

Afghan EFL Lecturers' Assessment Practices in the Classroom

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Abstract: *The current study is conducted with the aim to explore the practices and perceptions of Afghan EFL lecturers toward assessment. A second aim of the study is to explore the challenges the lecturers encounter in the implementation of formative assessments in their classes. To serve these basic objectives, a qualitative case study method design was employed with three English language lecturers as the participants. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main instrument to collect data. The findings of the study indicated that all three lecturers maintained positive perceptions toward formative assessment and favored it over summative assessment. However, the study also discovered that the lecturers practice summative assessments more than formative assessments in their classrooms. This, as indicated by the lecturers, was due to the fact that their choices of employing certain assessment practices were dictated in terms of certain challenges such as university rules and policies, large classes, and time constraints. Lastly, some suggestions are made that may prove useful to effectively apply formative assessment in Afghan EFL context.*

Keywords: *Afghan EFL Context, Formative assessment, Perceptions, Practices, Challenges*

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

English language, in its universal, developmental, networking and technological signification, connects countries and nations to knowledge. It has become such a dominant language nowadays that millions of people around the globe use it as a medium of communication. Likewise, it has emerged as a vital language in both academic and non-academic platforms in Afghanistan as well. In Afghanistan, students learn English as a foreign language, and the educational policy of the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) (2011), acknowledges the

significance of English language and concedes that it should be taught as a school subject from fourth grade until high school. Furthermore, the English language as a subject is also offered for another two years (four semesters) at the undergraduate level as well.

Though English language is viewed as a key language in the educational sector of the country, little is known about the learning and teaching of English language. In 2003, Afghan MoE revised the country's educational curriculum (MoE, 2011) and this new curriculum advocates a more student-centered approach in teaching language classes. The same also applies to the higher educational institution where students study English language for another two years with the objective to enable them to be competent in their respective fields of study. The educational policy of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) considers the teaching of English language in higher educational institutes as a high priority. The policy also emphasizes on the significance of assessment practices in the learning process and requires the EFL teacher to utilize different types of assessments.

Assessment has been a very hot topic in the field of education for many decades now. According to Lumadi (2013), nobody denies that assessment plays an integral part in the teaching, learning, and entire educational process. Similarly, Heaton (1975) state, "both testing and teaching are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other" (p.5). Tuttle (2009) defines assessment as a process of giving feedback which develops and expands student learning. Likewise, Heaton (1975) and Phye (1997) assert that assessment is a systematic process that entails identifying the extent to which students have mastered and achieved the learning goals. Similarly, Angelo & Cross (1993) argue that assessment involves both student and teachers in the continuous monitoring of learning and teaching

process. That is to say, it offers feedback to the teachers regarding the usefulness of their instruction, and also offers students with a means to measure their development as learners. In this framework, assessment functions as a tool for evaluating the quality of teachers' activity by keeping them liable for their actions.

Scholars have proposed a variety of assessment methods amongst which formative and summative assessment are the two types of assessments widely used in ESL/EFL classroom. According to Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007), formative assessment (also referred to as, *assessment for learning*) happens during the instructional process, and its primary purpose is to provide the necessary information to modify teaching and learning. That is to say, formative assessment is used to inform both students and teachers concerning student understanding at the time when making adjustments are possible. Whereas, summative assessment (also referred to as, *assessment of learning*) is used to make final judgments on what students 'know and do not know'.

According to Black & William (2005), the perspectives of educators and policy makers, in many countries around the world, have witnessed a shift from the assessment of learning (summative assessment) toward the assessment for learning (formative assessment). In other words, today educators do not view assessment only as a tool for evaluating learning with the mere purpose of accountability, for instance, for grades, certification, or etc. They have moved on from this traditional view of assessment, and see assessment as a medium of representing and setting the stage for effective learning where the teachers provide students with constructive feedback (Black & William, 2005).

The same could also be said about Afghanistan. According to Basheer & Naeem (2015), in Afghanistan, the behaviorist approach to learning and teaching is dominant for a very long time. However, in recent years, it is gradually changing to a more cognitive and constructivist approach, especially in higher educational institutions. Basheer & Naeem add that student-centeredness and effective assessment "have become the buzzwords in the education system of Afghanistan" (p. 1). With the shift toward the constructivist approach, teachers are encouraged to emphasize more on assessment for learning rather than the assessment of learning.

However, as the approach is still new in the Afghan educational system, still many educators utilize the traditional assessment method (Somaiya, 2017). This is in line with what Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) who assert that there are still educators who only practice traditional models of assessment, for example, paper and pencil exams. Garrison and

Ehringhaus argue that in such models of assessment, it is difficult to say that educational goals could be achieved. Though the assessment methods, tools, and techniques are predetermined in the MoHE curriculum model that is being implemented, but still many teachers in the higher education institutions of Afghanistan follow the traditional assessment system (Darmal, 2009).

