instruments, four instruments such as questionnaire, classroom observation, pre and post observation interview, as well as document analysis (Shannon &Hsieh, 200; Shannon-Baker, 2016) were employed. Two types of questionnaires, one for the instructors and the other for the students, were designed and administered to obtain the required data. Both type of the questionnaires consisted of both open and closed ended questions. EFL instructors' questionnaire was used to gather data on the EFL instructors' use of CA in course, the challenges they face in using CA and the strategies they use to overcome the challenges. The items in the students' questionnaire were mainly used to identify the challenges they face as they responded

to their instructors CA tools and, in the meantime, cross check the information that was gathered from the teachers.

The classroom observation and the pre and post interview guide were prepared for both EFL teachers and students. A teacher was observed three times for an hour to actually identify the actual practices of the teachers' assessments including the use of assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning. The interview for both teachers and students was semi structured and was used to get additional information to triangulate the data that was obtained through the questionnaires. Teachers' assessment documents were used to identify the teachers' assessment plans, what types of CA they use and so on through document analysis to find out what areas of students' performance the teachers continuously assess in course.

Methods of Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were employed to analyze the data. The data obtained questionnaires were analyzed using frequency percentage, mean range and t-test to make the analysis as valid and realistic as possible. The information gathered through classroom observation, pre and post observation interview and document analysis were coded, summarized and analyzed qualitatively based on the recommendations and approaches (Cresswell, 2009, 2011 & 2014).

Results and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the practice of continuous assessment in communicative English skills course at Ambo University. To this end, the results and discussions of the data obtained through questionnaires, classroom observation, and interview as well as document analysis are presented in this chapter. The chapter has two main parts: the results and discussions.

The Results

The practices of Continuous assessment in the Course

In order to identify the extent to which EFL instructors use continuous assessment in communicative English skills course classes, the results of questionnaires are presented in the following tables.

Table 2: EFL Instructors' and Students' Responses on the use continuous assessment

S/N	Statement	Teachers		Students			
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Do you use continuous assessment in your communicative English Skills course?						
	A. Yes	32	100	225	74.5	257	77
	B. No	-	-	77	25.5	77	23
	Total	32	100	302	100	334	100

Table 2 above reveals the practices of EFL teachers and students in the communicative English skills in the University. The table shows that all, 32 (100%) of the teacher and most, 225 (74.5%) of the students indicated that they use continuous assessment in course. The interviews in both cases confirm the same phenomena. Most 257 (77%) of the interviewees believed that the implementation of continuous assessment in course was helping both students and teachers. However, 25.5% of the students think that they did not use continuous assessment in the course. The results of the classroom observation have confirmed similar findings that EFL teachers rarely employ continuous assessment in the classrooms.

In relation to continuous assessment practices, both teachers and students were asked two questions. The first question was what types of CA tools they use in the course. They were given a list of 49 CA tools to select for the first question. The second question required them to express how often they use the types of CA tools that they claimed in the first question. During this time, they answered the questions by selecting answers from a 5 scale alternatives: *1= never; 2=rarely; 3= sometimes; 4= often, and 5= always.* Based on the respondents' responses, 14 continuous assessment tools were identified for the first question. For the second question, the frequencies of the

MOTUMA HIRPASSA MINDA

respondents were separately computed for both the teachers and students as well. Finally, the total frequencies of each tool were computed and ranked as summarized in table 3 below.

Table 3: EFL Instructors' and Students' Responses on How Often They Use CA Tools

No.	CA Devices	Teachers		Students		Total		Rank
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	Portfolios	2.08	0.9	1.02	0.2	1.6	0.55	11
2	Journals	1.64	0.6	0.4	0.4	1.0	0.5	13
3	Conference	1.0	0.9	0.6	0.1	0.8	0.5	14
4	Interview	1.8	0.4	1.9	0.2	1.9	0.3	10
5	Observations	3.52	0.3	3.11	0.3	3.3	0.3	7
6	Self-assessment	3.52	0.5	3.48	0.3	3.5	0.4	4
7	Peer assessment	3.32	0.2	3.41	0.6	3.4	0.4	5
8	Group assessment	2.8	0.3	2.1	0.2	2.5	0.25	8
9	Role-play	2.88	0.4	2.19	0.3	2.5	0.35	8
10	Presentations	3.72	0.2	3.12	0.1	3.4	0.15	5
11	Tests and quizzes	4.0	0.1	4.8	0.4	4.4	0.25	1
12	Assignments	3.84	0.3	4.7	0.3	4.3	0.3	2
13	Debate	1.2	0.9	1.0	0.1	1.1	0.5	12
14	Questions/answers	4.6	0.1	3.6	0.5	4.1	0.3	3
	Grand mean	**2.85**	**0.44**	**2.53**	**0.29**	**2.69**	**1.67**	

