

# What does an Ideal Classroom-based Assessment Look Like?

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## Abstract

This paper summarizes a range of theoretical reviews about the development of language testing and assessment models. The models have notably been developed and changed. It was only focused on four basic skills of English (listening, reading, speaking, and writing). However, since 1990s, language ability is no longer regarded as the only skill to be tested. Language is viewed as discourse product and the discursal performance of the speakers or the learners is taken account in the development of language testing. Classroom based assessment (CBA) is one of testing types which treats language as discourse product. There is great debate among researchers, linguists, and other parties about the reliability and validity of CBA. Some of them argue the practice and the quality of the teacher as the assessor, the notion about appropriate form, to have formative or summative assessment. Therefore, this essay is intended to discuss How CBA can give information about learners' language ability, how teachers do CBA in their class, how formative differ from summative assessment in CBA? 3) How can validity and reliability be measured in CBA? the nature of CBA, the differences between formative and summative assessment in CBA, and how validity and reliability are measured in CBA.

Keywords: Classroom Assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment

## Introduction

Last two decades the language assessment model has been developed and changed. The test used to be a typical cognitive test rather than fluency and performance. Bachman (2000) outlines there are three development stages of the language assessment. First, from the mid-1960s through the 1970s language ability was essentially tested through the theoretical view of the ability which tends to test for basic skills (the listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills) and components of language such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Second, in 1980s the former language testing was criticized. Language ability is boarded into the proponent of *communicative competence*. Language use was viewed as discourse product, or situated meaning. In addition, language ability is regarded to be multi-componential and dynamic. It

cannot be only about listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. The language test takers are required to consider the socio-cultural and discorsal aspects of language use, as well as the context in which the speakers use the language. In this period, language testing was expanded into the area of second language acquisition (SLA). Last, in 1990s, the area of applied linguistic was taken account in the development of language testing. The testing was expanded in to a number of areas: research methodology, practical advances, factors that affect performance on language tests, authentic, or performance, assessments, and concerns with the ethics of language testing and professionalizing the field. Classroom based assessment (CBA) is initially introduced in this stage. Learners are observed and evaluated based upon the performance related to the classroom activities. Kohonen in Bachman (2000) asserts that CBA is an authentic assessment since this assessment contains a critical component of both teaching and learning: authentic assessment uses such forms of assessment which show the learning process, motivation, attitudes, and achievement in the classroom activities. In authentic assessment, the professional judgement of the teacher is very important as it is a commitment to enhancing student learning. However, in school classroom, Leung (2005) finds that there are some teachers' assessments which often are overlapped in practice: alternative assessment, authentic assessment, classroom assessment, educational assessment, formative assessment, informal assessment and statutory assessment. It shows that the notion of CBA is still confusing for some teachers. It is a crucial and interesting phenomenon to be explored more details, especially on how classroom assessment differs from other types of assessment. Teachers need to have clear understanding of what a CBA is and how to conduct the assessment in order to get reliable results. There is no doubt that the notion of classroom-based assessment is introduced and becomes great debate among researchers, linguists, and other parties. Some of them questioning the reliability and validity, some others argue about the practice and the quality of the teacher as the assessor, the notion about appropriate form, whether to have formative or summative assessment is also criticized. Therefore, this essay is intended to discuss about CBA in order to get clear picture about the nature of CBA and other related terms in it. This essay will answer the following questions: 1) How CBA can give information about learners' language ability? 2) How do Teachers Do CBA in their class? 3) How does formative differ from summative assessment in CBA? 3) How can validity and reliability be measured in CBA?

## **Review of related Literature**

### *Classroom-based Assessment*

Hill & McNamara (2011) defines CBA as any deliberate, sustained, and explicit reflection by teacher (and by learners) on qualities of a learner's work to formulate learning goals. Llosa (2011) adds that CBA can serve a number of function including assigning grades, monitoring progress, helping to plan instruction, predicting future performance, and enhancing students learning. Related to those descriptions about CBA, classroom assessment enables students to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways from multiple perspectives, thus serving as learning experiences themselves Leung (2005)

Moreover, CBA is an authentic assessment since it emphasizes the importance of the teacher's professional judgement and commitment to enhancing student learning (Kohonen in Bachman (2000). Leung (2005) adds that through CBA, teachers are able to gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing real life tasks in particular domain.