To be more precise, the current curriculum models implemented in higher educational institutes require the instructors to use both formative and summative assessments. The curriculum model proposes formative assessment methods worth (40%) which include a mid-term exam worth (20%), writing a small term paper and its presentation (10%), class participation and attendance (10%). As for summative assessment, the curriculum insinuates a final exam worth (60%). The aforementioned distribution of grades suggests that the summative assessment carries more weight in comparison to formative assessment with a comparative ratio of 60: 40.

Moreover, despite the fact that the assessment methods determined in the curriculum still focus largely on summative assessments, even so, a number of teachers do not tend to apply formative assessment at all. For instance, in his research Darmal (2009) discovered that the teachers were aware of the requirements of the curriculum and stressed the importance of formative assessment. However, when it came to their actual assessment practices in the classroom, the researcher observed that EFL teacher did not apply any sort of formative assessment. Darmal's research concludes that teachers were just administering summative assessment for the purpose of assigning grade and score to students. As to why do teachers only use summative assessment and did not give the necessary attention to formative assessment is the main purpose of this research.

To be more specific, the objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate Afghan EFL lecturers' perceptions towards assessments.
2. To investigate Afghan EFL lecturers' general assessments practices in the classroom.
3. To investigate the challenges Afghan EFL lecturers face in the implementation of formative assessments in their classrooms;

Similarly, the research questions are:

1. What are Afghan EFL lecturers' perceptions towards assessments?
2. What are Afghan EFL lecturers' general assessment practices in the classroom?
3. What are the challenges Afghan EFL lecturers face in the implementation of formative assessment in their classrooms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

From basic to higher education, assessment is an integral part of all teaching context. According to Linn and Miller (2005), assessment is a systematic process of gathering information about students' progress headed for the learning goals. Assessment is mostly used for accountability purposes; however, it takes into account much more than just deciding a learner's passing or failing. Shepard (2000) is on the view that assessment is the pivotal part of instructions in all learning cultures. Assessment should be viewed as a tool to measure the effectiveness of teaching and learning process and should not be interpreted as the objective of student's learning experience (Yong & Lim, 2008). It should work as a tool to achieve educational goals and should work as a tool to improve learning (Irons, 2008). Assessment should assist teachers as well as learners to understand learning development, the learners progress, achievements and need for improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Assessment will have positive effect on students' learning and motivation, if it is aligned with the process of teaching and learning (Bloom, 1969).

2.1. Formative and Summative Assessments

There are many ways of assessing learners' development of learning, but the main and most used assessments in the classroom are 1) summative assessment and 2) formative assessment. These two types of assessments have attracted the attention of educators. According to Scriven (1967), the main purposes of an assessment are to adjust and improve instructions (formative assessment) and to measure students' achievements (summative assessment). According to Wilim & Thompson (2008), formative assessment which is also called as assessment for learning which describe the process assessment as a support for learning compared to summative assessment also known as assessment of learning which describes the nature of assessment or the product. The emergence of both formative and summative assessment has dominated the current system of assessment and are the subject of discussion in current literature (Wilim & Thompson, 2008).

Formative assessment is a continuous process of evaluation of students' learning. It provides the teacher with feedback to modify and adjust instructions and learning. According to Thompson (2008, p.60), "formative assessment is used to provide information on the likely performance of students" and "to describe and feedback given to students... telling them which items they got correct". It occurs as a part of instruction during instructions rather than a detach activity (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). It includes both formal and informal formats

i.e. ungraded quizzes, peer feedback, self-reflection, oral questioning and so on. Similarly, Chappuis & Stiggins (2003) state that, majority of the researchers agree on the characteristics of formative assessment as, it strengthens the quality of teaching and learning and involves students in self-directed learning environment. On the other hand, summative assessment take place at the end of an educational period and is bound and restricted to the decision of administration. It measures students' achievements and instead of feedback, provide students with score. It involves grades and shows the students achievements as well as efficacy of a particular teaching method in a particular course.

2.2. Types of Formative Assessment in Classroom

Group tasks, projects, exercises, assignments, discussions and individual tasks are some of the usual elements of formative assessment in the classroom (Hall, Woodroffe & Aboobaker, 2007). Oral questioning, exercises, homework, unit tests and activities are the formative assessment practices (McMillan, 2011). Paper-pencil tests, homework and classroom discussions are some of the tools which can be used to assess students (Murnane & Sharkey, 2006). Formative assessment includes group discussions, written reports and hands on activities (Sato et al, 2008). Seminars are also one of the formative assessment method (Brown et al, 2000).

Assignment: Assignment is a task which students are provided with to accomplish in their own free time (Scouller, 1998). It is something of paramount importance for both teacher and students, as the teacher assess the progress of the students and the learner becomes familiarized with the pedagogical content (Venter & Prinsloo, 2011). It compel student to read further and can be done using internet or library. This may be formal or informal but its nature will be formative of course (Hall et al, 2007).

Group-work: Group work is an assessment form and formative assessment strategy in which learning is supposed to happen in groups (Davis, 2009). It is group work that helps students in developing transferable skills for constant learning i.e. leadership, teamwork, communication and management.

