Original Paper

Assessment Practices of Albanian & Italian Teachers in English Classrooms

Dr. Emilda Roseni[1*] & Dr. Alnida (Shano) Koroshi[2]

[1] Department of Foreign Languages, Aleksandër Moisiu University, Durrës, Albania

[2] Department of Italian Language, University of Tirana, Albania

[*] Emilda Roseni, Department of Foreign Languages, Aleksandër Moisiu University, Durrës, Albania

Abstract

Language assessment policies in Albania and Italy have impact on assessment practices of English teachers. This study describes Albanian and Italian secondary school English teachers' classroom assessment practices in ELL classes. It was conducted using qualitative method design with 48 secondary school English teachers as respondents, practically 24 from Albania and 24 from Italy who participated in an interview and observation to clarify their practices on classroom assessment. The study found that secondary school English teachers in both countries Albania and Italy used assessment for learning as the main purpose of assessment. The majority of secondary school English teachers in Italy prepared and made their own assessment, while secondary school English teachers in Albania used items from published textbooks as their primary sources for constructing assessment items. English teachers of both countries used written comments for providing feedback. Total score test and a letter grade were the highest percentage methods for providing summative assessment for both secondary school English teachers in Albania and Italy.

Keywords

assessment, practice, Albania, Italy, English teacher

1. Introduction

Classroom assessment importance in both countries Albania and Italy has been increasingly recognized since the newest concept of curriculum that places students at the limelight.

The educators of both countries realize that classroom assessment should be viewed as a process rather than as a product in which assessment purpose is not only a matter of getting the students' score and determining whether they pass the requirements or not but it is more on how to know the students'

progress in learning and mediating them to get success in learning. This approach is in accordance with Black and Wiliam's (1998) statement in which they said that educators are forbidden to see a classroom as a black box where certain inputs, pupils, teachers, other resources, management rules and requirements, parental anxieties, standards, tests with high stakes, and so on, from the outside are fed into the box.

Educators must understand state Weegar and Pacis (2012) that a classroom is a place for the students to construct knowledge through critical thinking, primary resources, and hands-on activities. Furthermore, Stiggins (2002) also reflects a similar perspective where he suggests that educators replace their assessment of learning with a balanced approach, using both assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. That is, teachers should use assessment not only to actively and continuously measure a learner's progress but also to acquire useful data to inform their own instructional practice. More recently, assessment discourse has shifted to assessment as learning that identifies feedback to students as being central to the teaching and learning process.

Classroom assessment practices have brought a lot of changes in the way educators perceive it, especially in the Albania and Italy.

Despite the state regulation, not all of the English teachers in Albania and Italy are totally aware in the application of right practices concerning classroom assessment in their English Language classes; because these students come from very different backgrounds and often face multiple challenges in the classroom. To complicate matters further, teachers lack practical, research-based information, resources, and strategies needed to access ELL students. Other challenges included the lack of tools to teach ELL students as well as appropriate assessments to diagnose student needs and measure student learning.

This study explored on how English teachers in Albania and Italy practice their classroom assessment in English language classes. It was specifically focused on knowing their purpose, methods and procedures.

2. Method

Levitt et al. (2017) states that every research must involve a systematic approach to find out most appropriate results. He considers qualitative research as inductive in nature, and the researcher generally explores meanings and insights in a given situation, in our case classroom assessment practices. The same perspective is faced by Creswell (2009) views who emphasis that this method describes an effective model which occurs in a natural setting and enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences. Taking into consideration researchers thoughts, the authors of this paper decided to conduct 48 interviews with practically 24 Albanian and 24 Italian teachers to explore the practices of classroom assessment in their English classrooms through interviews and observations in order to meet the requirements of the study. Our research was conducted in Tirana (Albania) and Verona (Italy) and the participants were taken from seven secondary schools of Tirana district and 5 secondary schools of Verona district with approximately 48 teachers altogether.

