

Alignment of English as a foreign language teachers' understanding of classroom assessment practices

Ida Ayu Made Sri Widiastuti¹, Katie Weir², Heru Sukoco³, Gunadi Harry Sulisty⁴

¹Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Teacher and Training, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Denpasar, Indonesia

²School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University, Nathan, Australia

³Department of Computer Science, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Institut Pertanian Bogor University, Bogor, Indonesia

⁴Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive understanding of classroom assessment is essential for improving students' learning and teachers' professionalism. This study was conducted to gain better information about teachers' understanding of classroom assessment compared to their classroom practices. Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were employed to collect the data. The collected data were then analyzed comprehensively using comparative and argumentative methods. The results were then presented descriptively to establish the findings. The findings showed that some teachers' classroom assessment practices were consistent with their assessment understanding, while others were inconsistent. The findings suggest that different contextual factors may influence teachers' classroom practices. Furthermore, English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers need to be re-trained on comprehending the influencing contextual factors to utilize their understanding of assessment in the classroom effectively.

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Corresponding Author:

Ida Ayu Made Sri Widiastuti

Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Teacher and Training,

Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar

Jl. Kamboja No 11A, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

Email: idaayuwidia@unmas.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom assessment is an integral part of teaching that enhances, empowers, and celebrates student learning [1]. Conducting appropriate classroom assessments is essential in any instruction to achieve educational objectives. Regarding education objectives in Indonesia, conducting classroom assessments is vividly important because all teachers must report for their students' learning conditions. Class assessments are generally carried out through a series of steps consisting of gathering, synthesizing, and interpreting information to assist in decision-making in class. Research by Box, Skoog, and Dabbs [2] highlighted the need to improve teachers' ability to carry out classroom assessments. It will help teachers develop their competencies in making decisions about class management, instruction, and student learning, including doing appropriate instructional planning.

In conducting classroom assessment, teachers must be able to determine the type or format of assessment precisely, establish goals for assessment, set assessment tasks, assess performance and provide feedback, and monitor student learning outcomes. The ability of these teachers is vital so that the assessment objectives can be fully achieved [3]. The achievement of assessment naturally influences the conditions of learning in the classroom. This is in line with a study conducted by Alkharusi [4] which emphasized that

effective classroom assessment allows teachers to make decisions about the quality of teaching and the student's progress. Consequently, teachers must have a high understanding of classroom assessment implementation to achieve the assessment object. So, the teachers have to conduct the assessment according to their understanding [5].

The increasing need for understanding how assessment should be carried out in the classroom has attracted educators and researchers to conduct studies on classroom assessments. Research by Hill [1] classroom assessment refers to assessments of student learning carried out in classroom settings to enable teachers to provide a better way of learning and continually monitor students' progress, as opposed to testing external standards. This shows that classroom assessment tends to use teacher-made tests. Another more comprehensive view was put forward based on other study [6], which emphasized that class assessment should focus on classroom decision-making. A teacher must understand that formative and summative assessments have different goals, even though both can be given in class. Formative assessment aims to see how well students learn, while summative measures student achievement after the learning period. Summative assessment is considered more important for most teachers in Indonesia because of the teacher's need to write reports on student achievement to school stakeholders.

Several studies have examined the use of classroom assessment to improve teaching and learning and enhance students' learning achievement. Research by Karimi and Shafiee [7] found that classroom assessment helps students and teachers. Students can use classroom assessment information as a tool to improve learning. Conversely, teachers can use information from classroom assessment results to modify their teaching strategies to be more effective [8], [9]. Classroom assessment can also help teachers identify areas of student weakness in learning. Knowing students' learning problems helps teachers plan to learn programs that are better suited to students' needs so that students get predetermined competencies. This shows that classroom assessment makes teachers aware of the best teaching practices. Moreover, research by Volante [10] revealed that if classroom assessment is carried out correctly, it allows teachers to provide information about the students' learning and gives feedback to students who tend to improve. Through assessment the teacher can determine the objectives, learning processes and learning outcomes achieved [11].