Homework: Homework is the fundamental element of teaching and learning and it is considered as a strategy of formative assessment that enables the students to assess themselves. It can be done through web, where students are required to answer questions on a particular website (Kieso, Weygandt and Warfield, 2011).

Oral questioning: Oral questioning plays a vital role in the checking of students' understanding during instructions. (McMillan, 2011). He adds, it is

questioning that attract students' attention, make them think and make them involved in the lesson. It is questioning that makes the lesson student-centered and practical and brings about discussion. In order to direct the lesson, questions are asked as formative assessment (Shermis, 1953).

Presentations: Presentations is an essential career skill which students need to master as they will be assessed on how convincingly and authoritatively they can speak (Brown, Race & Smith, 2000). There are numerous ways of presenting information in the classroom such as audio files, video files, photos and link to websites and movies (Cummins & Davesne, 2009).

Quizzes: Quizzes are skill, knowledge and growth measuring assessment strategies used in education. (Murray, Johnson & Johnson, 2002). They are short and has fewer simple questions and can be carried in shorter period of time as compared to tests.

Tests: It is great tests that bring about great learning (Knight, 1995). Test has different forms but most dominant are multiple choice and include the ones which requires right answer (Russell & Airasian, 2012).

2.3. Factors Influencing the Educators' Assessment Practices

When implementing assessments, there are several factors that influence the educators' assessment practices especially in the classroom. These factors could explain the reasons why educators choose specific types of assessments to be practiced in their classroom. To further understand what those factors are, several studies were conducted by previous researchers to explore more on the factors that influence the assessment practices.

Duncan & Noonan (2007) stated in their article that it is important to know how classroom learning conditions like the size of the classroom, teachers' training, experience of teaching, grade level and subject area affect teachers' assessment and grading practices. Therefore, the study they conducted was to investigate whether these factors play an important role in teachers' assessment practices, more specifically the factors of subject area, class size and school size. The study found that the subject area does influence the teachers' choice of assessments in the classroom. For example, Mathematics teachers use constructed-response assessment less regularly than teachers of other subject areas and would use more assessments related to cognitive abilities rather than assessments related to non-cognitive abilities (such as participation in the classroom and efforts of the students in completing an assessment or assignment). Other than that, this study also found that the class size and the school size have little

effect on the teachers' assessments practices. This means that no matter how big or small the size of a class or a school is, it is not really a factor of why a teacher chooses certain types of assessments to be practiced.

Meanwhile, Chih-Min & Li-Yi (2007) presented more factors of teachers' assessments practice in their study. They interviewed forty English teachers in Singapore context in order to find out what are the factors that influence their assessment practices. These were among the factors discovered by the researchers; 1) high stakes examinations, 2) school management, 3) physical environment and facilities, 4) parents, 5) professional coursework, and 6) experience in their classroom practice. These factors are in different dimensions than Duncan & Noonan (2007) study. Based on this study, the participants said; as Singapore emphasizes heavily on the high-stakes examination, they tend to gear their assessment practice towards the summative assessments. Some of the participants also said that they were not allowed to do alternative assessments to assess their students, hence they had to stick with the types of assessments outlined by the school management. Other than that, the physical environment and facilities in the school and classroom also affect their choice of assessments. For example, one Participant in this study mentioned that at times when the environment was hot and noisy, it was impossible to conduct speaking and listening test.

Chih-Min & Li-Yi (2007) also found that parents also influenced teachers in their assessment practices. They figured out from the teachers in government schools that parents put pressure on them about the assessment methods while in private schools, parents pressured the teachers in terms of the marking and grading papers. The researchers also found out that professional coursework and training helped the teachers to learn more and practice more varieties of assessments. Similarly, Saxe, Franke, Gearhart, Howard, & Crockett, (1997) in their study also reported that professional development program helped the Mathematics teachers they interviewed to shift their old assessment practices to new practices. The teachers asserted that from the professional development program, they learned to assess their students' higher order thinking skills rather than lower order thinking skills. The experience from the classroom practice also played a role in this matter (Chih-Min & Li-Yi, 2007). One Participant mentioned that when she found out that summative assessment did not help her students to improve, she switched to formative assessments to ensure her students' understanding in the teaching and learning process. From this study, we could see that conducting assessments is not easy and there are a lot

of factors that a teacher has to consider before practicing the assessments in the classroom.

2.4. Challenges in Implementing Assessments in The Classroom

Other than factors that influence the teachers' formative assessment practices in the classroom, it is also important to look at the challenges that the teachers face in implementing them. It is not always that an assessment works in favor of the teacher and sometimes it backfires and teachers do not get what they need to know from the assessment especially in formative assessments, where they need to reflect the students' process of learning rather than the product of the learning (Brown, 2001). If a teacher does not truly understand or could not manage the formative assessment in the classroom, then it will not be effective to assess the students' progress in the teaching and learning progress.

