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Exploring Assessment Methods Used by Grade Four English First Additional Language Teachers

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The form of assessment which grade four teachers use to determine the learning outcomes of the learners who are studying English First Additional Language (EFAL) in South African schools demands urgent attention. This urgency stems from the necessity to critically examine the post-apartheid educational system's assessment practices and how effectively they align with the evolving needs of society. To maintain a more discreet approach, this investigation specifically centered on teachers of EFAL and utilized a qualitative case study methodology. A purposive sampling technique led to the inclusion of 10 grade four EFAL teachers from schools in the King Cetshwayo District for data collection. The primary tool employed for this purpose was a semi-structured interview, skillfully developed to explore the perspectives of teachers and beliefs on assessment techniques. The researchers opted for a thematic analysis approach, allowing for a thorough examination of the data while respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. The findings of classwork and teachers predominantly leaned towards traditional approaches such as engaging students through question-and-answer interactions, conducting tests, evaluating classwork, and assessing comprehension abilities. These methods were the primary means through which teachers assessed their students' understanding and performance within the learning environment. The study recommended that diversifying assessment techniques could provide a more comprehensive understanding of learners' development, catering to varying abilities and better addressing individual learning needs.

Keywords: Assessment, Curriculum, English First Additional Language Teaching Methods, Grade-four Teachers, South Africa.

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1. Introduction

Following the eradication of apartheid education in South Africa, assessment emerged as a focal concern amidst the extensive curriculum reforms (Kanjee et al., 2022). A study conducted by Van der Berg and Gustafsson (2019) highlighted the objective of addressing educational disparities and improving the quality of education in the South African system through these reforms. The post-apartheid changes were comprehensive, touching on different aspects of education, such as curriculum design, teaching approaches, and notably, assessment methods. Evaluations, being a fundamental element of the educational system, underwent substantial adjustments in accordance with the broader objectives of the reforms (Department of Basic Education, 2020b). The focus shifted from traditional evaluation methods primarily measuring rote memorization to more comprehensive assessments evaluating the skill of thinking critically, skill of problem-solving, and knowledge application. In this regard, assessment approaches were expected to have evolved to include a broader range of evaluation techniques such as project-based assessments, portfolio assessments, or performance assessments. These methods would have captured a more holistic understanding of students' abilities beyond mere retention of information, fostering a deeper comprehension of subjects and encouraging a more participatory and engaging learning environment. Nevertheless, the overhaul involves shifts from C2005 and Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), accompanied by subsequent modifications like the Revised NCS and the formulation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), as indicated by the Department of Basic Education (2020a).

It is apparent that the educational reforms after the apartheid regime in South Africa instigated a transformation in assessment practices. The modifications in assessments, integral to the educational framework, were closely aligned with the broader goals of these reforms (Kanjee & Sayed, 2013). There was a noticeable shift away from traditional assessment methods centered on memorization towards more comprehensive evaluation mechanisms. These newer approaches aimed not only to assess memorization but also the ability to think critically, problem-solving abilities, and knowledge application. As a result, EFAL teachers in schools within the King Cetshwayo District are entrusted with nurturing communication skills among learners by adeptly utilizing assessment methods. Proficient EFAL learning enables students to express their emotions, thoughts, and concepts, turning language into a conduit for fostering cognitive and academic abilities (Department of Basic Education, 2020b). The National Protocol for Assessment policy specifies that teaching and assessment of EFAL at grade four should

encompass diverse assessment methods to capture ample evidence of cognitive academic development (Department of basic Education, 2011). This policy aligns with the study, emphasizing that assessment should effectively and efficiently showcase learner achievements (Popkova, 2020). Within the CAPS curriculum framework, assessment takes on various forms, embracing both formative and summative evaluations to comprehensively gauge and interpret learner performance. This context inspired the researchers to investigate the assessment methodologies employed by teachers of EFAL to assess the learning outcomes of their learners.