The teacher's understanding of classroom assessment determines how the teacher views and practices classroom assessment [1], [9]. Their understanding also influences teachers' understanding of carrying out assessments. Therefore teacher understanding is an essential component of good assessment practices [12]. Teachers need to build a high understanding of classroom assessment. They must understand the concept of class assessment and how assessment should be done in class. Teachers may have a negative understanding of class assessment because they only have a poor understanding of it. Research by Karimi and Shafiee [7] found that teacher understanding exerts a powerful influence on the practice of classroom assessment in the right direction. Teachers with strong beliefs in classroom assessment will make more appropriate classroom assessments. This can be deduced from teachers' understanding of class assessment which is influenced by their understanding of the benefits of classroom assessment. Teachers' understanding considerably influences the assessment of appropriate practices [5].

Several researches also revealed that the teachers' understanding of classroom assessment practices is influenced by the assessments conducted by the teachers in the classroom assessment [1], [5], [10], [13]. The findings reveal significant differences in teacher assessment practices at different school levels. Moreover, research by Yahiji, Otaya, and Anwar [12] showed that teachers in other locations tend to employ different assessment strategies. These findings indicate that teachers have different views of the classroom based on their understanding and understanding of class assessment. This is also confirmed by a study conducted by Zhang and Burry-Stock [13] found that teachers have various competencies in conducting classroom assessments. Teachers faced problems in performance assessment, interpretation of standardized test results, and grading procedures.

Ideally, in assessing students, teachers are required to be a professional in conducting assessments based on the assessment policy or standard. The policy should be used as a reference in preparing and conducting the assessment to attain the real purpose of conducting the assessment in the classroom. Therefore, considering the previous studies, which were mainly conducted to see the classroom assessment practices in the general nature of assessment practices at schools. Unlike these studies, this present study is, however, intended to thoroughly study the alignment of teachers' understanding of the assessment of English as a foreign language (EFL) to practices of classroom assessment which is viewed from their different lengths of teaching experiences. This study is significant to be performed because previous preliminary studies conducted at several schools showed that Indonesian teachers make inappropriate language assessments. Therefore, exploring research in classroom assessment practices becomes highly important because it provides educators with empirical evidence to inform them about the right decision in conducting classroom assessments. This present study specifically aims at revealing the alignment of teachers' understanding and practices of classroom assessment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was carried out to explore each case of teachers' understanding and their practices in the English language classroom. This study was conducted to investigate selected cases. The cases are compared in-depth and are used to describe and interpret the situational existence of their cases from the same phenomenon through different perspectives [14]. A qualitative approach was used to reveal the alignment of teachers' understanding to how they practiced their understanding in the classroom. Through qualitative research, empirical knowledge of teachers' understanding and classroom assessment practices in EFL classes can then be adequately revealed as the findings of this study.

Some criteria were carried out in selecting the teachers as the participants for this study. These qualified certified EFL teachers with at least five years of teaching experience with a minimum of a bachelor's degree in English Education represent different intensive experiences in teaching English. Due to many teachers in Bali being eligible for the present study, computerized open questionnaires were distributed through computer systems. The teachers' profiles were then categorized accordingly. Finally, 15 English teachers at different high schools were determined to be the study participants. However, based on the selection criteria specification and to establish a thorough study, only three teachers were selected as the representative teachers. Therefore, these three teachers were chosen as the participants of this study. The selected participants were EFL high school teachers with significant differences in teaching experiences. They were from high, average, and low experiences. The objective of this study was to reveal the alignment of teachers' understanding and practices of classroom assessment.