There are a lot of studies conducted in order to find out the challenges that teachers face when implementing the formative assessments in the classroom, suggesting that this issue is not to be taken lightly. Teachers all over the world might face the same issues and these issues need to be addressed so that solutions and actions could be taken appropriately. A study conducted by Quyen & Khairani (2016) in the context of Asian teachers suggested that the challenges occurred in micro and macro levels. They explained the micro level as "...the immediate context of the classroom with varied classroom-level influences. This can consist of the individual factors generated by the teachers and students" (Quyen & Khairani, 2016, p. 163).

In the micro level, they found out that the teachers' knowledge of formative assessments was lacking and there were very little professional development programs to train the teachers in formative assessments. This is also acknowledged by Wei (2010) in her study that formative assessment is the newest trend in China, the effect of the formative assessments was not very obvious when the teachers are less experienced and knowledgeable in that area. This does indicate the lack of training for the teachers in formative assessments. Hunt & Pellegrino (2002) also claimed that in formative assessment, it "...requires that the assessor know in advance both the material that students are supposed to grasp and the different alternative and problematical ways in which students may fail to grasp it" (p. 75). Besides, the teachers' beliefs towards teaching, learning and assessment also become one of the challenges as Asian teachers have this belief that in order for students to grasp the fundamental knowledge from their books, the students need to memorize and drill the correct answer only and no other answers are accepted (Quyen & Khairani, 2016). This kind of

belief reflects the teachers' own experience during their schooling and they still hold the traditional method dear to their heart.

Other than that, Quyen and Khairani (2016) also stated that challenges in micro level also happened in the students' learning. What they meant by this is that, Asian students were not familiar with the formative assessments, especially the low achievers. Not only they had lower motivation, they also had low confidence to answer the formative assessments. When doing peer-assessment as well, students mostly preferred teachers' feedback rather than their students' because they felt that teachers' feedback would be more accurate than their friends'. In order to overcome this issue, Wei (2010) suggested to involve the students in the formative assessments (such as self and peer-assessments), as well as to share with them the learning outcomes, so the students would be able to see and make progress in their learning.

Big class size is also among the challenges mentioned by the participants in implementing formative assessments. Although Duncan & Noonan, (2007) stated that class size is not a factor influencing the teachers' practices, it is definitely a challenge according to Quyen & Khairani (2016). It was difficult for the teachers to provide feedback when the class size is big as they would have to spend longer time to focus on each student, and they had very limited time each period. Wei (2010) stated that formative assessment is acknowledged by the teachers that it is very time-consuming and requires a lot of effort and energy, hence, it is almost impossible to provide feedback to all students in a big class. To implement the formative assessment already requires a long time, giving feedback to the students will take a longer time, especially if the teacher needs to give one-to-one feedback. If the teacher is not able to recognize, evaluate, and respond to the students' individual problems, then the formative assessment would not be meaningful (Hunt & Pellegrino, 2002).

Furthermore, teachers also face challenges in the micro level, whereby the country's and the school's policies discourage them to use formative assessments in the classroom. When the country is very focused on high-stakes examinations and summative assessments, therefore the teachers will have less choice and opportunity in implementing formative assessments. This happens in Quyen & Khairani's study (2016), whereby the culture in Singapore inhibits them from trying other alternative assessments. Teachers sometimes are prohibited from using other assessments aside from summative assessments by their school governors and administrators, causing them to feel demotivated and resort to summative assessment. This is very synonym with education in Asian countries and if

this culture is continued, then the formative assessment will not make it in education field and the students will suffer throughout their education process.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

For this study, the educational policy of the MoHE provides a fundamental theoretical framework. The educational policy requires the educators to use classroom assessment strategies in a variety of ways to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (MoE, 2011). It also expects the educators to practically implement the different types of assessment practices prescribed in the curriculum (Darmal, 2009; Somaiya, 2011; Basheer & Naeem, 2015). Therefore, English language teachers are required to incorporate classroom assessment strategies in their lessons in order to effectively monitor the level of progress made by their students.

Since this study is concerned with the lecturers' perceptions and practices in the classroom, it is closely related to the lecturers' beliefs and world view when it comes to assessments. To explore the teachers' perceptions and assessment practices, theory of action which includes two contrasting theories (espoused theories and theories-in-use) by Argyris and Schön (1974) is used as a theoretical framework of this study. According to Kerr (2009), espoused theory is defined as the perceptions and values that a person believes his or her behavior is based on, while the theories-in-use is a contrast to the espoused theory, where the world view and values are actually inferred from the person's action. This theoretical framework is suitable to be used in this study since the perspectives and practices of the Afghan lecturers will be compared, whether they reflect one another or not.

2.6. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below illustrates the conceptual framework demonstrating the relationships and conceptual link between the research topic and other issues of the study. It is guided by Hughes (1993) Model which comprises of participant, process, and product. The framework deliberates and predicts teachers' behaviors all the way through the application process.