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Furthermore, all interviews basically followed the same format and questions prepared prior to the interview and non-participant observation was used.

3. Result

3.1 Classroom Assessment Practice

Qualitative findings through interviews indicated that both Albanian and Italian English teachers' purposes more mainly focused on classroom assessment for learning. Some of the Albanian English teachers believe that assessment helped them to recognize the students' progress in learning:

✓ *" the main function of assessment is to know the progress of my students and check their understanding (Albanian teacher 3, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

✓ *"My main purpose of conducting classroom assessment is to know my students progress in learning, so that I can measure how well they absorb the material that has been delivering" (Albanian teacher 10, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

✓ *"For me, with assessment I can recognize my students' progress in understanding the material that I gave to them:".(Albanian teacher 17, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

Similarly, Italian English teachers also believe that classroom assessment could help them
identify their students' strength and weaknesses in learning:

✓ *"the function of assessment is to help me in recognizing my students strength and weaknesses, so that I can know how to give a treatment" (Italian teacher 2, Interview, May 27, 2019).*

✓ *"from the assessment given, I know the weakness of my students in observing the lesson"*
(Italian teacher 22, Interview, May 27, 2019).

The observation results show that when teachers assess for learning, they use the classroom assessment process that provides complete information of students learning.

Teachers also used classroom assessment for learning to build learner confidence in them as learners and help them take responsibility of their learning so as to lay a foundation for life learning. These findings show that classroom assessment for learning should be used by the teachers at all times since students benefit from the teaching practice such as: allow teachers to adapt instruction based on results, making modifications and improvements that will produce immediate benefits for the students' learning, give students evidence of their current progress to actively manage and adjust their own learning.

This also provides students the ability to track their educational goals, and give teachers the ability to provide constant feedback to students. This allows students become part of the learning environment and develop self-assessment strategies that will help them understand of their own thought process.

3.2 Sources of Assessment Items and Tasks

The interview results showed that Albanian and Italian English teachers used some resources to develop their assessment task. Majority of Albanian and Italian English teachers prepared test items and other assessment procedures by themselves.

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✓   *"I construct my own assessment in order to know my students' understanding" (Italian teacher 1, Interview, May 27, 2019).*

✓   *"The assessments are made by myself and I adjust it with my students competence" (Albanian teacher 14, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

They also always worked collaboratively with other teachers or the previous teacher that handled the same grade level to prepare assessment. They believe that working collaboratively and asking their fellow teachers will help them in preparing an appropriate assessment for their students.

✓   *"I ask others teachers when I want to make assessment or I ask the teachers who taught before"(Italian teacher 7, Interview, May 27, 2019).*

✓   *"I do it collaboratively with other teachers to get some inputs and I always asked my friend who taught that class before" (Albanian teacher 3, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

✓   *"Making and working collaboratively with my friends to prepare assessment will help me much, I can get some valuable inputs from them to produce a good assessment" (Albanian teacher 4, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

Internet and published textbooks are the source of Albanian and Italian English teachers in preparing the assessment. They believe that sources can help them to guarantee the quality of assessment they prepare:

✓   *"When I want to make assessment, I usually search from the internet and other sources" (Albanian teacher 5, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

✓   *"I want to integrate technology for my assessment, so I just ask my students to search some suitable assessment and they do it by themselves" (Italian teacher 16, Interview, May 27, 2019).*

✓   *"I pick some of the items from published textbooks and also from websites" (Albanian teacher 5, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

One of the keys to successful learning and teaching is that carefully designed assessment tasks allow students to demonstrate achievement of clearly communicated learning outcomes. Teacher education programs and professional development experiences are asked to be essential for providing teachers with contemporary knowledge about learning and assessment, especially the knowledge and skills needed to develop assessment tasks. Moreover, to establish the validity and reliability of the assessments, teachers should conduct necessary scientific research and carries out intensive research of matching the individual test items to curriculum. Thus, the resources available to teachers enable the production of a high-quality assessment which teachers can quickly integrate into their daily classroom activities.