The researchers are driven by the desire to explore the extent to which teachers of EFAL in grade four implement both formal and informal assessment practices within their classrooms, in accordance with the guidelines set out in the CAPS assessment policy. This study aims to shed light on the existing variations involving formative and summative assessment used by teachers during the instruction and evaluation of EFAL in grade four. The exploration of this terrain seeks to narrow the gap in understanding how teachers navigate the expectations outlined in the assessment policy. This includes considerations such as incorporating multiple tasks, grading, record-keeping, conducting diagnostic analyses, devising improvement strategies, and other aspects integral to assessment practices. Additionally, the study aims to delve into teachers' approaches to effectively manage time while administering various assessment tasks. Therefore, the following two research questions are answered in this study.

1. What strategies do teachers of EFAL at grade four employ in choosing suitable assessment methods that cater to the unique language learning needs and proficiency levels of their students?
2. How do the teachers of EFAL balance formative and summative assessments to accurately measure and support student progress effectively?

2. Literature Review

The literature review in this study encompasses the examination of the following areas: The theoretical framework, the assessment methodologies employed by teachers in instructing EFAL in grade four, the factors influencing teachers in adopting a certain form of assessment, the challenges encountered by teachers when integrating innovative assessment practices especially in EFAL, and the comparison of old-style and alternative assessment approaches.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this study is rooted in activity theory. It is a theoretical framework with its origins in the philosophical works of Marx, Engels, Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Luria dating back to the 1920s. Serving as a philosophical lens, activity theory explores human practices (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2018), providing an alternative perspective to understand human thought processes and actions. It proves to be a robust tool for the analysis of various human activities. Therefore, the researchers employed activity theory to delve into teachers' perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors concerning the assessment methodologies used for assessing EFAL in grade four. For instance, teachers' beliefs and perceptions about assessing language proficiency can significantly influence their choice of assessment methods. If a teacher strongly emphasizes the importance of oral communication skills in language learning, they might prioritize assessment methods such as group discussions, oral presentations, or conversational assessments to evaluate students' speaking abilities.

Therefore, activity theory aligns with the objectives of this study, which concentrates on the methods of assessment employed by teachers who are placed in grade four to teach EFAL. Utilizing this theory enables an in-depth exploration of the varied methodologies teachers employ when assessing EFAL learners in grade four. Additionally, it provides a framework to structure themes and categories crucial for a comprehensive discussion of the collected data (Mpuangnan et al., 2023), thereby facilitating a thorough exploration of the gathered information.

2.2. Assessment Methods Used by Teachers in EFAL Classroom

Evaluation plays a vital role in the educational setting, enabling the identification, gathering, and interpretation of learners' performance through various methodologies (Chen et al., 2015). The teaching and assessment of EFAL in grade four within the CAPS curriculum encompass a range of assessment forms, incorporating both formative and summative, as well as traditional and alternative assessment methods. This highlights the significance of utilizing both formative and summative assessments for EFAL teachers to consistently track and assess learners' progress throughout their educational journey, with careful documentation of their advancements (Harlen, 2006).

2.2.1. Use of Summative Assessment for Assessing EFAL

Summative assessment means a reflective overview of students' accumulated knowledge, typically conducted at the conclusion of the learning phase to determine a comprehensive grasp of standards or a student's knowledge base (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). In the area of EFAL within the CAPS curriculum, this form of assessment materializes through formal tasks such as projects, tests, assignments, examinations, and presentations. Often referred to as the "assessment of learning," the Department of Basic Education (2011) dictates the frequency of formal tests per term and the year-end examination. Criticisms from Ketabi and Ketabi (2014) indicate that the rigidity of summative assessment undermines its potential to provide constructive feedback to learners for performance enhancement, limiting its effectiveness in fostering learner improvement. Ketabi and Ketabi emphasize the importance of continuous feedback throughout the learning process, enabling teachers to tailor their teaching approaches to meet learners' needs.

The interconnected nature of formative and summative assessment comes to light in Medina's (2015) perspective, urging for their collaborative use to actively engage learners and encourage self-reflection, particularly in additional language learning contexts. Chandio and Jafferri (2015) argue against relying solely on quantitative measures such as summative assessment, shedding light on its limitations in providing a comprehensive understanding of learner performance. They advocate for diverse assessment approaches that delve deeper into learners' accomplishments. This emphasizes the crucial interplay between summative and formative assessment, a concept emphasized by Black and William (2009) as a potent means to enhance learner performance in summative evaluations. Their viewpoint underscores the pivotal role of formative assessment in strengthening learner achievement in summative assessments, highlighting its significance within the learning process.

