

Accuracy of Use of Alternative Language Assessment (ALA) Tools and the Students' Performance

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to assess the accuracy of use of the alternative language assessment tools at STI College Cotabato and their relationship to the students' academic performance.

The study utilized the quantitative type of research. Two (2) groups of respondents were utilized in this study. One group consisted of the teachers teaching Com.Arts 3 classes and the other group consisted of the students of these teachers. Three (3) teachers were used as teacher-respondents and each teacher is handling thirty-five (35) students; hence, a total of one hundred five (105) students were used in this study.

The statistical tools used were the frequency, percentage count, mean, grand mean and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Five (5) alternative language assessment tools as embedded in the Communication Arts 3 courseware were assessed by both teachers and the students for accuracy of use. There were the skills used as indicators of teachers' accuracy of use of the alternative language assessment tools. Both sets of respondents assessed the accuracy level of teachers' use of the alternative language assessment tools as high.

The students' performance in Com.Arts 3 was 85.97 described as satisfactory in the STI College Cotabato grading system. There was weak relationship between the teachers' accuracy of use of the alternative language assessment tools and the students' performance.

The teachers' use of the five ALA tools was accurate. Procedures of each tool were followed and implemented correctly by the teachers

It is recommended that the learning institution must design a monitoring and implementing strategies relative to the accurate use of the ALA for sustainability in improving students' communication skills.

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Introduction

Through the years, education is chiefly concerned in developing and modifying the patterns of behavior in human beings, in the realms of thinking, feeling, creating and problem solving. It uses the prescribed curriculum as a means for bringing about these changes. It has been undergoing paradigm shifts and innovations which all aim for the improvement of students' learning.

In this period of technological advancement, improving students' academic performance is believed to be easier than it had been before. The widespread use of computer particularly the computer courseware in numerous fields and domains has given quite an impact on education especially on the second and foreign language education. This computer courseware has emerged to assist English language teaching to provide concepts which are necessary for daily life situation and to bring out the best potential of the students.

Consistent with this trend, the Philippine educational system has been attuned to these

different innovations for the students to be able to think critically and solve problems individually and collectively. These innovations and paradigm shifts are made evident in the field of language teaching and language assessment. This is a good sign for the teachers and the students to achieve effective and productive learning outcomes. It also implies that teachers should not only use the traditional method of teaching which is characterized largely by lectures where students seem to become passive learners.

The advocacy of language teaching today is the use of communicative approach. The basic concept of this approach is to use the target language for authentic learning. This kind of learning does not only allow students to know the content of the disciplines when they graduate; instead, it provides the students the skill to use the acquired knowledge in the real world. Thus, the communicative approach subscribes to the use of so called alternative language assessment tools.

Alternative language assessment aims to assess students' language performance and ensure that the students progress naturally and accurately

while they are engaged in the real world task. The task and performance are showcased for every learner and teams. The task, the criteria, performance conditions and the indicators are collaboratively defined and designed. This makes the learners understand from the beginning what they are expected of in a definite context of learning. The challenge therefore is for the teachers to measure appropriately and accurately the students' performance.

In the context of STI College Cotabato, where the Enrollment to Employment (E2E) system is utilized, the students will gain applicable education, job-ready skills, job preparedness and job placement assistance. The institution uses the courseware which is designed to bring desired changes in the learners. It is where the alternative language assessment tools, target communication skills, and general and specific objectives are stated. In other words, this is a complete approach to human resource development.

These being the case, teachers are mandated to use the courseware. This serves as their guide while they engage themselves in the teaching-learning process. However, as observed, there were teachers who do not follow exactly the procedures indicated in the courseware relative to the use of the identified alternative language assessment tools. By principle, these alternative language assessment tools are perceived to be effective. But their effectiveness degree would somehow be affected by some practices which do not conform to what are identified in the courseware. In addition, the students may have missed some of the opportunities to experience some of the concepts which are needed in their linguistic development. Thus, to claim effectiveness of a particular tool in developing students' linguistic performance, it is imperative to check the accuracy of use of the tools by following exactly the procedures of use.