This study used qualitative research design to collect the required data concerning the alignment of teachers' understanding and practices of classroom assessment. Several techniques were used to collect data, including semi-structured interviews, observation, and document studies. Semi-structured interviews were used in gathering data related to the alignment of teachers' understanding and practices of classroom assessment. There were three interviews conducted in this study. All the interviews were recorded using computer systems and appliances to ensure all data were well-stored and put according to the predetermined category. The first interview was intended to determine the understanding and practical theories about classroom assessment as well as how classroom assessment is conducted in the classroom. The second interview was related to the practice of the participants in the class regarding the results of the previous interview. This interview was conducted after class classroom observations. The third interview is to confirm the alignment of teachers' understanding and classroom assessment practices. During classroom observations, notes on classroom activities were also taken. All activities were recorded and transcribed to facilitate analysis. All the interviews were recorded using computer systems to ensure that all data were well-recorded and all data could be put into the right categories. Therefore, all data from all cases can be analyzed correctly.

The collected data were analyzed through interpretative analysis processes. First, the data collected from interviews were transcribed. Then the transcripts were checked to ensure all the required data were recorded correctly. Interview data and observation data were then coded and categorized using a specific way, reflecting their beliefs and understanding, which was then critically analyzed and presented descriptively. In analyzing the data, a detailed description of each interview result of teachers' understanding and observation results of classroom practices was made thoroughly. The interview transcripts were supplemented with data from the records at the observation time. The participants then checked the data from the transcripts to validate what they said.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

This study was conducted merely to align teachers' understanding and practices of classroom assessment. It is important because assessment is an integral part of language teaching. Moreover, assessment can reflect the learning outcomes well, and the teacher should know how to grade quality assessments. What things must be considered by teachers in conducting assessments, and how to assess learning according to the plan and target. Without the teacher recognizing and improperly using an assessment method, the results will not reflect the true state of the learning outcomes to be assessed. The assessment was the task of measuring student learning outcomes. Assessment is a way to assess students' level of ability by focusing on assessing students' understanding of the material being taught or finding out how well students had learned the lesson [9]. The data presented teachers' understanding are briefly discussed as:

“For me, classroom assessment must be done well because it helps me to improve my students' learning achievement and also to improve my teaching strategies to make my students more active in learning. It can be done through formative and summative assessments. It also allows us to see students' achievements, weaknesses, and strengths. Therefore, I think we should carry out

classroom assessments appropriately and make use of various assessment strategies. I always conduct the formative assessment at the end of the learning unit and summative assessment at the end of the semester.” (Teacher A)

“Classroom assessment must be done in every learning activity because it provides information about students' learning progress and achievement, weaknesses, and strengths in learning. The information then can be utilized for the improvement of learning activities. Formative assessment I conducted at the end of the learning unit and summative assessment every end of the semester.” (Teacher B)

“I always carry out classroom assessments properly. I always conduct formative assessments and summative assessments at the end of the semester. Both assessments are really important because it makes me know my students learning progress and I can use the information to modify my teaching strategy to suit my students learning condition.” (Teacher C)

Excerpts of the interview showed that Teacher A implements classroom assessment correctly because it helps him to improve his students' learning achievement. Teacher A also considers that classroom assessment allows him to see the weaknesses and strengths of his students. Therefore, he can modify teaching based on information from classroom assessments. Teacher A also understands that he must always carry out classroom assessments appropriately and utilize various assessment strategies.

The interviews show that Teacher B has a considerably good understanding of classroom assessment. His view of classroom assessment is undoubtedly positive, and he urges every teacher to conduct a classroom assessment in teaching English to find students' weaknesses and strengths in learning. The quote shows that Teacher C has a high understanding of classroom assessment in which he can see that classroom assessment can be used to measure students learning progress, students' learning strains and weaknesses. In addition, he also uses the results of classroom assessments to improve his teaching style to be more successful. It seems that he understands the principle of classroom assessment which is conducted in the form of formative and summative assessment.