Harlen (2006) presents summative assessment as a tool to assess learners' achievements, primarily documenting progress and evaluating school performance. This form of assessment primarily measures competency rather than solely focusing on knowledge or intelligence. On the contrary, Tsilo (2006) argues that summative assessment is significant in providing crucial information essential for learner selection and placement in subsequent grades. Additionally, it assists teachers in grading learners, maintaining comprehensive records of learner accomplishments, and effectively communicating progress to both parents and learners. This administrative

assessment practice not only ensures accountability to educational authorities but also evaluates program effectiveness (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). However, the predominant emphasis on grading within summative assessment suggests its primary role in evaluating learner achievement rather than nurturing the learning process itself.

2.2.2. Use of Formative Assessment Methods in EFAL Classroom

A formative form of assessment emerges as a crucial method employed by teachers of EFAL to measure learners' progress during ongoing learning. It is an informal approach, often referred to as assessment for teach (Hargreaves et al., 2014). Within the CAPS curriculum, educators are encouraged to integrate various informal tasks, including observations, discussions, projects, presentations, and practical demonstrations, while instructing and assessing EFAL (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Theorists such as Heritage (2007) and Cauley and McMillan (2010) perceive the formative form of assessment as a continuous process of accumulating evidence regarding learners' achievements and comprehension levels, subsequently using this evidence to provide feedback and adapt instructional methods accordingly.

Championed by Black and William (2009), formative assessment holds significance because the feedback generated is utilized by teachers for effective subject planning, while learners leverage this feedback to make informed decisions about their subsequent learning steps, fostering a smoother learning process. This practice encourages interactive engagement between teachers and learners, cultivating lifelong and reflective learning skills crucial for EFAL education (Wood, 2017). Unlike summative assessment, Tsilo (2006) highlights that formative assessment places less emphasis on assigning marks, prioritizing constructive learning, and creating an encouraging environment for both learners and teachers.

2.3. Assessment Methods in South African Schools

In South African schools, formative assessment methods are used continuously throughout the learning process (Taole, 2021). For instance, teachers might use classroom discussions to gauge students' understanding of a topic. They can observe how students participate, grasp concepts, and express their ideas. Quizzes are another common formative assessment tool, providing immediate feedback on students' comprehension, and allowing teachers to adjust their teaching methods accordingly (Sizwe, 2022). On the other hand, summative assessments, such as the annual national assessments (ANAs), are

conducted at the culmination of a learning period (Howie, 2012). These assessments often take the form of standardized tests covering subjects like mathematics and languages. For example, ANAs assess students' overall proficiency in these core subjects based on predetermined learning objectives. Results from these assessments help evaluate the effectiveness of the educational system in meeting educational standards (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010).

However, challenges persist in this assessment framework. The emphasis on high-stakes exams like ANAs might lead to a teaching to the test approach, where educators focus primarily on preparing students for these assessments rather than fostering broader skills and understanding (Kanjee, et al., 2022). Additionally, unequal access to quality education across regions and socioeconomic backgrounds poses a significant challenge (Bertram et al., 2021). For instance, students in underprivileged areas might have limited resources or support, affecting their performance on standardized tests compared to their more privileged counterparts. These challenges prompt ongoing discussions and reforms within the educational system, aiming to create a more inclusive and effective assessment environment (Department of Basic Education, 2020a). The goal is to move beyond relying solely on standardized tests and to incorporate a variety of assessment methods that better reflect students' diverse learning styles and contexts. This shift intends to address the broader educational needs of students, ensuring fair and comprehensive evaluation while promoting holistic learning and skill development.

2.4. Factors Influencing Teachers' Selection of Assessment Methods

2.4.1. Teachers' Beliefs

Teachers' beliefs play a crucial role in shaping their preferences for assessment methods in the classroom. In a study by Kim et al. (2013) investigating EFL teachers in Colombia, it was revealed that teachers' beliefs strongly influence their choices in both teaching and assessment methods, particularly in the context of implementing communicative language teaching. Additionally, Crusan et al. (2016) found that the teachers' diverse experiences contribute to distinct beliefs regarding assessment practices, with more seasoned educators holding different perspectives compared to their less experienced counterparts.