Table 3 above illustrates the answers for the questions that required what types of CA tools and how often the teachers and students use the CA tools in communicative English skills course. The teachers and the students agree that the use only 14 CA tools from the list of 49 tools and strategies. The CA tools were ranked from 1st to 14th depending on the calculated mean to each to identify how often the EFL instructors use them. As a result, the mean 4.4, 4.3 and 4.1 reveal in descending order that the teachers and students were often using tests and quizzes, assignments and question-answer tools respectively. On the other hand the respondents confirm that they use in ascending order conference (0.8), journals (1.0), debate (1.1), portfolio (1.6) and interview (1.9) least frequently. Other tools, for instance, self-assessment (5.5), presentations and peer-assessment (3.4), observations (3.3), group assessment and role-play (2.5) were sometimes used in the course, portfolios, conference and interview and journals take the first to the tenth rank respectively.

In general, the grand mean and standard deviation values 2.69 and 1.67 show respectively that the respondents sometimes use CA tools and strategies. Moreover, there is significant difference between the grand means of the teachers (2.85) and students (2.53) on the practices of the CA in the course. The t-test of the difference between the two means was t=0.73 which implies an insignificant difference between the opinions of the teacher and the students. This means that both the teachers and students commonly agree that they did not always use the CA tools and strategies in communicative English skills course for various challenges they confronted as stated in following section. The results of the interview, the classroom observation and documents analysis confirmed the findings as the result claim that the respondents sometimes use few forms of CA in the course. As a result, there is a difference between what is suggested in literature by scholars such as Marrow (2018) and what the EFL instructors do.

The respondents were asked to rank the level of CA implementation form 1 to 6 in the six

components of communicative English skills course. As a respondent could give at most six answers in the process of ranking system, the total number of the responses is more than the number of the respondents. In computing the means, standard deviation, t-test and the frequency percentages of the respondents, *1st ranked language domain received six points … the 6th ranked language domain receive one point* in all respondents' responses as summarized in the following Figure 1.
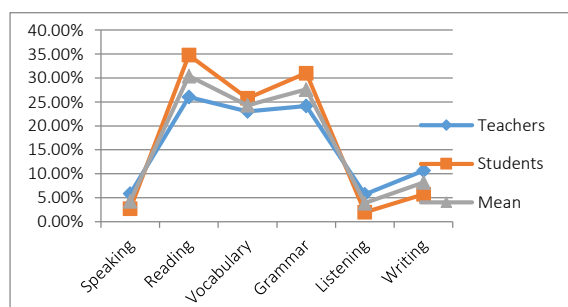

Figure 1: The Implementation of CA in Each Language Domain of CESC

Figure 1 reveals the practices of CA in each language domain of communicative English skills course. The mean of the percentages in the figure indicates that EFL teachers and students use CA more frequently in reading, (30.4), grammar (27.6%) and vocabulary (24.3%) in descending order than listening (3.9%), speaking (4.3%) and writing

skills (8.2) in ascending order However, referring to the means of responses, teachers and the students separately confirmed that they use CA more in reading, grammar and vocabulary than in other language domains of the course.

Challenges of the Implementation of CA in CESC

In order to identify the challenges of using continuous assessment, various questions both in the questionnaires and interviews were presented to both EFL instructors and the students. Every item in the questionnaires was sorted into six themes four major themes: the demanding nature of CA, the complex nature of the course, teacher-related challenges, learner-character, resource constraints and perceptions of the teachers and the students. As a result, the mean of ever item and the weighted mean of each theme were computed. In addition to the weighted means of the themes, the grad means of the teachers' and the students' responses were also computed. All the computed means and the standard deviations of the themes of the challenges were summarized and presented as in the following Table 4. The figures in the table were computed the respondents given to the questions with a 5 scale alternative as: *1= Not a challenge; 2= slight challenge; 3= Moderate challenge; 4=Critical challenge and 5= Very critical challenge.*