Related Literature

Assessment, Measurement and Evaluation

Assessment, measurement and evaluation are three terms that are webbed together to yield a meaningful function of each. The overall interrelatedness of these factors plays a crucial role in the entire educational assessment. Ineffective use of any of them affects the total process of giving meaning to students' performance.

Oftentimes, these terms are used by some interchangeably. The term assessment refers to the full range of information gathered and synthesized by teachers about their students and their classroom. Information can be gathered on students in informal ways such as through observations and verbal exchange. Information about classrooms and teacher instruction can also be a part of assessment (Arends, 1994). Etymologically, the term "assess" according to Freeman and Lewis (1998) is derived from the Latin word "asoidere" meaning "to sit by" in judgment. For them, to assess is to judge the extent of students' learning.

Assessment then is a systematic process used to collect information which is used to make inferences about the characteristics of the students (Reynolds and Wilson, 2009). As a process, assessment is used to enhance students' efforts, engagements, and performances (Hammerman, 2009).

Marriot and Lau (2008) added that the students' knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills are appraised through assessment. Hence, assessment is linked to a course or programs intended learning outcomes.

The results of assessment support learning process of the students and shape the teacher's teaching pedagogies. These results help the teacher determine his effectiveness and efficiency. The information the teacher obtain from the results of assessment would provide him several adjustments in his teaching and learning activities that are taking place in his classroom (James, et.al 2007).

Ainsworth (2007) added that assessment results would enable the teacher to diagnose his students' learning needs accurately. The teacher then can make meaningful modifications and changes in his instructional approaches.

Thus, Black, et.al (2006) point out that assessment, curriculum and instruction are linked with each other. Assessment needs to be integrated with curriculum and instruction. This integration makes assessment an important learning experience. accordingly, assessment should be integral in the teaching process.

Moreover, Linn (1989) as cited by Gardner (2012) stressed that, the design of assessment is of great value in making instructional decisions. This means that assessment is indeed integrated with the teaching-learning process.

These definitions of assessment given by the identified authors are closely related to each other. On the other hand, according to Gines, et.al (1998) the term measurement is the process of quantifying the degree to which someone or something possesses a given trait that is quality, characteristics, or feature. They added that it is not synonymous with the administration of test since data may also be collected with processes such as observation or may already available and retrieved from records.

Oosterh (1999) shares the same definition of measurement as the process used to assign number =s or attributes or characteristics of a person, as that of Gines, et.al (1998). Assessment for Oosterh (1999) refers to a related series of measures used to determine a complex attribute of an individual or group of individuals. According to him, evaluation combines measures and assessment with other information to establish the desirability and importance of what teachers have observed.

Garcia (2003) and Osuji (2006) defined the three terms as follows; measurement as used in education is the quantification of what students have learned through the use of tests, questionnaires, rating scales, checklists and other devices. It answers the question "How much does a student learn?" assessment however as Garcia (2003) defined, is the full range of information gathered and synthesized by the teachers about their students and their classrooms. It looks into how much change has occurred on the students' acquisition of skills, knowledge or value before and after a given learning experience. evaluation on the other hand is a process of making judgements as signing value or deciding on worth of students' performance. Since it is concerned in making judgments, it therefore answers the question how good, how adequate or desirable is it.

The Role of Assessment in Language Teaching

In all academic settings, assessment is viewed as closely related to instruction. According to Shaaban (2005), assessment is needed to help teachers and administrators in selection, and in making decisions about students' linguistic abilities, their placement in appropriate levels, and their achievement. This means that the success of any assessment depends on the effective selection and use of appropriate tools and procedures.

Shaaban (2005) added that aside from being essential for evaluating students' progress and achievement, assessment also helps in evaluating the suitability and effectiveness of the curriculum, the teaching methodology, and the instructional materials.

For final evaluation of a certain level of education, the government administers the tools and procedures of the assessment. However, there have been some pros and cons about the policy of the national examination. The objection is based on the views that policy does not go for learner-centered and communicative teaching methodologies. With the advent of learner-centered and communicative teaching methodologies, however, in many setting control over the collection and interpretation of assessment information has shifted from centralized authority towards the classroom where assessment occurs on a regular basis. Moreover, it points the necessity for teachers to look for new assessment techniques to evaluate students' achievement and progress.