### *Formative and Summative Assessment*

Banchman & Palmer in Chow (2010) state that formative is an assessment which emphasizes greater students involvement to improve learning, and enhance motivation for learning. This guide the students to their own sequent learning, or teachers modify their teaching methods and material so as to make them more appropriate for students' needs, interests, and capabilities whilst summative is done at the end of a school year for providing information about students' achievement and the end of course study (bachman & Palmer). Genesee & Upshur in Chow (2010) adds that the summative assessment is done for administrative purposes such as certification.

Sadler (1989) finds that formative assessment concerns more on how judgements about the quality of students responses (performance, pieces, works). This assessment can be used to shape and improve the student's competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning whilst summative is concerned with summing up or summarizing the achievement status of a student, and is geared towards reporting at the end of a course of study especially for purposes of certification.

In formative assessment, the role of teacher is to help students to come to these meta-cognitive understanding Harlen & James (1997). Ramaprasad in Harlen & James (1997) says that formative assessment is essentially feedback both to teacher and students about present understanding and skill development in order to determine the way forward whilst summative assessment is to describe learning achieved at a certain time for the purpose of reporting to parents, other teachers, the pupils themselves, and other interested parties such as school governors, or schools boards.

Moreover formative assessment is central to learning and is firmly based within classroom teaching in which skill in observation and interpretation is crucial in informing the teacher about how much the learners as a group, and how much individuals within that group, have understood about what has been learned or still needs learning (Rea-Dickins :2001)

## **Discussion**

### *How can CBA Give Information about Learners' Language Ability?*

Fulcher (2007) conveys that the main difference between classroom assessment and large-scale educational assessment is the context of the classroom. The learners are there as learners, and the teacher are there to engage with the learners in the learning process. The teacher is not only function as the model for the language to the students yet he/she has role as the facilitator for the development of his/her learners' language ability. Rea-Dickins & Gardner (2000) adds that class teacher together with language support team have main responsibility to manage the curricular subject and English language use because there is strong evidence of symbiotic relationship between those involved in the CBA. The role leads teacher to implement different assessment strategies as key points during the class, and to collect information that subsequently informs their decision making. During the session, teacher comprises information through observation, confirms the comprehension of the students, and the recognises the learning gaps ( Perrone , 2011). The information gather during the observation can be used as the base to make decision about language teaching. Teacher gets pictures about the ability of the students as well as gets description on how far the lesson can be continued or to be refreshed in the classroom.

Hall et al in Rea-Dickins (2001) outlines that there are 3 stages in the developmental model of teacher assessment: 1) concerned with building in assessment with reference to the attainment targets specified in the curriculum, 2) getting to know both the class and individual learners in terms of their level of attainment and stage of development, 3) concerned with matching work to individual need and a strong curriculum focus with assessment centring on progress in relation to curricula criteria. These three stages show that in assessing the learners, the teacher has to consider the target of the curriculum, the achievement and development of the students, as well as the relation between individuals' needs and the curriculum focus.

The active involvement of students in charting their growth, and setting goals for future learning entails a shift in teacher's role within a transmitter of knowledge as well a supportive facilitator assisting students to gain sustainable progress, independent, and self-regulated learning (Alice, 2010). Students' performances are monitored through the students' involvement in the process of classroom assessment by identifying the strengths and weaknesses in their work. According to Rea-Dickins & Gardner (2000), there is a range of factors likely to enhance learner performance: difficulty levels of assessment activities, the level of task preparation and spoken instructions given by the teacher, the amount of assistance received by the learners during an assessment, the length of time to do the assessment, differences in content of the assessment activity and the condition of the interlocutors. In this case teacher needs to be aware of the students' condition. Each student has their own ability to absorb the instruction and knowledge from the teacher, thus teacher has to be wise in doing the assessment. Chow (2010) adds that In order to be effectively engaged in the process, the learners have to have metacognitive knowledge about him/her and about the learning process. Chow (2010) adds that the students also need to be actively participate and control in the learning activity so that they can, evaluate his/her progress in a standard or achievement goals. The students also need to deploy certain strategies in order to reach good progress towards the goal.

Moreover, Sadler (1989) contends that feedback is a key element in classroom assessment. He defines feedback as the information about how successfully something has been or is being done. Moreover, feedback can also be defined as the effect of informational content which has control function. Teachers can use feedback to make programmatic decisions related to diagnosis, the respect to readiness, and remediation. Students can use feedback to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of their performances. Through the information provided in the

feedback, aspects which are associated with high quality and success learning can be recognized and reinforced. In addition, modification and improvement can be made for those unsatisfactory aspects. Leung (2005) conveys that classroom teacher assessment provides useful close-up information on student learning in context, and can also be used indirectly to inform development of change in pedagogy and curriculum, and provide feedback to the students. There is integration between teaching and learning in this assessment. In the classroom learning environment, feedback to the learner helps him or her to identify what needs to be learnt next to become an independent user of language in a new context (Fulcher, 2007). In other words, feedback contains diagnostic information, and this is not usually found in formal tests.