Table 4: Responses on the Challenges in Implementing Continuous Assessment in the Course

S/N	Themes of the Challenges	The Weighted Means						Rank	T-test
		Teachers		Students					
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	Resource Constraints	4.6	1.2	4.7	0.6	4.65	0.9	2	0.08
2	Demands activities of the CA	4.5	2.3	4.6	3.3	4.55	2.8	3	0.04
3	Teachers-character	4.3	0.9	4.4	0.4	4.35	0.65	6	0.11
4	Students-Character	4.6	1.4	4.3	2.2	4.45	1.8	4	0.21
5	Teachers' and students' perceptions	4.4	2.1	4.4	2.3	4.4	2.2	5	0.00
6	Complex nature of the course	4.7	2.4	4.8	1.3	4.75	1.85	1	0.04
	Grand mean	**4.52**	1.72	**4.53**	1.68	**4.52**	1.7		0.00

Table 4 above reveals several concepts: the responses of the teachers and students by weighted mean, the total responses of the

respondents, the grand means of the teachers and students' responses and the standard deviation of the respondents' responses as well as the result t-

MOTUMA HIRPASSA MINDA

test on each theme of the challenges. Consequently, 90.4 of the teachers and 90.6% of the students confirmed that they similarly confronted a range of different challenges in employing CA in communicative English skills course. In addition to the percentages, the mean values 4.52 and 4.53 clearly show shat the teacher and the students held similar opinion on the level of challenges. Moreover, the t-test values ranged from 0.00 to 0.08 assert that the respondents were equally challenged by resource constraints (0.00), complex nature of the course and demanding activities of CA (0.04) and improper perceptions of teachers and students (0.00) in using CA in the course. However, they did not seem to agree that teacher-related challenges (0.21) and student-character (0.11) have similar challenges in using CA in CESC because the teachers thought that students' language character and language deficiency affected the implementation of CA more than the teachers' activities and commitment, and the other round of this statement is true for the students' opinions. The following figure 2 presents the challenges the teachers and the students faced in implementing CA in each language domains of the course.
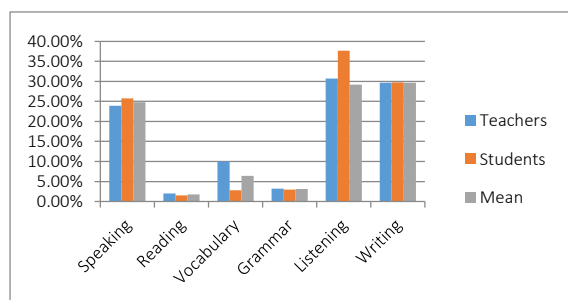
Figure 2: The Challenges the teachers and the students faced in Implementing CA in each Language Domains

Figure 2 above presents the analysis of challenges the teachers and the students faced using CA in the each language domain of communicative English skills course. The grand mean percentages in Figure 2 29.7%, 29.2% and 24.8 reveal that both the teacher and the students faced challenged in using CA in descending order in writing, listening and speaking. However, the mean values 37.69% for students' responses and 30.72% for teachers'

responses indicate that students were confronted the challenges in listening than the teachers. On other hand, both the teachers and the students faced more challenges in listening than in other language domains of the course.

In relation to the analysis of challenges, both the teachers and the students were asked to respond to several questions in their pre and post observation interviews. The result of the observation was also included in this qualitative analysis of the data. Moreover, the results of open-ended and content analysis were integrated in this section. In this effort to analyze the data qualitatively, the challenges mentioned by the respondents and sensed by the researcher were categorized into six major themes: the demanding activities of CA, complex nature of the course, improper teachers' activities, learners' character, resource constraints and the perceptions of the teachers and student.

To begin with, the demanding nature of CA, complex nature of the course and the perceptions of the teachers and students were identified as the first, the second and the third most critical challenges by the teachers and students. The teachers asserted that the multiple domains of language objectives and the demanding activities of CA in CESC created a mismatch between assessments and instructions of the course. This is because teachers faced difficulties to include all the language domains in their continuous assessment from CESC components. Similarly, the complexity of designing, constructing and administering all assessment strategies, correcting and measuring students' results were the most common demanding activities for the teachers to make their assessments comprehensive and proportionate. In relation to this, it is a respectful to state the voice of a teacher that might represent all EFL teachers' view on their perception about the implementation of CA in CESC.