Generally, the clientele prefer schools with good performance in these national achievement tests. As such, backwash effect of the centralized assessment is for the teachers to focus on the content on how to make the students perform well in the national examination. In effect, some more important and productive approaches like giving communicative activities are left out in favor of a dictated coverage in the national examination.

This scenario contributes to the problem already felt. To make learning and teaching process effective, there is a necessity to really analyze the needs of the students and match the teaching as well as the assessment practices with these needs. As Frey and Fisher (2003) contend, wise teachers recognize the value of such assessments as a rich source of data.

This being known, it is of prime importance for teachers to identify the kind of assessment that will help develop the skills needed by the students to achieve success in language learning. Included in the guidelines for the choice of appropriate assessment tools to use are the information that gauge whether the students indeed are making progress; the insight that through the assessment tools used the students are able to respond to instructional approaches and materials; and the tools to assist the students in accomplishing the complex learning expectations.

In other words, a O'Malley and Pierce (1996) contend, the teachers need information about integrative language and content knowledge rather than isolated pieces of knowledge and skills.

Alternative Assessment as a Call for Change

The integrative language teaching and assessment being referred to by O'Malley and Pierce (1996) is what Hancock (1995) actually calls the alternative language assessment approach. This approach according to Hancock (1995) offers the opportunity for understanding of concepts and measuring them by making use of practical and creative skills in addition to analytical skills.

Hamayan (1995) said that many educators have come to recognize that alternative assessments are important means of gaining dynamic pictures of students' academic and linguistic development. Huerta-Macias (1995) pointed out that alternative language assessment is particularly useful in learning English as a second language because it employs strategies and tasks that require the students to really use the language. In testing application, the alternative language assessment evaluates what the students can integrate and produce rather than the students can recall and reproduce.

Gipps (2004) pointed out the difference between the traditional assessment and the alternative assessment. In the traditional assessment, the sets and defines the tasks to be done by the learners. The teacher alone determines how the student performance is to be evaluated. The learners do not participate in the formulation of criteria on how they are able to be evaluated. In this type of assessment, the teacher does not seek help how student performance is to be evaluated. His intention is to produce typical students' performance.

On the other hand, alternative assessment gives opportunities for the learners to negotiate with their teacher on how their learning activities should be done. The learners also participate to determine assessment criteria and do self-assessment and peer assessment. The main concern of this assessment is the need to understand the learners' responses. Hence, an open communication exists between the teacher and the learners where everyone respects the assessment perspective of others. In this process,

the teacher helps produce the best performances among his learners.

Moreover, Gipps (2004) stated that alternative assessment becomes a collaborative enterprise. As such, the learners are allowed and encouraged to participate in the assessment process. Learners are given the chance to formulate criteria on how their performances be evaluated. In the traditional assessment, the teachers sets the specific criteria for evaluating the students' performance; whereas, in the alternative assessment, the students share the responsibility with their teacher in relation to how their learning activities be done and how they are to be evaluated. Likewise, in the traditional assessment, the teacher is the judge of the students' performance; however, in the alternative assessment, the teacher is the facilitator of learning.

Thus, alternative assessment is both a process and a product (Martin-Kniep 1993). It becomes a holistic and integrative process which gives a great impact on instruction, curriculum, and assessment. As a process, alternative assessment helps the teacher determine what and how to teach. This also helps the teacher express his vision on what he wanted to produce among his learners. This type of assessment helps the teacher, with the participation of the students, how to assess students' performance.

As a product, alternative assessment leads in designing of assessment tasks and documentation system (Martin-Kniep, 1993). This enables the students understand what learning activities they are to perform and how the outcomes of their learning activities are to be evaluated.

However, Brown and Hudson (1998) stated that the alternative assessment may be counterproductive. This type of assessment is something new and different. This may even be exempted from the requirements of responsible test construction.