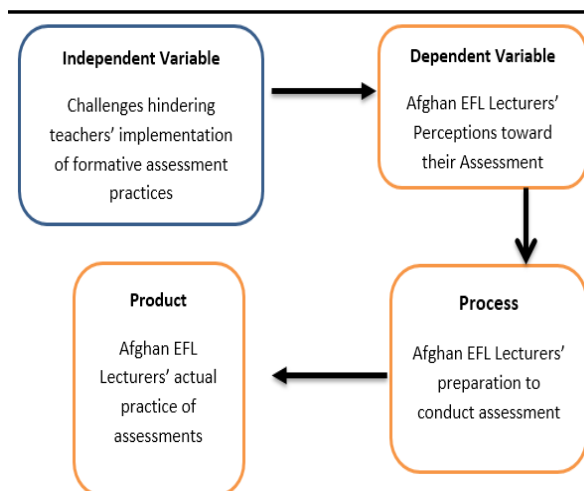


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for Afghan's EFL lecturer assessment practices in the classroom.

According to Duncan and Noonan (2007), EFL Teachers' perceptions have a significant influence on their practices of assessment. Furthermore, certain other factors such as size of the classroom, teachers' training, experience of teaching, grade level and subject area also influence teachers' practices of formative assessment (Duncan & Noonan, 2007). Therefore, it can be inferred that the close relationship between teachers' perceptions and the factors influencing the practice of formative assessment will result into the (product) actual assessment practices of the teachers.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on Myers (1997) claim, qualitative research methods were developed in the social science in order to assist the researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. For this study, a qualitative research approach was employed because Starman (2013) claimed that case study is part of the qualitative research. Additionally, for a qualitative research community case study focuses on experimental information of the case and close attention to the effect of its social settings (Caldwell, 2016). The researcher of a case study is expected to be delicate to opportunistic and as well as to planned data collection (Cassell & Symon, (2004).

Furthermore, Griffin (2004) stated that the qualitative approach can discover a deep analysis of the experiences of relatively small numbers of participants and how the respondents practice events from their viewpoint. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to get closer to the participants and to elicit their feelings, perceptions regarding the research problem (Fahad, 2011). Particularly, the semi-structured interview as it seeks to investigate

and understand the personal practices, experiences and perceptions of the participants because qualitative research approach can provide an in-depth description and detailed ideas generated by the participants of the study. According to Newton (2010), a semi-structured interview offers the opportunity to make the data rich.

Accordingly, there was a set of follow up interviews with the participants of this study. The researcher attempted to increase the validity of the responses as it was also proposed by Golafshani (2003) that validity determines whether the research measures that what it was anticipated to measure. Therefore, there were three interviews carried out with the same participant on three different occasions. The first interview simply happened to ask the interview questions. After transcribing the interview, the researcher conducted a second interview and probed to deepen the responses to the questions and intensify the richness of the data being attained. Finally, in order to avoid ambiguities, the researcher led the third interview for further elaboration.

3.1 Population and Sample

The available population was all the teachers in the public-sector universities in Afghanistan. There were three male teachers involved as participants for this case study. These teachers were from different universities, two of them are currently acquiring their master's degree in TESL in Malaysia. The third participant of the study who is a holder of bachelor degree was contacted through Skype call. These teachers all aged between 25 to 30 years old. The rationale behind choosing teachers from different universities will help the researchers to know how the assessment is practiced in these universities and it was also considered that these teachers will enrich the data. The participants of the study shared different opinions in regards with the assessment in their respective universities.

3.2 Instrument

The questions considered for this study were adopted and adapted from various articles (see Appendix A). For each interview, it took between 5 to 10 questions asked. The questions were administered in face-to-face and Skype interview. The interviews were recorded by a voice recorder. Each interview took 10 to 15 minutes. These teachers were contacted in order to have a consent for the interview and make an appointment for the interview. The relevant questions were asked from these teachers and provided their opinions, comments and elaborated on some points.

3.3 Data Analysis

As the interview process went smoothly, all the recordings were later transcribed. The data analysis is the procedure of making sense out of the data which consists merging, reducing and interpreting what the respondents have said. Accordingly, qualitative data analysis involves identifying, coding and categorizing patterns or themes found in the collected data (Woods, 2011). For data analysis, the researcher encoded the data transcribed from the interview to find out any patterns that could be found. Then, the encoded data were grouped into subthemes, which were later categorized into themes that were found in the data. To make the presentation of the data analysis easier and more organized, the data will be presented in a tabular format and the explanation of the data will follow suit.

4. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Participants' Profile

First Participant

The first participant of this study is a male Afghan who was aged 30. He is an EFL lecturer in one of the public universities in Afghanistan. The level of his education was currently a postgraduate student in one of the public universities in Malaysia. He has been teaching the EFL students in English Department for four years. For the last four years, he has taught freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior EFL students.

Second Participant

The second participant of the study is 27 years old who is currently acquiring his postgraduate studies in Malaysia. He has been teaching the EFL students for almost a year in both public and private universities in Afghanistan. He has been teaching various EFL classes. He also used to teach students in the nongovernmental organization for adult education.

Third Participant

The third participant of our study is a 32 years old male Afghan, whom the researcher interviewed through a Skype call. He is the lecturer of English language at Education Faculty in Said Jamaluddin Afghani University, Kunar, Afghanistan. He is a bachelor degree holder and has been teaching in the mentioned department for almost five years. He has also worked as the English language teacher in Kunar Teacher Training College for almost one year. He is currently the head of English department in the mentioned university.