Communicative English Skills course involves multifaceted objectives and contents. It is difficult for me to use continuous assessment in these all language domains at a time.

> *Moreover, when I design the continuous assessment items, how should I worry about the proportionality and comprehensiveness of the language domains in the course?*

In this quotation, one can infer that complexity nature of CESC and the demanding activities of CA are the critical challenges the teachers face to align their continuous assessment techniques within its language domains. The teachers were also challenged by the multifaceted objectives and the demanding activities in correcting and giving feedback for the students to make their assessment comprehensive and proportionate to the objective to be assessed in CESC. The analysis made from the teachers and the students' interviews so far support the results of the analysis of the questionnaire and documents. The teachers also forwarded the worries on the implementation of CA in CESC. *"It is difficult for me to align the language domain with its appropriate assessment techniques. Even if, I try to implement the continuous assessment strategies, how can I correct all items set from different language domains and feedback for the students?* The analysis of this statements show that the teachers were less strategic to overcome the complexity of CESC and the demanding nature of CA. The students also confirmed that they did not carefully study the complex module of the course; they usually review the previous examinations items because they knew that their teachers repeat the preceding items.

Resource constraints were the fourth serious challenges for teachers to use CA in all the components of language domains. The teachers explained that as CESC is a multidimensional, it requires various resources to CA in its components in a proportionate and comprehensive way. However, constraints of reference materials, shortage of computer, lack of cameras, very small size and poorly furnished laboratory, frequent internet interruption, problem of duplicating machines and stationery materials have challenged the teachers' and students' continuous assessments implementation. Moreover, large class size and constraints of time created due to instability in Ambo University have affected the teachers' continuous assessment activities. The students also criticized that they rarely went to language laboratory to learn, but they were not assessed using any sort of technological devices.

Student character was the fifth most emphasized challenges by the teachers and by the students. Student character as a challenge of continuous assessments in CESC encloses the preoccupied learning and assessment culture, ethnic diversity, disciplinary problems, language deficiency, cheating in collaborative learning, lack of intrinsic motivation and negative attitude toward the use of CA, self and peer assessment in CESC. One of the teachers stated that:

> *Sometimes students become dizzy because they are given continuous assessment not only from a single instructor but also from different instructors in different courses. In that case, students get bored with continuous assessment and they may just fail to do it in the time given. Because of that students' motivation decreases.*

The teachers evaluated that these affected students' self-initiative and self-reliance, self-evaluation, goal setting practices and appropriate reaction to their teachers' assessment techniques in CESC. The students confirmed similar connotations with the teachers' expert judgments that they were reluctant to be assessed through self and peer-assessments.

Teacher character was the sixth solemn challenge for the content validity of their assessments. The questions were asked to respond to how they designed assessments and how they managed student character of as well as resources constraint they need to carry out assessments. They illustrated that they design assessments without guideline and table of assessment specification. However, they internalized that teachers' prior experience, poor pedagogical skills and low interest towards CA challenged their assessment activities. In relation to teacher

character as a challenge, a teacher said the following.

> *Two or three forms of continuous assessment are can effectively assess all language domains in the course. Students will learn language skills by the next times in their specific course to the language domains. For this reason, I skip over listening and speaking activities in particular because there are no efficient laboratory and technological devices.*

This summarizes that the teacher fail to reverse the traditional assessment paradigm they have experienced in other course. This implies that they might give more weight to continuous testing, or they failed to design valid, clear, practical, reliable and measureable continuous assessment techniques in CESC. Teacher character and their perception challenged them to implement continuous assessment in the course. The teachers were skipping over listening and writing during in CESC because they knew that students could have chance to separately exercise language skills more in the upcoming specific courses. In general, it is possible to deduce that teachers failed to properly handle students' interest, demanding activities of CA and complex nature of CESC.

Discussions

This section integrated the findings identified through document analysis, the classroom observation and the pre and post observation teachers' and students' interviews with the results of the questionnaires. It discusses the status of CA implementation in the communicative English skills course, the challenges EFL teachers and the students faced in implementing CA in CESC at Ambo University and the relation between the practices of CA and the challenges of CA implementation in the course. These and others key concerns were discussed in detail in this subtopic.