Nevertheless, Gipps (2004) expressed for a call for change in the educational system. He felt a need that students be encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by using them instead of demonstrating comprehension or interpretation of knowledge and adopted skills as required in the traditional assessment. Teachers need to consider other assessment models that would enable

students demonstrate what they learned by engaging in different forms of presentation.

This call for a change does not mean a total disregard for the traditional methods of assessment. This call implies that the alternative assessment could even help monitor student progress and performance. Hence, while the teacher uses traditional assessment, he may employ alternative assessment models that would enable a better teaching-learning process and eventually have a better method of assessing student learning.

Characteristics of Alternative Language Assessment Tools

There are several alternative assessment tools which have been commonly used across the teaching profession. Brown and Hudson (1998) provided the defining characteristics of these assessment tools.

According to them, alternative assessment requires the students to perform, create and produce and do somethings. Students have to use real world contexts or simulations in doing something. The activities the students perform are non-intrusive since the activities are extensions of their daily classroom work.

The alternative assessment would even allow students to be assessed and evaluated on what they normally do in class every day. The students use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities; hence, students would focus on the both the process and the product. When the activities are planned and implemented properly, students would develop higher order thinking skills and problem solving skills. Hence, students are provided with feedback and information about their strengths and weaknesses.

When administered properly, alternative assessment is multi-culturally sensitive. This ensures that people do the scoring and this type of assessment encourages the participation of the students in formulating the standards of performance and the rating criteria. Moreover, alternative assessment calls teachers to plan and implement new instructional activities and assessment roles.

An alternative assessment could be structures or unstructured. The unstructured techniques are those which are limited to the creativity of the teacher and the students. These are activities that can be done within the school

premises. The structured techniques are planned to a greater extent. The activities tend to have a clearer outcomes such whether these are completed or not.

Assessment techniques are also categorized according to the focus of these techniques. The focus could be on the process or the product. When the focus is on the process, activities ensure that students demonstrate how the information is processed. On the other hand, when the focus is on the product, activities ensure on the outcome of a behavior, task or activity.

Huerta-Macias (1995) claimed that although traditional forms of assessment can provide somehow suitable measures of students' performance, they often fail to give information about what the students can do. Particularly, what the students can do in learning their second language is not provided in the traditional forms of assessment. Because of this, the alternative assessment is on assessing learners' ability to use language holistically, in real life situations, and is usually carries out constantly over a period of time.

Alternative assessment includes a variety of instruments that can be modified in varying situations. According to Goodman and Hood (1973), these instruments include the use of role plays, panel discussions, oral presentations, interview or conferences, and other.

Hence, alternative assessment is a flexible way to gather information about learners especially their reasoning ability physical ability, and speaking ability.

English Language Teaching Courseware

In this age, computers and courseware are becoming essential tools in teaching and learning. Various research studies have shown that these tools have a great impact on English teaching and learning.

As defined by Gibbs, et.al (2001), the instructional courseware is a software developed for the purpose of providing instructions. These supplements aid the language teachers to produce an effective and productive learning outcome.

The statement was also supported by Criswell (1989) who mentioned that the courseware was originally used to term any computerized packages of teaching-learning materials that instructors could supplement to the main lesson. He also added two definitions of the

courseware which says that in a narrow sense, courseware refers to the programs that administer instructions, and in a wider sense, it relates to all handbooks, performance aids and course materials.

Moreover, Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2008) argued that the courseware is regarded in a wider sense as any of the educational package including a number of language lessons or course appended with tests, teacher's or learner's manuals and guidelines available online. Thus, the courseware serves as the guide and a provider of the different approaches, strategies, methods and instructional materials to assist the language teachers when teaching English language.

The Curriculum Development Center (CDC) of the Ministry of Education in Malaysia emphasized that the instructional materials embedded in the courseware such as audio, video and animations, make the classroom lessons become visually more attractive and engaging. These materials bring positive effect on the students' performance.

Furthermore, it is believed that by using the English language courseware, language teachers will have resources that are tailored to their needs in developing their students' language competencies. As such, teachers need to exert extra time and effort to acquaint themselves of new technologies particularly the use of courseware in order to bring out desired learning outcomes of the students. Teachers must be responsible of knowing how to use the courseware to implement correctly and appropriately the strategies or methods indicated in the courseware to develop the students' skills (CDC, 2003).