3.3 Methods for Providing Feedback

The interview results also reflect a finding that Albanian and Italian English teachers always gave feedback to their students after giving assessment. They like to use verbal feedback in order to make their students know their strength and weaknesses:

✓   *"I give them feedback directly by telling them their mistakes" (Albanian teacher 8, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

✓   *"In giving a feedback, I always do it orally to show them whether they are correct or not" (Italian teacher 18, Interview, May 29, 2019).*

✓   *"In speaking class, for example, after they conduct a dialogue or role playing, I always give oral feedback , so that they can learn from it" (Italian teacher 22, Interview, May 29, 2019).*

Some of them also do a conference with the students after correcting the students work, they believe that by doing a conference with students they will learn and know their mistakes:

✓   *"After I correct their work, I give my assessment back to the students and discuss it together in the class" (Albanian teacher 15, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

✓   *"I always discuss the test result with the students in the class to help them know the correct and wrong answers and it will help them to learn from their mistakes" (Italian teacher 4, Interview, May 29, 2019).*

Findings of this research indicate that both Albanian and Italian English teachers have been manifesting a good practice of providing feedback. Numerous studies during support feedback's ability to correct inaccurate information. In addition to this, Anderson and his colleagues (1971) not only provided insight into the importance of the learner's processing of the lesson material before his or her response to a question, but also, and perhaps more importantly, provided indication that feedback functions primarily to correct errors, not merely to "reinforce" correct answers. Clarke (2003) claimed that the role of feedback is clearly a topic of importance because of the growing evidence that it can enhance student learning.

3.4 Method of Providing Information for the Summative Assessment

In keeping with their focus on classroom assessments, both Albanian and Italian teachers in English classrooms believed in the power of scoring in motivating students to learn. They gave a grade to their students and the following comments:

✓   *"I always check my students assessment and give them a grade and also some comments on it"(Albanian teacher, Interview, September 20, 2019).*

✓   *"I return the assessment and give it score also comments on their work" (Italian teacher, Interview, May 29, 2019).*

Classroom observation showed that Albanian and Italian English teachers also prepared a list of grades for final report for the school principal to sign before each homeroom teacher would the grades into the students' report books. The sheet contained a compilation of all students' scores covering four main sections: these are the average score from adding classroom assessments, the scores from teacher tests, the mid-term test and the semester test. In order to reduce these into one final score, schools utilized a particular averaging formula which might differ from one school to another in terms of priority. Some schools might accentuate teacher test and others focus more on the semester test.

In line with these findings, classroom-level reports make teachers aware to see how a group of students

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perform across the curriculum. Even if a group of students have moved on to the next grade by the time the score reports were available, teachers could examine class-level results as a source of information for revising curriculum and instruction for the next class.

Grading also can be a primary used of assessment data for providing summative assessment. For example, if a school's performance on a state assessment indicates high percentages of students who do not meet standards in writing, then the school could collect more information on its writing curricula, student writing performance (through portfolios or other classroom work), and professional development needs for its teachers. After collecting such information, the school may then review and adopt new writing curricula as well as provide professional development to its teachers in order to support stronger student achievement in writing. Stiggins, RJ., (2002) states that ongoing evaluation of the writing program would be conducted through the use of formative and summative assessment.

In brief, when classroom assessments practices are aligned, they can inform the instructional process and support both the daily instructional practices of teachers as well as the longer-term planning of curricula and instruction.

4. Discussion

The conclusion of the study is that both Albanian and Italian Secondary school English Teachers have similar preferences on classroom assessment purpose with assessment for learning as the first preference. It was then followed by the classroom assessment of learning. And the last purpose was classroom assessment as learning. Moreover, Internet and published textbooks became the source of Albanian and Italian Secondary school English teachers in making the assessments. Verbal feedback and conference with students were two most popular methods used in giving feedback for both Albanian and Italian Secondary school English teachers.

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