In relation to the analysis of documents, the objectives of the course as stated in the teaching materials were designed to develop students' speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills including grammar and vocabulary. Compared to the teaching materials of the course, reading, grammar and vocabulary items predominantly appeared in the assessments in descending order. In other words, the assessment items did not proportionally incorporate speaking writing and listening skills items in CAs of the course for various challenges including the malfunctioned language laboratory and scare resources. Evidently, the review and the analysis of the teachers' assessment documents indicate a list of general objectives and specific objectives; whereas, the actual practices of the teachers in implementing CA is fundamentally different from the main objectives implied in the CESC module as the course integrates complex language domains to be assessed using different type of items, tasks and techniques (Burger, 2008; Davies, 2008).

With regards to the disproportionate distribution of the language domains in the teachers CA assessment practices, various scholars including Plessis (2003) and Cheng et al. (2004) suggest that all the major language domains from the course material are expected to be assessed either by continuous assessments or by summative assessments (SA). However, the reality at Ambo University in implementing CA in CESC during the sample time deviated from what these scholars have suggested. For instance, in the assessments, the teachers included very few listening, speaking and writing skills. The teachers in their interview have confirmed that CAs and SAs were occupied by reading, grammar and vocabulary.

Concerning with the implementation of CA in the course, although the overall intention of CA is to involve students in a variety of activities as stipulated in the objectives of the course materials, and thereby, promote the students' language skills, the practices of EFL teachers in implementing CAs did not have fundamental difference from the summative assessments. For example, only 1 (2.18%) item from listening skill and four from writing skill items were included into CAs. The teachers were required to reply to a question why they could not design proportionate and comprehensive CA items. They listed several

challenges that had confronted them to make continuous assessment proportionate and comprehensive in the course. The challenges were classified into six major themes based on the suggestions of Iyer (2015; Jabbarifar, 2009).

With regard to the complexity of CESC and the demanding nature of the CA, CESC encloses complex language components and, thereby, requires demanding activities of CA to assess the language domains in a comprehensive way. These demanding activities of CA and complex language domains in the course were identified as the critical challenges for the teachers and the students. The most common demanding activities of CESC consist of the difficulty of designing, constructing and administering, the continuous assessment strategies, correcting and measuring students' results. In other words, they faced difficulties to promote the practicality, validity and measurability of their CA activities and techniques; for instance, home works and group works were challenging for EFL teachers for uncontrollable students' cheating. The teachers also confessed that their continuous assessments involved mismatches with the teaching. Moreover, they justified that they could not prepare inclusive continuous assessment due to the multiple domains of language objectives in the course.

Communicative English skills course, as a multidimensional course, requires a variety of resources to carry out comprehensive and proportionate continuous assessments (Five and Nicolen, 2013). To state the argument clearly and precisely, the constraints of resources fundamentally challenged the teachers to carry out comprehensive assessments in such a complex course. For example, scarcity of resources was identified as critical challenges for the teachers' activities to effectively implement CAs. Moreover, large class size and time constraints created due to students' unrest in the University had challenged the teachers' assessment activities.

In relation to the challenges created by resource constraints, the teachers asserted that listening skill in particular has mostly been neglected in both CAs and SAs in CESC because of the problems of listening facilities in language laboratory. However, although it is well expected that the teachers might not include the speaking and listening questions in SAs for the constraints of laboratory devices and other resources, there is no reason to exclude speaking, writing and listening items from CAs. This is because one can argue that writing skills can directly be assessed using SA. Similarly, speaking skills can also be assessed using SA in the form of dialogues which are common even in standardized tests. Moreover, in the era of CA, teachers are expected to prepare speaking and listening questions in CA and administer it either in classroom or in language laboratory (Burger, 2008; Motuma, 2014, 2015, 2017).

Another most concerned challenge by EFL teachers was student character. Student character as a challenge of content validity of the teacher-made assessments in the course encloses the preoccupied students' traditional learning and conventional assessment culture, students' learning styles and ethnic diversity, students' disciplinary problems, their language deficiency, students' cheating in general and in collaborative assessment activities in particular, students perception towards CA, lack of intrinsic motivation and negative attitude toward the use of self and peer assessment in CESC. The teachers also expressed their observations that the students' poor self-initiative and self-reliance, lack of self-evaluation and goal setting practices were challenging the teacher to properly implement CA techniques and thereby, effectively assess their students in CESC.