3.1.1. Implementation of classroom assessment

The classroom observations indicated that teachers in this study implemented classroom assessments in various forms. A summative assessment is typically conducted at the end of the semester of the learning period, as the school principal usually schedules it. Formative assessment on the hands was conducted differently by the teachers.

Table 1 shows that all teachers implemented summative assessments. The test type and test content were utilized differently. Teacher A focused on the multiple-choice test, meanwhile, Teacher B used completion tests, and the Teacher C used more effective tests such as multiple-choice, completion, and essay. The test contents were differently focused on. Teacher A merely measured general knowledge and minorly measured the achievement of learning objectives. Teacher B mostly took the test from the textbook, meanwhile, Teacher C focused on measuring the achievement of the learning objectives. The summative assessment was also not strictly supervised by Teacher A, Teacher B moderately supervised the assessment administration, whereas Teacher C strictly supervised and properly administered the summative assessment.

Table 1. Summative assessment

	Test type	Content	Implementation
Teacher A	Multiple choices	General knowledge and minorly related to learning objectives	At the end of the semester and improperly supervised
Teacher B	Multiple choice and completion	Textbook based and minorly related to learning objectives	At the end of the semester and moderately supervised
Teacher C	Multiple choices, completion, and essay	Focused on learning objectives	At the end of the semester and strictly supervised

As shown in Table 2, all teachers carried out formative assessments after the learning processes, however, teachers implemented it in a variety of assessment forms. Objective tests were mostly used by Teacher A. Teacher B made use of multiple-choice types, completion, matching, and essay formats. Meanwhile, Teacher C made use of essays and authentic assessments. The ways teachers administered the assessment were also in a variety of forms. Teacher A only occasionally conducted the formative assessment, Teacher C properly conducted the formative assessment and more intensively carried out the assessment compared with Teacher B. Teacher C made use of an essay, authentic assessment, and performance-based assessment, whereas Teacher A merely used material from the exercise book, meanwhile Teacher B used materials from exercise book and websites.

The data in the Table 2 showed that some teachers still have a variety of understanding of classroom assessment practices. During the interviews, teachers explained that they hardly had a teachers' development program related to classroom assessment practices. Most of the knowledge they learned by themselves from available resources. Meanwhile, Teacher C explained that she learned a lot when he was studying with a teacher in his college.

Table 2. Formative assessment

	Test type	Content	Implementation
Teacher A	Multiple choices and true-false, matching	Topics are merely taken from the exercise book	Occasionally conducted
Teacher B	Multiple choice, completion, matching, essay	Topics are taken from the exercise book and some materials are taken from websites	Sometimes conducted at the end of the learning unit
Teacher C	Essay, performance assessment, authentic assessment	Topics are taken from the exercise book and authentic learning materials are also utilized	Always conducted at the end learning unit and remedial is properly planned

3.2. Discussion

Assessment is a process that involves activities that teachers use to help students learn, whereby the activities involve educators gathering information about prior knowledge before instruction and determining appropriate upcoming learning topics using various techniques to gauge students' progress [15]. Thus, students feel helped by the teacher to achieve the expected results. All types of classroom assessments aim to assess students' learning outcomes in schools, take responsibility for implementing education in the community and determine the achievement of the quality of education [16].

The teachers in this study showed that they have a good understanding of classroom assessment. The interviews indicated that they could comprehensively explain the types of classroom assessment activities, when the assessment should be conducted, and how it should be conducted. Although they all have a different level of understanding depending on their educational backgrounds, teachers' professional development programs and teaching experiences, to a broad extent, their understanding of classroom assessment is acceptably sufficient for conducting appropriate classroom assessment. This is in line with the findings of previous studies [17], [18]. However, this study revealed that the teachers who carried out classroom assessments were outside their level of understanding. Teaching experiences could not be used as a guarantee of appropriate or better classroom assessment practices.