#### *How do Teachers Do CBA in their class?*

It is clear that there are certain aspects involve in classroom-based assessment (CBA). Teacher has big responsibility and main role in the practice of the assessment. As it is described above, CBA is the assessment conducted in the classroom, during the process of learning. The activities and assessment are almost entirely performance-based and completely integrated. CBA can also be regarded as a social learning environment that encourages interaction, communication, achieving shared goals and providing feedback from learner as well as teacher to learner (Fulcher, 2007).

However, the practice of CBA is not as easy as what it is conceptualized. Applying the idea of integration between learners and teacher and performance-based sometimes leads to unexpected occurrence and result of the test itself. The unexpected things come from both sides, teacher and students, or even the environment surrounding them like institution, decision maker in curriculum, the curriculum itself, and also researchers.

In one hand, the teacher must have a concept of quality appropriate to the tasks. Teacher also has to be able to evaluate and make judgement to the student's work by referring to the concept in order to gather description about the quality of a student's work or performance (Sadler, 1989). On the other hand, teacher often cannot maintain the consistency in scoring, teacher tend to be affected by the students' personality and classroom behaviour, the teachers' beliefs about assessment and grading, motivation, effort, and other personal factors which should not be taken account to the scoring or grading. Sometimes teacher also uses grade as reward to their students. Dwyer (1998) finds that most beginning teachers do not clearly conceive the cycle

of establishing learning goals and verifying the progress of the students. Many teachers do not view teaching as analytical process of collecting evidence about student learning. They conduct the assessment just as fulfilment of their job as teacher which regards as a responsibility to provide scores or grades about their students. The result of those unexpected thing in CBA is the data gathered from classroom assessment. It does not reflect to the real classroom activities which describes the language acquisition process and development of the students.

Meanwhile, the assessment goal is to improve the quality of education for all students by developing rigorous standards, clear instruction, assessment, professional development, and resources to those standards (Llosa , 2011). Teacher needs to have good knowledge in assessing the students' performance. Clark (2012) suggests that administrators and policy-makers need to support teachers as they adapt their core practices such as adaptation or practice should result in teachers being more flexible in their approach to instruction and assessment. In addition, the flexibility is just to the approach to instruction not to the grading level. Therefore, Leung (2005) contends that teacher assessment should be criterion-referenced because this may help clarify what teacher should attain to. The flexibility of the teacher in conducting the assessment is underpinned by the criteria that he/she should pay attention on.

### *Formative Vs Summative in CBA*

Chow (2010) defines formative assessment as language assessment which in practice in school put more emphasis on assessment for learning. Chow & Li in Chow (2010) adds that this assessment involves all elements in learning and teaching area such as teacher, students, and institution because assessment can be used as the information source for curriculum planning, supportive information in teaching, and record about the performance of students, individual school, and education system. On the other hand, summative assessment is done at the end of a school year for administrative purposes such as certification (Genesee & Upshur in Chow, 2010). This assessment also provides information about the achievement of the students at the end of course study (Bachman & Palmer in Chow, 2010).

In formative assessment, the emphasis is greater students' involvement in purpose of improving learning result. The students are guided to their own sequent learning, and teachers can promptly modify their teaching strategies and material in order to make them more appropriate for students' needs, interests, and capabilities. This assessment provides information

about cognitive perspective on the nature of learning. It recognizes the importance of engaging students in goal setting, mental planning, and strategic efforts for progressing to reach achievement goals.

Formative assessment is concerned with how to judge the quality of students responses such as pieces of work and classroom performance which then can be used to shape and improve the student's competence whilst Summative is concerned with summing up or summarizing the achievement of a student, and is geared towards having report at the end of a course especially for purposes of certification (Sadler, 1989). It is clear that formative and summative assessment main distinction is not related to purpose and effect, but not timing. Therefore, feedback is an important element in formative assessment because it gives information about how successfully something has been done. There is current pictures of understanding and skill development gathered from the feedback which can be usefully used to decide the way forward ( Harlen & James, 1997). On the other hand, Summative assessment is to describe learning achieved at a certain time for the purpose of reporting to parents, the students, other teachers, and other parties such as school principle, or schools committee.