On top of others, students' lesser consideration for CA challenged the teachers to properly implement the assessment techniques. The teachers also complained that the students considered CA as it is usually given to support their grades, not to assess their knowledge, attitudes and skills. For instance, the teachers confirmed that students did not worry about the result of their CAs; they were usually preparing themselves for SA. To this end, they often review previous examination items to score good result in SA. Moreover, the students gave lesser attention to listening, writing and speaking skills than others even during the time of CA.

Students' language deficiency was also a critical challenge to implement CA in the course. Although CESC requires different alternative assessment techniques, the teachers asserted that they could not use peer-teaching, classroom works, home works and other collaborative activities to assess the students for the students' language deficiency and cheating. This is because the teachers complained that students were unable to use English language during the listening and speaking classes; rather, they use their mother tongue. As a result, they do not want to work with the students who cannot use their respective language. The teachers were also challenged by the students' cheating to give activities as homework or group works to assess their students' ability because the students did not do it for themselves; unexpectedly, they usually give it to other person or a better student they think among themselves to do it for them. Hence, the teachers think that considering 60% of the students' grade from CA results is giving free grade for many students because they do not perform it. For this reason, implementing proper CA itself in the course is the most critical challenge for the teachers.

Continuous assessment in CESC was also challenged by teacher characters. The teachers failed to design comprehensive assessment and administer CA in the course. They were also ineffective to manage the interest and character of students. Besides, they were unsuccessful in managing scarce resources they need to carry out continuous assessment. Moreover, inefficient teachers' activities in selecting and designing additional relevant, authentic teaching and assessment materials have challenged the implementation of the continuous assessment in the course. Furthermore, teachers' previous working culture, poor pedagogical skills, poor classroom English, low commitment and interest as well as teachers' improper perception towards the role CA in CESC challenged the continuous assessments. Moreover, teachers' failure to manage the complex components and the demanding activities of CESC were identified as a challenge of the continuous assessments.

To sum up, the gathered and analyzed data showed that inverse relationship between the practices of the teachers and the students with the challenges they faced in implementing CA in the course as well as in each components of the course. The grand mean 2.69 for the practices CA and the grand mean 4.52 computed for the challenges the respondents faced indicate that as the challenges become higher and higher, the practices of the teachers and the students become more limited to some language domains only. For example, the challenges in implementing CA in the three language domains such as writing (29.7%), listening (29.2%) and speaking (24.8) in other language domains; as a result, the activities of the teachers and the students in these three language domains were lesser, for instance, in listening (3.9%), speaking (4.3%) and in writing skills (8.2) than in reading (30.4), grammar (27.6%) and vocabulary (24.3%).

Conclusions

Based on the analysis and discussion made so far, the following four fundamental conclusions were made.

1. Al most half, 15 (46.2%) of EFL teachers did not employ continuous assessment in the course in general. Moreover, there is no doubt that they totally ignored the use of CA in listening, speaking and writing skills. However, they sometimes use CA in reading, grammar and vocabulary.

2. This inefficient practice of the teachers' continuous assessment was resulted from their and their students' improper perceptions and attitudes towards practicality, validity and measurability of continuous assessment in such an integrated communicative English skills course.

3. A mismatch between how to teach and how to assess has also been identified in the course. For instance, the modules of the course was designed based on the principles of communicative English skills course, but the teachers assessments were dominated by traditional grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension throughout the items.

MOTUMA HIRPASSA MINDA

4. There were challenges which created the mismatch between how to teach and how to assess in the course. The dominant challenges that confronted the teachers and the students in using CA strategies and tools include the complex nature of the course, resource constraints and demanding activities of CA, ineffective teachers' performance, students-character improper perception of teachers, and students towards CA

Recommendations

Based on the results made so far, the following three basic recommendations were forwarded.

1. Embarking on the insufficient and ineffective, Department of English Language and Literature, College of Social Science and Humanities, as well as, Ambo University should work together to give necessary awareness raising trainings and workshops on the importance of continuous assessment, on how to handle the course and how to implement a variety of continuous assessment tools appropriately in the course, and thereby, to alter the teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes continuous assessment techniques

2. Particularly, EFL teachers are expected to up-date and equip themselves with these skills through self-training and conducting action research or problem-solving studies.

3. In order to assess what they have to assess, teachers should develop a guideline and assessment specification to carefully design relevant, authentic, proportionate and comprehensive CA in very clear and precise terms to align the assessment strategies to the teaching-learning strategies in the course.