4.6. Research Question 1: What are Afghan EFL lecturers’ perceptions towards assessments in the classroom?

For the first research questions, there are two themes available and under these two themes, there are several subthemes discovered. The two themes emerged are the lecturers’ perspectives on assessments and their assessment preferences. In the first theme, the subthemes available are assessments for students and teachers, while in the second theme, the subthemes are categorized into positive and negative perspectives, as well as the lecturers’ assessment preferences. To further illustrate the themes and subthemes to answer the first research question, the data was presented in the tabular form as followed.

Research Question 1	Themes	Subthemes
Afghan EFL lecturers’ formative assessment practices in the classroom	Perspectives on assessments	- Assessments for students: - Evaluation - Progress - Help students’ learning - Record of performance - Assessments for lecturers: - Effectiveness of teaching
	Assessment preference	- Positive perspectives towards formative assessments - Negative perspectives towards summative assessments - Prefer formative than summative assessments

Table 1: Findings on the Afghan EFL lecturers’ general assessment perspectives in the classroom

4.2.1 Theme 1: Perspectives on Assessments

The first theme found in the data of the interviews shows the perspectives of the Afghan lecturers towards assessments. When talking about assessments, all participants had more or less the same ideas on what an assessment is. All participants agreed that assessment is an evaluation that will help them to check the progress of their students. The

assessment becomes a record of students’ performance so that not only the students are able to see their performance, but the parents will also have an opportunity to see their children’s progress. Below were the answers given by the participants regarding assessments:

“I think assessment is generally a practice for the evaluation of learners or students. Well it is in general an evaluation of learners to evaluate the extent that they have learned from the teaching practices in different classes and session...”

(Participant 2)

“I mean to say that it is an important part of educational system to check whether our students are going along with what we are teaching them.”

(Participant 3)

“The assessment also helps the parents and guardians to know about the performance of their children.”

(Participant 1)

Other than that, the participants also agreed that assessments also play as an evaluation to their own teaching, whether it is effective or not. The assessments do not only help the students, teachers and students to see the progress, but helps to give insights to the teachers on what aspects of their teaching that they might need to change or focus more on. Participant 1 and Participant 2 both agreed that assessments will evaluate their teaching as well, as per below:

“The assessment is very important for both teacher and students. Through the assessment, the teacher can figure out how effective his teaching was.”

(Participant 1)

“And it also makes a teacher or educator to realize if there teaching practices are appropriate, whether the students get any advantage from the teaching practice.”

(Participant 2)

4.2.2 Theme 2: Assessment Preference

During the interview as well, it was found that the participants have more positive perspectives towards formative assessments. The participants actually prefer formative assessments rather than summative assessments. Participant 2 and Participant 3 particularly stated their preference towards formative assessments as stated below:

“Well, another type of assessment I prefer, is task based assessment which encourage the students do rather than know how to do.”

(Participant 2)

“Well I support formative assessment than summative assessment.”

(Participant 2)

“Actually, I love to assess student through small activities like pair work and group work activities, where students learn but at the same time we assess them as well.”

(Participant 3)

Regarding the summative assessment on the other hand, the participants clearly showed their negative perspectives towards it, as in their dislike towards the assessment because the use of the assessment was abused. It is found that Participants 1 and 2 in this study agreed that they did not enjoy the summative assessments conducted in their respective universities.

“...the assessment process is not enjoyable at all. In fact, it a very tiring process especially, summative assessment. ... I consider it as a bad day when I have a test or final examination.”

(Participant 1)

“...I am against summative assessment. Well, if I am the dean of the university or faculty or even the minister in my country, I would eliminate summative assessment....”

(Participant 2)

However, Participant 3 showed a neutral attitude towards both formative and summative assessments, and he also mentioned that both assessments are useful in the students' learning.

“The assessments I use in the classroom i.e. formative and summative, both are very helpful for the students' learning.”

(Participant 3)

4.3. Research Question 2: What Are Afghan EFL Lecturers' General Assessment Practices in The Classroom?

In the second research question, one theme emerged from the interview data. The presentation of the data under this research question is presented as per below table:

Research Question 2	Theme	Subthemes
Afghan EFL lecturers' general assessment	Assessment practices	- Formative assessments - Summative

practices in the classroom		assessments
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Table 2: Findings on the Afghan EFL lecturers' assessment practices in the classroom

4.3.1 Theme 1: Assessment Practices

The researchers asked the participants regarding their assessment practices in the classroom during the interview. Based on the interviews, it was found that Participants 1 and 2 implemented summative assessments despite their negative attitudes towards it, while Participant 3 actually used both formative and summative assessments in his classroom. The data is as per below excerpts:

“Generally, I apply summative assessment in my classes. The students are assessed summatively twice in a semester.”

(Participant 1)

“In general, I use summative assessment in my classes, at X University. Well, I apply summative assessment.”