A language courseware is designed to provide students with the foreign language ability and advanced professional knowledge necessary to succeed in the job market. According to John and Dudley-Evans (1991), the English for specific purposes instruction has become increasingly emphasized since 2000 at different universities. The goal of which is to meet the needs of learners who learn English for use in their specific fields such as business, science, technology, medicine, leisure, and even academic learning. With this perception, the use of English language courseware will upgrade the level of knowledge regarding the industry's development and simultaneously improve English skills within the current system of higher education because it will help the students gain related abilities, including

language skills for potentials future jobs (John and Dudley-Evans (1991).

Hsia (2004) added that the use of the courseware provides an opportunity for the development of English language instruction which is considered to be a learner-centered, content-based approach to teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The courseware provides different tasks or activities that could enhance the students' target skills. These activities bring out the best linguistic potential of the English learners which are essential in a real world context.

Method

The researcher used the quantitative type of research. It utilized the Communication Arts 3 courseware of STI College Cotabato and the grades of the students in Com.Arts 3 during the first semester of the academic year 2013-2014. In assessing the accuracy of the teachers' use of the alternative language assessment tools in developing the students' target communication skills, the mean of four (4) point scale was used while the significant relationships were interpreted using the scale of Ramsey (2010).

There were two (2) groups of respondents. One group consisted of the teachers who taught Com.Arts 3 classes and the other group consisted of the respective students of these teachers. There were 3 Com.Arts 3 teachers and 105 students who served as the respondents of this study. A total of 108 respondents participated in this study.

Two (2) parallel questionnaires were used as the instruments in this study. One was used for the teacher-respondents and the other one was used for the student-respondents. Items in this questionnaire were formulated based on the Com.Arts 3 courseware. The items were validated by the 5 subject experts.

The statistical tools used were the frequency, percentage count, mean, grand mean and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Results and Discussions

Table 1
Teachers' Accuracy of Use of the Alternative Language
Assessment Tools as Assessed by the Teachers

ALA Tools	Mean	Description
1. Oral Presentation	3.27	High
2. Interview	3.41	High
3. Panel Discussion	3.29	High
4. Physical Demonstration	3.19	High
5. Voicing and Decoding	3.09	High
Over all Mean	3.25	High
Legend:	Range of the Accuracy	Description
	3.50 – 4.00	Very High
	2.50 – 3.49	High
	1.50 – 2.49	Low
	1.00 – 1.49	Very Low

This table reflects the teachers' accuracy of use of the alternative language assessment tools as assessed by the teachers. There were five (5) identified alternative language assessment tools and each tool has five (5) target communication skills. As reflected, oral presentation as one of the ALA tools has a mean of 3.27 described as high; interview 3.41, high; panel discussion, 3.29, high; physical demonstration, 3.19, high; and voicing and decoding, 3.09, high. The over all mean of 3.25 which described as high implies that the teachers use the identified alternative language

Table 2

Teachers' Accuracy of Use of the Alternative Language
Assessment Tools as Assessed by the Students

ALA Tools	Mean	Description
1. Oral Presentation	3.20	High
2. Interview	3.41	High
3. Panel Discussion	3.11	High
4. Physical Demonstration	3.23	High
5. Voicing and Decoding	3.16	High
Over all Mean	3.22	High
Legend:	Range of the Accuracy	Description
	3.50 – 4.00	Very High
	2.50 – 3.49	High
	1.50 – 2.49	Low
	1.00 – 1.49	Very Low

The table above shows the assessment of students on the identified alternative language assessment tools. As seen in this table, the oral presentation has a mean score of 3.20, high; interview, 3.41, high; panel discussion, 3.11, high; physical demonstration, 3.23, high; and voicing and decoding, 3.16 described as high.

assessment tools correctly and appropriately to develop the target communication skills of the students. It further implies that the teachers believe that the courseware provides a package of teaching procedures which aim to develop the students' target skills by providing effective and productive learning experience. This finding affirms the idea of Criswell (1989) that the courseware is a package of teaching-learning materials that instructors could supplement to the main lesson.