Despite the continuous evolution of assessment methodologies, some educators still lean towards old-style assessment methods. As per the findings

by Acar-Erdol and Yildizli (2018), teachers commonly employ assessment methods like observations and utilize objective questions, including true or false statements and short-answer questions. Similar findings were reiterated in Tsilo's research (2006), emphasizing the persistent reliance on traditional assessment tools like tests and examinations despite the suggested diversity in assessment methodologies. However, this inclination towards traditional assessment practices tends to prioritize the outcomes of learning over the process of learning itself (Acar-Erdol & Yildizli, 2018). There is a growing call for teachers to cultivate an environment that encourages learners to independently construct knowledge through critical thinking (Saefurrohman & Balinas, 2016), indicating a shift away from conventional assessment methods that primarily focus on evaluating the outcome of learning.

2.4.2. Knowledge of Assessment Methods

Teachers' proficiency in assessment methods, skills, and attitudes significantly influences the selection and implementation of assessment methodologies within the learning environment (Acar-Erdol & Yildizli, 2018). It can be learnt from Masole and Howie's (2013) study that teachers in agriculture education tended to opt for assessment methods aligned with their comfort zones, despite the call for more comprehensive evaluation methods in performance assessment. This tendency was attributed to insufficient training, leaving them without the necessary assessment competencies. As a result, there is a recognized need for educators to acquire adequate assessment skills to be effective.

Furthermore, the study identified large class sizes as a hindrance to effectively conducting performance assessments, compelling each school to develop its assessment principles on the basis of the statement of the syllabus and the local contexts (Crusan et al., 2016). This lack of assessment knowledge leads to a deficiency in teachers' confidence in their assessment abilities, as emphasized by Crusan et al. (2016), echoing the sentiment expressed in Masole and Howie's (2013) study. Insufficient training and inadequate support contribute to teachers' unease and hesitation in carrying out assessments effectively, underscoring the critical need for enhancing educators' assessment skills and confidence.

2.4.3. Time Allocation

The selection of assessment methods while teaching EFAL is notably influenced by time constraints. Literature underlines the challenge teacher's

encounter in developing high-quality assessments due to limitations in time, deviating from the expectations set by the Department of Education (Kim et al., 2013). This pressure intensifies as teachers navigate the multitude of required assessment practices outlined by the CAPS curriculum concerning EFAL.

2.5. Challenges and Successes Experienced by Teachers during Assessment

EFAL teachers in grade four are confronted with challenges arising from learners' educational backgrounds, particularly the transition from using the first language for instruction in the foundation phase as a means of incorporating the EFAL (Ngcobo, 2015). This shift presents a hurdle to the effective implementation of assessment practices, as EFAL teachers wrestle with the adoption of formative assessment techniques that require substantial changes in instructional methodologies (Black, 2015). The CAPS curriculum introduces modifications in assessment methods, prescribing both formal and informal assessments for EFAL learners in grade four, encompassing diverse language skills.

Research by Ngwenya (2006) underscores that while some teachers of EFAL are receptive to change, the lack of support from educational authorities impedes the effective implementation of new assessment methodologies. Despite teachers' awareness of the various assessment methods introduced by the new curriculum, outdated assessment strategies persist within classrooms, primarily focusing on testing content knowledge (Ntuli, 2007; Tsilo, 2006). However, this testing-centric approach primarily gauges content knowledge for promotion purposes, failing to contribute effectively to learners' ongoing performance improvements throughout the learning process.

Furthermore, Ramsaroop (2013) presents evidence highlighting how language policies and overcrowded classrooms constrain teachers' ability to employ diverse assessment forms in certain schools. Cele (2009) revealed a gap in teachers' knowledge of the importance of formative assessment during both teaching and assessment processes. It also highlighted the absence of clear assessment programs, suggesting that teachers might need more support and clarity in integrating formative assessment effectively into their classrooms (Cele, 2009). Building on Cele's work, this study takes a human-centered approach by recognizing that successful integration of formative assessment within grade four EFAL classrooms is more than just a technical challenge. It involves delving into the knowledge of the teacher of the significance of

formative forms of assessment and their ability to connect with students' ideas. This recognition goes beyond the academic context and touches on the human aspect of teaching, emphasizing the importance of teachers not only knowing why formative assessment matters but also being able to interpret and engage with the unique perspectives and ideas of their students. Therefore, this study seeks to study the form of assessment employed by EFAL teachers within the CAPS curriculum, acknowledging the human elements that contribute to effective teaching and learning.