(Participant 2)

“...I use both formative and summative assessment.”

(Participant 3)

Participant 3 explained and elaborated more on the types of formative assessments he used in the classroom during the interview. He mentioned that despite having to follow the university rules, he used unofficial formative assessments just to assess how far his students have understood his teaching. He explained his formative assessments as per below:

“Actually, I am teaching reading subjects in my university, so in every class I, allow students to work in group and then they share their understanding with the class which work as a formative assessment. Another formative assessment tool which I use quite often unintentionally in the class is the use of asking questions at the end of every lesson.”

(Participant 3)

As seen from the excerpts above, only Participant 3 used formative assessments in his classroom. The formative assessment he conducted were group work, Q & A session as well as presentation.

4.4 Research Question 3: What Are the Challenges Afghan EFL Lecturers Face When Implementing Assessments in The Classroom?

In this section, this study attempts to figure out what are the challenges that Afghan EFL lecturers faced in

implementing the formative assessments in the classroom.

Research Question 3	Themes	Subthemes
Challenges to implement formative assessments in the classroom	University rules and policy	- Exam-based policy - Penalization
	Large size of classes	- Difficulty in implementing assessments - Difficulty in grading
	Time limitation	- Short class duration

Table 2: Findings of the challenges to implement formative assessments in the classroom

4.4.1 Theme 1: University Rules and Policy

The first theme or challenge that the participants mentioned to implement the formative assessments is, they have to abide to their university rules and policy regarding the assessments. In the interviews, Participant 2 mentioned that his university does not allow other than summative assessments to be implemented. These are the excerpts from Participant 2 interview regarding his university rules. Participant 2 also added that when he tried to implement formative assessments in his classroom, he was called by his superior and was reprimanded for using a different format of assessment. The excerpts from the interview as per below:

“Well, in a place where you work you need to obey the rules of the university, the dean of the university, and the curriculum, syllabus that is given to you right?”

(Participant 2)

“Yeah, it is mainly because of the system. In general, I don’t have any other choice. If we apply any other type of assessment, we will be penalized by the faculty and university.”

(Participant 2)

“He called me to his office and asked me that you can’t only rely on presentation. We have two tests, a mid-term and a final exam. So he told me that you are not allowed to practice assessments like formative assessments i.e. presentation.”

(Participant 2)

Participant 3 also mentioned that he has to obey his university rules, but in his case, his university conducts both formative and summative assessments. However, the lecturers are only restricted to the assessments that are already decided by the university, and they are not allowed to use any other forms of assessments.

“We are really bound to the university rules. Actually, our university is very strict towards the assessment rules and no one is allowed to include or exclude any assessment practice to the existent practices.”

(Participant 3)

“Yes, these are the assessment which I am compelled to do as per the university regulations and we don't have much choices other than the mentioned ones.”

(Participant 3)

4.4.2 Theme 2: Large Size of Classes

The second challenge faced by the participants in implementing formative assessments is the large size of classes they have in their universities. In the interview, all of the participants agreed that the large size of the classes make it more difficult for them to conduct any types of formative assessments in the classroom. Below are the excerpts from the interviews of all participants regarding this challenge:

“I think the biggest challenge is practicing the formative assessment. Due the large classes, it is very difficult the teacher assesses the student and to approach every single student.”

(Participant 1)

“Well, in classes that I teach there are students more than 50. Well when I ask the students to deliver presentation, well, I wouldn’t be able to ask all students to deliver presentation.”

(Participant 2)

“Yes, indeed crowded classes is a big challenge for assessment activities like presentations, group work and questioning.”

(Participant 3)

Due to the big number of students in a classroom, it resulted difficulties for the participants to grade the students, as mentioned by Participants 2 and 3. There are too many papers to be graded and the participants found that this is very inconvenient and difficult to do.

“Well the grading is the most challenging aspect. Well, in classes that I teach there are students more than 50.”

(Participant 2)

“Let me tell you that crowded classes are not only causing problems in presentation, group work and questioning activities but personally it is very difficult for me to score the papers of large number of students at the summative assessment.”

(Participant 3)

Based on these responses, we could see that the participants struggled to assess the students, especially formatively since the number of students in a class is quite big. Even though they wanted to conduct some kinds of formative assessments, it is almost impossible for them to do so in the classrooms.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Time Limitation

The third challenge or theme found in this section is the time limitation. This challenge is closely related to the second challenge, which is the large size of a class. The participants claimed that they could not conduct formative assessments in the classroom because of the short duration of class. Participant 2 and Participant 3 both agreed that short duration of class hindered them if they wanted to implement formative assessments.

“And also as I mentioned before, the time limitation will be a problem because we don't have enough classes in the university i.e. when you give students a test, well the test is one or two hours and another classes starts and when you apply formative assessment and project presentation, right, this will be a challenge, the time issue will be a challenge.”

(Participant 2)

“One thing to add that it is not only large classes that hinders regular assessment but at the same time the biggest challenge I personally face is the short duration of our classes. The duration of our classes are usually 50 minutes where one cannot be able to teach and use assessment activities in such large classes.”