Teacher A, for example, who has more than 15 years of teaching experience, was found to conduct poor-quality classroom assessments. Although during the interviews he had indicated he has a good understanding of classroom assessment, however during a classroom observation, he practiced classroom assessment irrelevantly with their understanding. This can be seen from the test types, assessment topics, and the way the assessment is being conducted. The test types being used are solely in the form of objective tests. The tests are mainly taken from a test book and exercise book. Moreover, the way he conducted the assessment was also in a relaxed manner which was poorly supervised which enabled students to compare the answers with other students. Consequently, the assessment results could be used as student's reflection on their ability [19]. Moreover, teachers could use the results to improve learning activities to attain better learning objectives [20], [21]. Therefore, ideally, assessment should be always completed with feedback provision to enrich the student's ability [22], [23].

Teacher B who has fewer teaching experiences when compared to Teacher A showed better classroom assessment practices. During the interview process, he showed quite a similar level of understanding of the types, topics, and how classroom assessment should be implemented. Teacher B utilized more appropriate types such as multiple choice, completion, matching, and essay and the topics were taken from the exercise book and some materials taken from websites. He conducted summative assessments as scheduled by the school headmaster; however, the formative assessment was only sometimes conducted at the end of the learning unit completion. How he conducted formative assessment indicated that he carried out classroom assessment irrelevantly with his understanding. Ideally, he implemented classroom assessments in-line with their understanding [24]–[26].

Contrary to Teachers A and B, Teacher C has less than five years of teaching experience, so it can be said that he is a fresh graduate teacher. During the interviews, she explained her understanding of classroom assessment clearly and during the classroom observation, she showed that she carried out the most appropriate classroom assessment compared with other teachers. She utilized essays, performance assessments, and authentic assessments and used more authentic materials. The way she administered the classroom assessment both in the summative and formative assessment was set in an ideal assessment

atmosphere. Consequently, the assessment results could be used as a source of information for real achievement and can be used as a reference for learning improvement [9], [27], [28].

The findings showed that teachers' discrepancies in classroom assessment practices were viewed from their understanding and teaching experiences. Implementation of classroom assessment is strongly influenced by the teacher's understanding of assessment. Teachers who understand assessment well can certainly carry out class assessments better [29], [30]. This study found that the existing general theories and public assumptions related to teachers' understanding and teaching experiences are not always in-line with actual practices in a real classroom setting. The discrepancy occurred because many factors were affecting the implementation of the classroom assessment such as classroom conditions, time allotment, the national examination, and teachers' workloads. Among those factors, the need to be successful in the national exam is still one of the main factors which really worry all teachers [31], [32]. Consequently, most teachers focus on practicing students in doing national exams. Teachers' workloads also become prime problems as teachers tried hard to fulfil all their duties, consequently, the implementation of classroom assessment tends to be neglected [33]. Ideally, teachers should allocate sufficient time for carrying out all types of assessments to gather appropriate information about students' learning achievement [34].

Teachers need to be clear about the purpose of the assessment to implement assessment properly and appropriately [35]. It should be understood that the objectives of formative and summative assessments are quite different altogether. Formative assessment is mainly conducted to improve learning, while summative assessment is intended to measure student achievement. However, for both of the assessments, teachers ideally have to pay attention to three areas, namely knowledge (cognitive), attitude (affective), and skills (psychomotor). These three domains should be assessed proportionally according to the nature of the subject matter. Moreover, classroom assessment should be ideally carried out continuously and periodically. Continuous means that assessment is carried out throughout the learning process, while periodic means assessment is carried out after learning one competency, at the end of the education unit level and the end of each semester.