Contrary evidence suggests a positive outlook and the potential strategies that can be used in assessment processes to achieve objectives. Nkosi's (2014) study focused on teachers' encounters with the CAPS curriculum in South Africa, revealing that many educators perceive curriculum changes as a positive advancement in the education system. Similarly, Pohl (2010) uncovers that teachers share optimistic perceptions of the integration of appropriate teaching methodologies capable of developing learners. Additionally, Pohl (2005) found that many teachers comprehended the importance of incorporation, believing it prepares learners to be able to face the challenging world.

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, which harmonizes effectively with the investigation of teachers' practices in utilizing assessment methods for teaching English First Additional Language in grade four. Qualitative research, as emphasized by Baskarada (2014), provides a thorough avenue to collect data about the phenomenon at hand. Therefore, the various assessment methods employed by teachers are critical. It allows for an in-depth understanding of the research problem, enabling the researcher to delve into the nuances surrounding assessment methodologies. While qualitative research, notably during interviews, can be time-consuming, it presents a distinctive advantage in its capacity to explore varied perspectives concerning the phenomenon under scrutiny, as noted by Choy (2014). This approach offers a breadth of insights and viewpoints, enriching the comprehension of teachers' behaviors and approaches in utilizing assessment methods for assessing learners in the class of EFAL.

3.1. Participants

The study gathered data from ten grade four teachers of EFAL from schools in King Cetshwayo District, employing a purposeful sampling

technique. Purposeful sampling involves the deliberate selection of specific participants who can offer pertinent insights into the phenomenon under investigation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Tongco (2007) underscores the significance of purposeful sampling, emphasizing its reliability in retaining genuine information, which remains consistent and testable over time.

The application of purposeful sampling was guided by the need for educators especially teachers teaching EFAL to learners in grade four, as they can offer comprehensive and relevant information crucial for the research (Cohen et al., 2007). Additionally, the researchers' choice of purposeful sampling was influenced by the activity theory as used in this study to scrutinize participants' activity within various contexts, notably in the context of assessment methods in this study (Curtis et al., 2000). Selecting ten participants from different schools aimed at ensuring the reliability and transferability of the collected data to other contexts with diverse participants (Anney, 2014). The researchers employed the following participant selection criteria.

- A participant should be a grade four EFAL teacher, regardless of gender.
- A participant should be teaching EFAL in grade four within curriculum changes such as OBE, NCS, and RNCS.
- A participant should have teaching experience of eight years.
- A participant should hold a minimum qualification of four years in teaching.

Participants were selected based on their roles as instructors of English First Additional Language, providing valuable insights to assess the extent of data generalizability (Miles et al., 2013). The selection prioritized individuals with substantial knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon, showcasing a willingness to share their experiences and perspectives, as emphasized by Palinkas et al. (2015). To initiate the study, the researchers obtained permission from school principals and teachers of EFAL before engaging with the participants. Subsequently, contact details were exchanged, facilitating subsequent communication. The researchers then arranged in-person interviews at mutually convenient times and suitable locations after coordinating with the participants via phone.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Semi-structured In-Depth Interviews

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary method for data collection. The selection of this method was based on its effectiveness in eliciting and comprehending participants' beliefs and perceptions on the topic, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the social phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007). Studies like Gill et al. (2008) underscore interviews as valuable tools for exploring participants' perspectives and probing into their experiences, views, and contextual understandings within the research phenomenon. The use of semi-structured interviews facilitated a thorough exploration of their experiences, as emphasized by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006). This method was well-suited for the study's objectives, aiming to delve deeply into the phenomenon and guide the exploration of various facets within it (Gill et al., 2008). The semi-structured nature of these interviews provided flexibility while offering guidance to participants, allowing for an exploration of diverse areas related to the topic at hand.