4. Ambo University, College of Social Science and Humanities and Department of English Language and Literature should revise its assessment policy, guideline**,** rules and regulations in the legislation to reduce the CAs' lions' share from 60% to about 30% to 40% to determine the status of students' grade and to increase the status of SA to maximize the credibility of students' grade.

5. All the concerned bodies including Ministry of Education, University managements, College Deans, Heads of Departments and teachers need to work together to minimize large class size for English language teaching, furnish the language laboratory and provide reference materials so that EFL teachers and students can fulfill all the necessary requirements of CA in all language domains including writing and listening skills in the course.

6. EFL instructors and other course instructors need to work together to set plan or programs to reduce the loads and overlapping that might be happened during assessments in order to overcome the tensions students may face because of the overlapping of assessment activities.

Acknowledgement

References

Adeoye, F.A. and Okpala, P.N. (2005). *Impact of systematic assessment procedure on physics achievement at the cognitive of knowledge*꞉ A paper presented at IAEA 31st Conference, Abuja, Nigeria.

Alemu, H. (2009). Ill-designed Reading Activities: The Case of a Unit in Grade 11 English Textbook, *The Ethiopian Journal of Education,* no: 2, Vol. XXIX,

Ambachew M. D. (2003). *A Review of the Ethiopian Related Literature on Reading Ability*, University of Pretoria ltd. Pp. 83-93

Banta, T. W., & Palomba, C. A. (2015). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

MOTUMA HIRPASSA MINDA

Banta, T.W., Jones, E.A. and Black, K.E. (2009). *Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice.* USA:JOSSEY-BASS

Benzehaf, B. (2017)*. Exploring Teachers' Assessment Practices and Skills, International Journal of Assessment Tools in Education*: 4 (1)1-18

Brown, H.D. (2004). *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*. Longman.

Brown, J. D. (2012). Choosing the right type of assessment, In C. Coombe, S. J. Stoynoff, P. Davidson, & B. O'Sullivan (Eds.), The Cambridge guide to language assessment (pp. 133-139). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Burger, M, (2008). The Alignment of Teaching, Learning and Assessment in English language in grade 10 in district 9, Johannesburg (master thesis), University of South Africa

Burkaitien, N. and Margarita T. (2008). Integrating alternative learning and assessment in a course of English for law students, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Academic Journal of Research and Development,* 33(2)155–166

Cheng, L., Watanabe, Y., & Curtis, A. (Eds). (2004). *Washback In Language Tteting: Research Contexts and Methods.* London: LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, Publishers.

Chinda, B. (2013).Teachers' Reactions Towards Performance-based Language Assessment, Chiang

Chirimbu, S. (2013). Using Alternative Assessment Methods in Foreign Language Teaching. Case Study: *Alternative Assessment of Business English for University Students Scientific Bulletin of the Polytechnic University of Timisoara* , ansactions on Modern Languages, 12 (2) 1-2.

Coombe, C. & Hubley, N. (2011). Fundamentals of Language Assessment Manual. Retrieved on 25th Nov. 2011 from http://

Cresswell, J. W. (2014). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (4 th edition). California: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design (4th ed.).* University of Nebraska-Lincon: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publication.

Davies, A. (2008). *Assessing Academic English: Testing English proficiency 1950–1989: The IELTS solution*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press and Cambridge ESOL.

Davies, A. (2012). Kane, validity and soundness. *Language Testing*, *29*(1), 37–42.

Davies, A. (2013). Fifty years of language assessment*,* In Antony Kunnan (ed.), *The Companion to Language Assessment*, 11(1) 1-18, John Wiley & Sons Inc, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, Retrieved on 28-Oct-2017 from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.

Desalegn Ch..(2004). Continuous Assessment in Lower Cycle Primary Schools. *IER Flambeau*, 12(1), 1-30.

Fives, H. & Nicole, D., (2013). Classroom Test Construction: The Power of a Table of Specifications. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 18(3)

Gattullo, F. (2010). *Formative Assessment in ELT Primary (Elementary) Classrooms: An Italian Case Study*. Retrieved January 8, 2011 from http://ltj.sagepub.com/content/17/2/278

Heritage, M. (2011)*. Formative assessment: An enabler of learning. Journal on Better: Evidence-based Education,(3),18-19.*

Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for Language Teachers (2nd ed.).* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Iyer, S. (2015). Impact of Washback in English as Second Language Classrooms – An

Investigation. *ELT Voices- International Journal for Teachers of English Volume (5), Issue (3)*, 88-91.

