

## Classroom-based Language Assessment

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### Abstract

Classroom-based language assessment is at the core of language teaching and acquisition because of the benefits of such assessment throughout the learning and teaching process. This essay aims to support that classroom-based assessment plays an essential role in language learning and teaching. This is based on a discussion of three general aspects: teachers, feedback and assessment frameworks and qualities. This paper begins with a discussion of teachers' roles, cognition, attitudes, assessment knowledge and capabilities. Then, this essay will discuss assessment frameworks and qualities, such as reliability and validity. Lastly, the role of feedback and how comments impact students and teachers will be discussed.

### Keywords

Classroom-based language assessment; The framework of classroom-based language assessment; Teachers' feedback and comments.

### 1. The Features, Cognitions, Attitudes and Qualities of Teachers

Classroom-based assessment is regarded as a formative assessment for learning, and it provides information for teachers to revise teaching strategies and give quality feedback to students. Also, the classroom-based assessment helps students understand what they have mastered, what they need to improve, and how they can meet their learning goals. Therefore, the philosophy of classroom-based language assessment is to encourage learning and motivate students.

With the assessment development in the area of education, teachers play a crucial role in classroom-based language assessment practice, which should be acknowledged. According to Rea-Dickins (2008), teachers as facilitators and assessors are inseparable during the classroom assessment process. This is because they are responsible for improving and monitoring learning development among students, conducting assessment procedures, and informing students' achievement and progress. Teachers collect information from formal assessments or informal everyday observations to know about their students and then make subsequent determinations on language teaching pedagogy adjustment. Rea-Dickins (2008) pointed out that teachers made decisions on assessing and recording students' performance in language learning consecutively.

Also, the variability in the implementation of assessment is influenced by teachers' cognition, attitudes, assessment knowledge and capabilities. More specifically, teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the assessment process and the prediction of language learners' performance differ. Yin (2010) clarified that the assessment cognitions, including strategic cognitions and interactive cognitions, could be used to understand the thinking processes behind the decision-making of planning and implementation of assessment procedures. Teachers tend to focus on different aspects of assessment. For instance, Canadian teachers paid more attention to how assessment purposes parallel with students' needs, while teachers from Hong Kong were concerned with the validity and reliability of assessment (Cheng & Wang, 2007).

During the classroom-based assessment process, one primary problem is that some teachers do not have enough professional abilities as they lack assessment knowledge. Teachers' assessment capacity can influence assessment activities. In the study of Cheng and Wang (2007), the researchers revealed that some Chinese teachers did not demonstrate expertise in using different types of marking criteria. Hence, they usually use holistic scoring, a general scoring scheme, to assess their students. Thus, teachers with professional knowledge and technical skills are required, as the classroom-based assessment becomes more specialized and skilled. Based on that, three suggestions are listed below.

Firstly, teachers could conduct action research. This investigation may offer detailed practical evidence for teachers regarding what teachers need to know and do when they implement a classroom-based language assessment. Stoyhoff (2012) suggested that the results of survey research should combine with other empirical evidence of the effect of teacher disposition when the results are applied to an assessment process.

Secondly, peer coaching, self-improvement, discussion meetings, and the external source of stimulus could develop teachers' capabilities and enhance their professional knowledge about classroom-based language assessment. Cumming (2009) mentioned that a large amount of language assessment textbooks and specialized scholarly journals, such as *Language Testing* and *Language Assessment Quarterly*, are valuable and available resources for expanding the depth and range of specialized knowledge. Also, Stoyhoff (2012) advised that training opportunities in language assessment should be provided for professional development during a teacher preparation program.

Thirdly, teachers should be self-aware, self-monitor their assessment practices, share their reflections with colleagues for the salient outcomes, and then determine whether the assessment process benefits language learning and teaching strategies. Bachman (2000) identified that after teachers had different and sufficient assessing experiences and practices, their evaluating skills in students' language performance and learning difficulties would improve.

Therefore, all these factors regarding teachers should be taken into account for effective and fair implementation of classroom-based language assessment.

## 2. Assessment Frameworks and Qualities

Stoyhoff (2012) pointed out that "assessment frameworks can guide teachers in organizing the assessment process". An appropriate assessment framework enables teachers well combine it with language learning. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) and the TESOL Standards (TESOL, 1998) are the most commonly used language assessment framework in the global context. However, simply applying these frameworks to classroom-based language assessment is inappropriate. This is because the classroom consideration is a more complex process, and it is a more dynamic context (Rea-Dickens, 2008). Thus, directly employing the traditional validity criteria in all different classroom assessment practices could be questioned (Teasdale & Leung, 2000). With the development of worldwide language assessment frameworks, different institutions, schools, and agencies have made their benchmarks and localized assessment frameworks for evaluating their local populations and programs (Cumming, 2009).

Meanwhile, teachers should use specific assessment frameworks in line with the assessment purpose, learner's learning goals and course objectives to effectively use assessments in their classroom. Learning-oriented assessment frameworks based on theories or research of SLA and language testing could be employed (Purpura, 2004). For example, task-based assessment and construct-based assessment, as a framework and approach, could be taken into account when designing a good language assessment (Bachman, 2000). Students' performances could be

evaluated with detailed assessment criteria, such as specific skills and knowledge. Dynamic assessment, another instance, is a theory-based framework on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which also integrates learning into classroom assessment (Stoynoff, 2012).