3.3. Procedure

In securing data, the researchers acquired consent from participants, specifically grade four EFAL teachers instructing within the CAPS curriculum. Adhering to ethical standards, the participants' identities remained confidential, and assurance was provided regarding the exclusive use of the data for research purposes solely. The interview process encompassed three separate sessions, each spanning 45 minutes, with explicit permission obtained from the participants for audio recording. Following the interviews, the recorded audio was transcribed and meticulously documented in a notebook for further analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

In this study, the data analysis involved categorizing and structuring data in a thematic approach, drawing insights from the work of Lewis and Ritchie (2003). A thematic analysis involves the identification and reporting of themes that emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). Guided by the theoretical framework of activity theory, this approach facilitated a comprehensive depiction of the data, revealing participants' experiences, interpretations, and conveyed realities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was employed by the researchers to meticulously examine the assessment methods utilized by teachers of EFAL, with the aim of analyzing

ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and beliefs conveyed by the participants (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003).

To establish inter-coder reliability in thematic analysis, the researchers first established a coding framework as per the research questions. Then, each coder independently analyzed a subset of data, identifying themes to prevent biases. Subsequently, researchers compared their coded findings, discussing any discrepancies to reach a consensus on themes and interpretations. This process ensures consistency across all coders, enhancing the analysis' validity, as seen in a study. Table 1 shows the systematic exploration and identification of themes, contributing to the understanding of the research questions.

Table 1

Steps Followed in Analyzing Data

Steps	Description of the Analysis Process
Step1	The researchers engaged in multiple readings of the collected data from interviews and transcripts, actively seeking meanings and forms (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Step2	The investigators audio-recorded the data and transcribed and meticulously verified the accuracy of the transcriptions via the original audio recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maree, 2007).
Step 3	The researchers performed coding by annotating notes directly on the data (Maree, 2007).
Step 4	The investigators aligned the data that were coded with relevant data obtained from each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Step 5	The diverse codes were organized into potential themes (Maree, 2007).
Step 6	The identified themes were carefully examined and enhanced (Schreier, 2012).
Step 7	The findings were eventually presented (Schreier, 2012).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Selection of Appropriate Assessment Methods

The participants highlighted their preference for a narrow range of assessment approaches while evaluating EFAL learners in grade four. Despite acknowledging selectivity, their choices predominantly leaned towards conventional approaches like question-and-answer sessions, tests, classwork, as well as assessment of comprehension. Below, we present the responses from participants.

Participant 1: *The only formative-related assessment methods I use are question and answer; written work and homework.*

Participant 2: *Types of formative assessment methods I use are question and answer; comprehension; written exercises; reading aloud and homework.*

Participant 3: *I use question and answer, homework, and class work.*

Participant 4: *In our English classes, I believe in a mix of assessments. When we have lively class discussions, I can immediately see where students are grasping the material. And when we have exams or essays, it gives us a chance to evaluate their overall understanding.*

Participant 5: *I am a big advocate for variety in assessments. Whether it is through creative projects or engaging presentations, it is essential to let students show their language skills in different ways, especially considering their different learning preferences.*

Participant 6: *I encourage self-reflection and peer evaluation in my class. It is wonderful to see students take responsibility for their learning and work together to assess each other's progress.*

Participant 7: *I believe in finding a balance between traditional methods and modern approaches. Incorporating technology for projects engages students and makes learning English more fun. But it is not possible because of resource challenges.*

Participant 8: *I am all about variety! From encouraging debates to fostering creative writing, I aim to make assessments diverse to cater to each student's unique strengths.*

Participant 9: *I rely on weekly quizzes to keep a pulse on student learning. Immediate feedback helps students stay on track and understand where they need more support.*

Participant 10: *I find portfolio assessments incredibly insightful. It is like capturing a journey through their work, allowing a comprehensive understanding of how they've progressed in English over time.*

Participants' insights underscore the significance of utilizing diverse assessment techniques, encompassing discussions, essays, presentations, and technology-driven projects, to assess students' language competencies effectively. Notably, the endorsement of varied strategies, with some participants emphasizing the benefits of self-assessment and peer evaluation in cultivating accountability and teamwork. Others stressed the importance of continuous evaluations, like weekly quizzes or portfolio assessments, as essential components of a holistic approach to measuring students' language

proficiency and overall academic development. The varied perspectives highlight the approaches educators employ to comprehensively understand and enhance students' language skills and academic progress.