Jabbarifar, T. (2009). The Importance of Classroom Assessment and Evaluation in Educational System. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of Teaching and Learning*, 2-4.

Janisch, C., Liu, X. and Akrofi. A. (2007). Implementing Alternative Assessment: Opportunities and Obstacles, *The Educational Forum,* 71(1) 221: http://www.erc.ed.gov

Kapambwe, W. (2010). The implementation of school based continuous assessment in Zambia. Educational Research and Reviews, vol. 5(3) 99-107.

Marrow, Ch. K. (2018). Communicative Language Testing, *The TESOL Encyclopaedia of English Language Teaching,* Print ISBN: 9781118784228| Online

Ministry of Education (MOE). (1994). Ethiopian education and training Policy, Transitional Government of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Ministry of Education (MOE). (2004). Guideline for Quality Education, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Ministry of Education (MOE). (2017). Higher Education Inspective Evaluation Result Feedback Report Presented to Ambo University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Motuma, H. (2017). Alignmet of Primery school complition examinition with the textbook:2006-2009 infocuse, *Unpublished*.

Motuma, H. (2015).The Changing Role of the University TEFL Teacher in Improving the Students Communicative English Skill: From Passive Technician to Reflective Practitioner; Journal of Science and Sustainable Development (JSSD), 2015, 3(1), 133-155.

Motuma, H. (2014). An assessment of the Students' Reading Ability in Higher Institutions: The Case of Asela College of Teacher Education.

Journal of Science and Sustainable Development (JSSD), (1). 2. Pp.76-95.

Nunan, D. (2009). Introduction to Task-based Teaching. Singapore; Cengage Learning

Okeeffe, L. (2013). A Framework for Textbook Analysis, International Journal Review of Contemporary Learning Research, 2(1)1-13

Piper, B.(2010). Ethiopian Early Grade Reading Assessment, *Data Analysis Report: Language and Learning*. Ed Data II, Task order 7&9, USAID/Ethiopia.

Plessis, J. et al. (2003). *Continuous Assessment: A Practical Guide for Teachers*. USAID. Retrieved December 24, 2010, from http://www.equip123.net/equip1/mesa/docs/CA_Practical_Guide_Teachers.pdf.

Puppin, L. (2007). A Paradigm Shift: From Paper-and-Pencil Tests to Performance-Based Assessment: *English Teaching Forum*, B RAZIL, nv(4), 10-17, 07-0004 ETF_10_17.indd 10

Sastre, E.B. (2011). *What is continuous Assessment?* Retrieved February 7, 2011 from http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_continuous_Assessment

Sethusha, M. J (.2012). "An Investigation of the Challenges Affecting Teachers' Classroom Assessment Practices" (Doctoral Dissertation) University of South Africa Supervisor.

Shannon, S. E. Hsieh. H. (2005). *Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis*, Qualitative Health Research, 15(9), 1277-1287, Sage Publications

Shannon-Baker, P. (2016). Making Paradigms Meaningful in Mixed Methods Research *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 10(4) 319–334.

Shrestha, P. (2014). Alternative Assessment Approaches in Primary English Language Classrooms, *Journal of NELTA*, Vol. 18, No. 1-2 (148-163), jornalinner.pmd

United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (2010). Improving Quality Education Program (IQPEP): Continuous Assessment and How to use it: *Teachers Handout*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3. Pp.15 26-86.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (2011). Proceedings on National Workshop on Quality Education and Future Directions to Ethiopia. A.A, Ethiopia, PP,26-86..

Wei, L. (2010). Formative Assessment: Opportunities and Challenges ISSN 1798-4769 *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 1, No. 6, pp. 838-841.

Weir, C. J. (2005). *Language Testing and Validation.* Palgrave Macmillan: Martin's Press,.

Wood, J. (2011). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and communication strategies (CSs): Theory and practice, *Modern Language Journal*, 83(4)495-517.

Woodrow, L. (2005). The challenge of measuring language learning strategies. *Foreign Language Annals,* 38(1), 90-98. www.christinecoombe.com

Yorke, M. (2003). Formative Assessment in Higher Education: Moves towards Theory and the Enhancement of Pedagogic Practice. *Higher Education***,** 45 (4), 477-501.

MOTUMA HIRPASSA MINDA