In terms of classroom-based assessment qualities, it should not be neglected since it is another critical factor that needs to be considered. Nonetheless, some teachers were not clear on making classroom-based assessments reliable and valid, and they were confused about what standards stand for reliability and validity (Stoynoff, 2012). Reliability and validity are the most fundamental qualities of assessment. Apart from these two basic features, other necessary qualities were listed by different scholars. For example, Carroll (1991) suggested that a good assessment should be relevant, comparable, acceptable and economical. However, to determine the usefulness of a language assessment, the most widely accepted five essential qualities are reliability, validity, practicality, authenticity and washback (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Teachers could use different methods to increase reliability and validity in classroom-based language assessment. For example, incorporating research results regarding validity and reliability of language assessment into classroom assessment will provide a solid foundation for developing a valid classroom-based language assessment; also, it makes sure the content of the assessment is in accordance with what students are learning; moreover, training teachers in design and the use of assessment could improve score reliability. Therefore, developing and using a specific and suitable assessment framework with essential features in classroom-based assessment is needed.

### 3. Feedback and Comments

Feedback and comments become increasingly significant in classroom-based assessment procedures. During this process, feedback and comments could assist teachers in modifying teaching strategies and then promoting learning. This is because the outcomes of language assessments have consequences for students and teachers (Cheng & Wang, 2007). Again, classroom-based language assessment is an ongoing learning-oriented assessment process. Hence, feedback and comments not only provide essential information for students about their learning and using the target language in the classroom but also offer teachers better-knowing students' language learning progress at different learning stages.

Indeed, with the feedback and comments, students can clearly recognise their shortcomings and advantages, and teachers could have a helpful resource to plan further courses. Hence, teachers are responsible for monitoring the effects of assessment and ensuring students can obtain positive and negative consequences, which means students could know what they have understood and need to put more effort into it (Purpura, 2004).

However, not all feedback could helpfully improve learning. For example, if grades are without any comments, grades are just used to know whether students pass or fail or compare with their classmates. A single score cannot offer students enough information about where they need to put more work and how to improve (Purpura, 2004). Also, if the comments are implicit and brief, students will not pay too much attention to their learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers should avoid vague and simple comments. Black et al. (2003) examined which type of feedback is the most useful for facilitating language learning in the classroom. There were three groups in this study: the group with grades only, the comments only group, and the group with grades and comments. It was found that the most improved students were in the comments-only group with clear and detailed comments. Researchers concluded that written feedback should be explicit rather than ambiguous, and it should not focus on the grading of performance. Besides, this was also supported by Cheng and Wang (2007). They found that assessment consequences could be more valuable and practical than a simple letter or number.

Moreover, teachers should inform students of learning objectives and syllabus to make them better comprehend comments and use them in their learning. Harlan and Winter (2004) specified that learners could get meaningful guidance on what they should do next with clear learning intentions and explicit feedback. Also, this could motivate autonomous learning and promote students' responsibilities for their studies. If learners realize the future plan for learning, feedback could be a more constrictive guidance for themselves (Purpura, 2004).

In addition, teachers should use a rubric scoring and inform students before receiving feedback. Thus, the assessment process could be fairer, more transparent and more trustworthy. According to Cheng and Wang (2007), "informed their students of the scoring criteria before they assessed them, could increase the transparency of the assessment criteria and learning expectations". Also, students could make a comparison between their work and the criteria. It is a better way to develop independent learning because students could fully understand the gap between what they have mastered and what they should take more time to explore with the rubric. Purpura (2004) clarified that rubric scoring could give students more information about the criteria feedback and make them aware of how they were assessed.

As for teachers, they could effectively notice learning outcomes among different students. Cheng and Wang (2007) compared three types of marking criteria which are analytical scoring, holistic scoring and rubric scoring. They specified that rubric scoring was effective to use in the class and easy to understand for students and teachers, whereas "analytical scoring was time-consuming or difficult for students to understand and holistic scoring was too subjective".

Furthermore, teachers should combine peer feedback and self-feedback in the final feedback. Thus, students could engage in the assessment procedure, help each other, and progress together. However, only a few teachers use peer evaluation to complement teachers' comments (Cheng & Wang, 2007). It seems that classroom-based assessment is done without students' engagement. Rea-Dickins (2008) mentioned that outstanding students absorb more peer feedback than teachers' feedback. Hence, involving students in classroom-based assessment could make assessment done with them. This not only gives students a sense of engagement but also promotes their learning efficiency. As for teachers, with the information of peer assessment and students' self-assessment, they could get a more detailed and valued assessment outcome.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay has discussed three critical aspects of classroom-based assessment to present the significant role of classroom assessment practice. However, some issues in the classroom-based assessment were found during the discussion. For example, some teachers do not have enough knowledge about classroom-based assessment and are not qualified in the assessment procedure. Correspondingly, suggestions and advice are provided by combining literature with the author's learning experience. For example, to help language teachers be better qualified in assessment, suggestions about peer coaching, self-improvement, discussion meetings and the external source of the stimulus are offered. By examining such assessments, a better understanding of the impact of classroom-based assessment on teaching and learning could be gained. Classroom-based language assessment "takes us, as teachers, closer to the learning of learners and makes us think more clearly about the purposes of classroom assessment and how it can be made the 'partner' of learning rather than, as we can sometimes feel, the driver of what we do" (Harlan & Winter, 2004).

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