4.1.2. Challenges involved in using assessment methods

English teachers in South Africa discussed diverse challenges encountered when selecting appropriate assessment methods. Details of the educator's opinions are presented as follows.

Participant 1: *It is challenging to try all the other forms of assessment because my attempts to use other formative related assessment approaches like debates, presentations, as well as storytelling were unsuccessful.*

Participant 2: *Learners hardly express themselves due to low self-esteem and lack of vocabulary.*

Participant 3: *Presentations, debates, and storytelling are difficult to do since learners do not have the vocabulary to express themselves.*

Participant 4: *Resources can be a bit of a headache. I'd love to do more interactive stuff, but sometimes we're held back by limited materials or access to technology.*

Participant 5: *Aligning assessments with what we're supposed to cover is like solving a puzzle. It's crucial that our assessments match what we're teaching but getting that balance right can be tricky.*

Participant 6: *Those big exams can really steal the spotlight. While they're important, sometimes they overshadow other methods that could benefit our students in different ways.*

Participant 7: *Finding time for everything is tough. We want to keep a pulse on how students are doing, but it's a challenge to fit it all in without rushing through the curriculum.*

Participant 8: *Avoiding bias in assessments is a real concern. We try hard to create fair assessments that don't unintentionally favour any group of students.*

Participant 9: *Getting students excited about assessments can be a bit of a puzzle. I am always looking for ways to make assessments engaging and to help students see the value in different approaches.*

Participant 10: *One of the tough parts is making sure every student feels they have a fair shot at assessments. I want each student to shine but balancing that while keeping things consistent can be really challenging.*

The participants' viewpoints reveal a variety of challenges associated with the selection of appropriate assessment methods. They emphasized the ongoing difficulty in achieving a balance between maintaining fairness and inclusivity, all while ensuring the consistency and diversity of assessments that

protect the distinct desires of individual students. These challenges highlight the intricacies involved in crafting an assessment framework that accommodates diverse learning styles and abilities within educational settings. This highlights a continuous commitment to refining assessment strategies to enhance the equity and effectiveness of the educational experience for all students.

4.1.3. Balancing Formative and Summative Assessment

The outcomes within this theme reveal that EFAL teachers grapple with aligning with the curriculum policy, struggling to balance assessment through formative and summative forms of assessment mandated by the CAPS curriculum policy on EFAL, as shown in the following responses.

Participant 1: *Utilizing all formative assessment strategies is not feasible. It's not that these assessment strategies aren't valuable – they absolutely are! But they are numerous, and all can't be applied.*

Participant 2: *Implementing all types of formative assessment, as stipulated by the policy, is not practically achievable. It's about selecting the most effective methods rather than trying to use them all.*

Participant 3: *The guidelines outlined in the policy are not practically implementable. I choose specific assessment methods that best fit the learning goals, the student's needs, and the available time.*

Participant 4: *I like to keep things varied. We have regular quick quizzes during the week to see how everyone's doing, and then we dive into fun projects or presentations every month, giving students a chance to shine.*

Participant 5: *Our classroom is buzzing with discussions! We chat about what we've read, and then I have the kids write down their thoughts. It's a mix of daily chats and bigger monthly quizzes.*

Participant 6: *I've seen the magic of projects! We work on these exciting projects related to our lessons, and at the end, students present them to the class. It's a neat way to learn and be assessed at the same time.*

Participant 7: *Portfolios are my go-to. Each student keeps track of their work in a folder. It's got everything from weekly writings to more significant tests, giving us a good look at their progress.*

Participant 8: *We mix it up every week. Quick check-ins and short quizzes help me see where everyone's at, while every two weeks, we dive into a mini-test to make sure we're all on the same page.*

Participant 9: *I love bringing tech into our learning! We have these online quizzes that pop up now and then, and then for bigger assessments, we go for traditional tests or presentations.*

Participant 10: *Self-reflection is a big part of our learning journey. Students write about what they've learned regularly, and we discuss these thoughts when we have more substantial tests or cool projects.*

The responses above reveal the varied approaches adopted by EFAL teachers in South Africa to maintain a balance between formative and summative assessments for grade four students. These strategies encompass a range of assessment methods, including regular quizzes, discussions, and projects aimed at gauging ongoing progress. Additionally, larger assessments like presentations or term tests are incorporated into the evaluation process. The diverse methods employed underscore the commitment of EFAL teachers to ensuring a comprehensive assessment framework, allowing for a thorough understanding of students' academic development and contributing to a well-rounded educational experience.