Harlen & James (1997) adds that criterion-referenced or norm-referenced tends to be used in summative assessment whilst formative assessment is usually criterion-referenced because this type of assessment always made in relation to where students are evaluate in terms of specific content and skills. Criteria are used in both formative and summative. The criteria enable teachers to use the information from the assessment in planning the students' future learning possibilities.

Michael Fullan in Clark (2012) finds that the lack of knowledge and personal implementation of schools lead to the lack of development in formative assessment and other potentially beneficial instructional practices. This is related to the previous discussion, where the teacher's knowledge may affect the result of the assessment.

### *Validity and Reliability*

In classes where the majority of children are learners of EAL, it is truly time consuming to produce detailed records of individual language development. Teachers often get difficulty of collecting adequate language samples through assessments. However, this is the responsibility of the teachers to provide those records because the record can be the evidence for the validity and

reliability of the assessment. The distinction between summative and formative assessment are not as straightforward as typically portrayed and that the interplay between reliability and validity for purpose of CBA. Rea-Dickins & Gardner (2000) is reliability in CBA is complex notion because the differences in the actual recorded samples of the student and some evidence of mismatch of language sample against students are commonly happen in CBA. These are then considered as potential threats to the reliability of the assessment. In connection with the tension between validity and reliability, Banchman in Rea-Dickins & Gardner (2000) comments on the cost associated with assuring validity and reliability, even in classroom and refers to the time and care required to develop reliable procedures that achieve content validity in relation to specific course of instruction. Moreover, Hill & McNamara (2011) outlines that CBA has three critical dimension of assessment: evidence; interpretation, and use, which are not an easy task in the practice especially regarded to maintain the consistency.

The fact in classroom is the dynamic move of the students. the students are changing. They may have good capability in doing the task in on situation but may have difficulties in doing it in another time. Therefore the evidence from CBA often becomes a problem in making a judgement for categorizing the students. It is very hard to fit the category. Validity is vital and important to formative assessment because the validity cannot be formative unless it demonstrably leads to action for improving learning; hence relevance to the goals of learning paramount (Harlen& James, 1997). He adds that it is not necessary to be over-concerned with reliability in formative assessment since the information is used to inform teaching in the situations in which it is gathered. Huertel in Leung (2005) adds that Reliability is relatively unimportant for three reasons: 1) teacher assessment task is unique because it is impossible to reproduce any particular assessment task in the same way or under the same condition since they are uncontrolled., 2) teacher assessment task rarely used without variation, 3) important decision are unlikely to hinge on the precise ranking of the students.

In addition, Fulcher (2007) asserts when reliability is interpreted as consistency, it is very rare to be calculated in ways that actually involve giving multiple tests over time, or many similar tasks. Thus, the usefulness of assessment, the validity of interpretation of evidence, is meaningful only if it results in improved learning. In this point, all the needs of students, teacher, and administration system have to be match and go for the improvement of the learning. All of

the records done by the teacher can then be considered as valid even though each teacher has her/his own approach in doing the assessment.

## **Conclusion**

Classroom assessment can help the improvement of students learning. The assessment provides the process in language learning. The result of classroom assessment can be feedback for both students and teacher. However, since it focuses on the classroom activities and performance of the students, it is not easy to maintain the consistency of the grade as classroom itself is a social practice. The students are changing; the teacher is also sometime affected by his/ her personal judgment and interpretation.

Classroom assessment is a formidable educational challenge. It needs professional effort from the teacher as the one who has central role in monitoring the progress of the students as well as the one who is committing the assessment. Teacher can maintain their professionalism through the criteria he/she has for the assessment because the criteria is important in gathering data to reach the goals of the assessment.

The challenge to have a professional and skilful teacher in classroom assessment is not impossible to realise. Teacher can be train to be a professional one in doing classroom assessment. Furthermore, the stakeholders can work together with the assessments specialist, teachers' professional organization, or other teacher education programmes to share information and knowledge on how to be a professional assessor who has skills and knowledge for maintaining the consistency of the assessment form and result. Moreover, setting up the criteria for the assessment which is related to the target in curriculum, will also help teacher in maintaining the consistency.

Moreover, there should not be preference to only use formative in classroom assessment because it is better in giving the description about the process of learning than summative assessment. It is not about the choice of which one is good and bad. Both formative and summative can be applied in classroom assessment because the end point is to draw report about the students' ability in learning language. So, choosing formative and summative assessment is just about the setting of planning, framing, and target of an assessment.

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