(Participant 3)

Overall, it could be concluded from this data analysis that the participants have positive attitudes towards the formative assessments. However, even though they prefer formative than summative assessments, not all of them have the opportunity to implement formative assessments in the classroom because they have to obey their university rules. There are also challenges they have to face in order to implement the formative assessments like large size of classes and time limitation.

5. DISCUSSION

The results from the interviews revealed that the assessment is a process which helps the Afghan teachers to improve their teaching process. Similarly, Boston (2002) stated in a carried out study that the assessment is a diagnostic phenomenon that offers feedbacks to both instructors and learners over the course of instruction. He added that the teachers can use the information in order to make some essential changes in their teaching process. For example,

providing more chances for practice, utilizing different teaching methods, and teaching again. These can lead the teacher to enhance students' success.

In addition, Ramaprasad (1983) viewed assessment as a process which helps the students know about the gap which exists in their knowledge and it will guide them towards the improvements. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicated that the assessment will provide an insight to the parents and guardians about the students' progress. Accordingly, Marzano, Pickering & McTighe (1993) mentioned that assessment is closely associated to both learning and teaching and it should be carried out in a way which delivers more informative and valuable feedbacks to learners, educators, parents, and the general community.

From the responses of the participants it was found that the general assessment practice of Afghan lecturers is summative assessment. This is in accordance with the study carried by Biggs (1998) in Hongkong, who found that the assessment system was hugely based on high stake exams (summative). It was revealed in the interviewees responses that their attitudes towards the summative assessment was not that much positive, yet, they ought to implement summative assessment in the class. However, from the participants' responses it was quite clear that they know the importance of formative assessment and love to practice formative assessment as well alongside summative assessment.

The findings of the study also indicated that the participants in this study viewed the phenomenon of large classes as a major factor affecting their use of formative assessment. This is in harmony with what Biggs (1998) suggests that large class sizes do obstruct the attempts of Asian teachers to apply learning novelties, such as formative assessment. As the main aim of formative assessment is to provide individual students with constructive feedback for improvement, a large number of students in a classroom make it very challenging for EFL/ESL teachers to implement formative assessment.

As revealed earlier in the participants' responses that the assessment system of Afghan universities is hugely based on the summative assessment. The teachers are not autonomous in the assessment practice and they are limited to only university accepted assessment practices i.e. summative assessment. This was also found by Do Quyen & Khairani (2016), that the teachers are in favour of using formative assessment but the school authorities are not allowing them to use formative assessment and not allowing them to be autonomous and creative in the process of their assessment practices. However, from the participant responses it was revealed that the degree of restriction towards

assessment practice differs in different universities. It was found from one participant response that regarding his university rules and policy, he is not allowed to follow any other assessment method and that is why he only practiced summative assessment. However, another Participant said that he respects the university's rule and regulation, but at the same time he thinks that formative assessment is quite useful and that is why he unofficially practice formative assessment as well at appropriate juncture.

Furthermore, the teachers in this study regarded time constraints as another challenge in their efforts to implement formative assessment. A study conducted by Chen et al. (2014) at a Chinese university also reveal that providing feedback to individual students in a large class is quite tough especially if the class is only limited to approximately an hour. It is impractical for EFL teachers to use formative assessment within the limited duration of a 50 – 60 minutes' class (Chen et al., 2014). To this, Weeb (2005) asserts that sufficient length of class periods along with school's organization, routine needs, and traditions have a substantial effect on the effectiveness of the educational policies.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aimed to investigate the Afghan EFL lecturers' formative assessment practices and the challenges they faced to implement the formative assessments in their classroom. The findings from this study revealed that most participants practised summative assessments in their classrooms, despite the negative perspectives towards the nature of summative assessments. However, all of the participants have positive perspectives towards the formative assessments, and they are confident that formative assessments would help their students to learn better, as well as helping them to improve their teachings in the classroom. Among the challenges faced by the participants to implement formative assessments in their classrooms are university rules and policy, large size of classes as well as time limitation. These challenges hinder their efforts to implement the formative assessments, hence resulting them to resort to summative assessments to assess the students.

In order to improve the situations that Afghan EFL lecturers are facing, there are some actions that could be done. Firstly, the number of students in one class needs to be reduced to the number that a lecturer will be able to handle, either in the teaching and learning process or during assessments. The small teacher-student ratio will definitely help the lecturer to focus better and to pay more attention to each student rather. Secondly, the lecturers need to voice out their opinions and discuss with the university administration regarding the effectiveness of the

assessments. The lecturers might as well need to conduct researched in their universities regarding formative and summative assessments, in order to convince the university administrators that summative assessments will not be enough in the teaching and learning process. Finally, the duration for class sessions should be make longer (if the option of reducing the number of students is not doable) so that the lecturers will have more time to assess the students in the classroom. In conclusion, the assessments should act as a benchmark for the students as well as the teachers to figure out what is lacking and what needs to be done, so that the teaching and learning process will achieve its goal, especially the formative assessments.

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