Considering the importance of accurate implementation of assessment, teachers need to carefully plan the assessment. Planning classroom assessments is a very important thing in learning to determine the success of learning [35]–[37]. Teachers therefore in the application of classroom assessment need to have a high understanding of the type and form of assessment and how to use them in class. Additionally, in conducting classroom assessment, the following things need to be considered, such as comprehending assessment as an integral part of learning activities, developing learning strategies that encourage and strengthen the assessment process as a reflection activity (self-reflection and learning experience), carrying out various assessment strategies in the learning program to provide multiple types of information about student learning outcomes, accommodating student needs, developing a recording system that provides varied ways of observing student learning, and using assessment to gather information to make decisions about the level of student achievement. The discussion indicated that classroom assessment is a very complex activity to do in the classroom; therefore, to conduct it appropriately, teachers need a very high understanding and passion in doing their duties, particularly in preparing and carrying out the classroom assessment.

4. CONCLUSION

Classroom assessment serves as a material consideration in determining classroom progress, feedback in improving teaching programs, a driving tool in enhancing students' ability, and a tool for students to evaluate their performance and self-reflection to improve themselves. This study revealed that teachers have a variety of understanding of classroom assessment and classroom assessments were not always practiced properly in line with their understanding. This discrepancy due to the fact that several factors influenced their classroom practices. Thus, considering the importance of these findings, further study should be conducted, and these findings can be used as a reference for other researchers and policymakers to pay more attention to teachers' professional development programs and other forms of teacher enrichment activities.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS






Ida Ayu Made Sri Widiastuti    received her Bachelor's degree in English Education from the Mahasaraswati University Denpasar in 2010, two Master's degrees in English Education from the Ganesha University of Education and Linguistics from the Udayana University both in 2011, and Doctoral degree in English Education from the State University of Malang in 2019. She is an associate professor and has been a lecturer in the English Education study program at Mahasaraswati University Denpasar since 2010. Currently, the author is actively conducting research in the fields of education and assessment and has many publications published in various accredited national and international journals of repute. In addition, the author is also a reviewer of reputable national/international journals and a speaker or resource person in various national and international seminars and conferences. She can be contacted at email: idaayuwidia@unmas.ac.id.






Katie Weir    is a Senior Lecturer in Assessment and Curriculum at the School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University Australia. She began her career in education as a Secondary Science teacher in North Queensland, where she enjoyed thirteen years teaching and heading up school science departments. A move to Sydney opened up an opportunity to return to university to undertake a Master's Degree in Education specializing in Curriculum Studies. This was followed up with a Ph.D. at the University of Queensland that examined the New Basics Curriculum under the supervision of Professor Allan Luke. That was ten years ago, and that research inspired Katie's passion for assessment. Her academic career includes employment as a lecturer in the middle years at QUT, teacher professional experience at SCU, and a senior lecturer in Assessment at Griffith University. Her research and teaching focus is on quality, the school-based assessment that supports and enriches learning. She can be contacted at email: k.weir@griffith.edu.au.



Heru Sukoco    received his B.Sc. degree in Computer Science from the Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) in 1999, M.Eng. degree in Electrical Engineering from the Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB) in 2005, and Dr.Eng. degree in Advanced IT and Informatics from the Kyushu University Japan in 2012, respectively. Currently, he works at the Department of Computer Science at IPB University. His research focuses on net-centric computing, future internet, IoT, wireless and mobile technology, high-performance computing, and agromaritime 4.0 to support modern and smart agriculture. He is also a member of APTIKOM, IEEE, and IEICE. Currently, he gets research grants from LPDP, Kemendikbudristek, and BRIN. In addition, he also conducts several research in the industry and has published in reputable national and international publications. He can be contacted at email: hsrkom@apps.ipb.ac.id.



Gunadi Harry Sulisty    is an EFL learning assessment and research professor at the State University of Malang, Indonesia. He has been conducting many ELT-related research projects such as continuous professional learning of ELT Teachers, EFL Instructional Materials Development, and community social services on ELT to several communities. He has also been an author of books like *Reading for Meaning*, *ELT Assessment at Schools*, *Classroom-Based Authentic Assessment for Teachers*, and others. He can be contacted at email: gunadi.hs@um.ac.id.