The over all mean of 3.22 which described high suggests that the students believe to their Com.Arts 3 teachers for using and following the procedures on conducting the identified alternative language assessment tools in order to develop the target communication skills of the students. They further believed that teachers were engaging activities and allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a real

life context. Students were able to demonstrate and bring out their best potential by participating in the different activities conducted by the teachers as reflected in the courseware. The students' motivation was observed to be driven by the class activities which require them to use their personal experience.

This finding is an affirmation of Brown and Hudson (1998) claim that alternative assessments require students to perform, create, produce, or do something and use real-world contexts or simulations.

Table 3
Distribution of the Students' Performancne in Com.Arts 3

Grades	Frequency	Percentage
76-78	3	2.86
79-81	19	18.10
82-84	21	20.00
85-87	23	21.90
88-90	17	16.19
91-93	16	15.24
94-96	6	5.71
Mean Grade = 85.97	105	100.00

Highest Grade: 96

Lowes Grade: 77

As displayed in this table, there were three students or 2.86 percent whose average grades ranged from 76-78. Nineteen Or 18.10 percent of the students had an average grade ranging from 79-81. Twenty-one or 20.00 percent of the students had an average grade ranging from 82-84 while the twenty-three or 21.90 percent had an average grade ranging from 85-87. The 16.19

percent or 17 students got an average ranging from 88-90 while the other 15.24 percent or 16 students got an average grade ranging from 91-93. The remaining 5.71 percent or 6 students got an average grade ranging from 94-96. The highest grade obtained was ninety-six (96) while the lowest grade was seventy-seven (77). The calculated mean grade was 85.97.

Table 4
The Correlation Coefficient between the Accuracy of Use of the Alternative Language Assessment Tools and the Students' Performance

Paired Variable	Correlation Coefficient r	Description
Accuracy of Use and Students' Performance	0.21	Weak (Significant)

r to be significant (S) at 0.05 level of significance should be at least 0.19

Legend:	Ranges of Values of r	Description
	0.00 - ±0.19	Very Weak
	± 0.20 - ±0.39	Weak
	± 0.40 - ± 0.59	Moderate
	± 0.60 - ±0.79	Strong
	± 0.80 - ± 0.99	Very Strong
	± 1.00 -	Perfect

As gleaned in table 4, there is a weak significant relationship between the teachers' accuracy of use of the alternative language assessment tools and the students' performance. This is shown by the computed r-value of 0.21 at 0.05 level of

significance. This means that the grades or performance of the students had something to do with the teachers' accuracy of use of the identified alternative language assessment tools in developing the target communication skills of the student. This finding further means that the

teachers must be accurate in using the identified ALA tools because the accuracy of use predicts the development of students' communication skills. In other words, if the teachers correctly followed the procedures of each ALA tool, there is a positive impact or effect on the students' performance. The higher is the accuracy of use, the higher is the students' performance or grades. The result was intensified by Hammerman (2009) who defined assessment as a process which is used to enhance students' efforts, engagements, and performances.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the light of the findings of the study, it is concluded that the teachers' use of the five alternative language assessment tools embedded in the courseware was correct and appropriate. The different procedures of each tool were followed and implemented correctly by the teachers. Further, the teachers' accurate use of the ALA tools helps in developing the students' communication skills. By using these tools, teachers actually used the communicative approach to language teaching.

It is recommended that the expertise of the teachers in using and implementing the alternative language assessment tools is indispensable. Thus, the learning institution must maintain if not, improve their performance towards using the courseware in speech and oral communication arts. The use of ALA tools is found accurate in developing students' communication skill. Thus, the recommendation of using the same tools in other areas of field of discipline is applicable. The learning institution must design a monitoring and implementing strategy relative to the accurate use of the courseware particularly the ALA tools for the sustainability of accuracy of use in developing students' communication skills. Lastly, exploring the feasibility of using the same tools in other areas of discipline to help improve students' academic performance should be conducted.

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