4.2. Discussion

This study sought to determine the forms of assessment that teachers of EFAL teachers employed in grade four. The results of the study were presented in three thematic areas; selection of appropriate assessment methods, challenges involved in using assessment methods, and balance formative and summative assessment. Data concerning the selection of appropriate assessment methods revealed that diverse evaluation techniques such as discussions, essays, presentations, and tech-infused projects to measure students' language competencies were essential for achieving instructional objectives. While some emphasized self-assessment and peer evaluation for cultivating accountability and teamwork, others favoured ongoing evaluations like weekly quizzes or portfolio assessments. O'Neill and Padden (2022) support that these assessment practices often involve familiar techniques like question-and-answer sessions, and written exercises such as essays or problem-solving tasks. The participants stressed the importance of a well-rounded approach, customizing assessments to suit diverse learning styles and ensuring a holistic assessment of students' language proficiency in their English classrooms. This is what Kanjee et al., (2022) refer to as a pillar in the foundation of traditional evaluation in South Africa, aiming to measure different aspects of a learner's grasp of the subject matter, from comprehension and recall to application and expression. These techniques have been staples in educational settings, providing instructors with insights into participants' learning progress and areas that may require further attention or support.

It was observed that despite the CAPS curriculum recommending a comprehensive range of assessment approaches for teaching EFAL learners, teachers faced challenges in adopting diverse evaluation approaches. One such assessment method highlighted includes the formative assessment, encompassing discussions, observations, and presentations via oral, projects, storytelling, debates, homework, and question-and-answer sessions

(Department of Basic education, 2020a). This suggests that teachers in grade four exhibit limited flexibility in their selection of assessment methods, leaning towards traditional approaches and showing resistance to exploring innovative assessment techniques. However, Mohlabi-Tlaka et al. (2018) concluded in their study that relying on old-style assessment methods would lead to a neglect of learners' skills of communication.

Data about the challenges involved in using assessment methods revealed that diverse evaluation techniques such as discussions, essays, presentations, and tech-infused projects to measure students' language competencies are essential. While some emphasized self-assessment and peer evaluation for cultivating accountability and teamwork, others favored ongoing evaluations like weekly quizzes or portfolio assessments. The finding is consistent with those of Savignon (2018), which showed that the selection of certain forms of assessment would help to eliminate learners' chance of effective communication. Also, resource limitations, particularly in materials and technology, hinder the integration of varied assessment approaches. Mpuangnan et al. (2021) concur that lack of resources poses a challenge in effective teaching and learning at the school level. Aligning assessments with curriculum objectives proved demanding, amid concerns that high-stakes exams overshadow alternative methods. Balancing ongoing assessments with curriculum demands posed time constraints. Furthermore, worries about assessment bias and engaging students in diverse assessment approaches emerged as persistent challenges for educators in South Africa. Grant and Garies (2015) support that assessment bias does not help learners to make meaningful learning to enrich deep understanding and skills development. Within this theme, it can be inferred that the participants leaned towards specific assessment methods that may not have effectively nurtured the language proficiency of the learners, hindering the development of meaningful learning for a deeper understanding and skills enrichment. Instead, the participants demonstrated a preference for traditional assessment methods that did not facilitate the effective enhancement of communication skills among learners. The data generated indicates that the participants faced challenges in utilizing the formative-related assessment in the classroom as a recommendation stipulated in the EFAL CAPS curriculum. This compromises learners' assessments leading to the ineffective application of methods of assessment.

To balance formative-related assessment and summative assessment, teachers emphasized the use of variety, utilizing portfolios, tech-integrated quizzes, and self-reflection exercises to measure learning outcomes. Kashanizadeh et al. (2024) concur that technological innovation opens fresh opportunities for educators to adopt novel methods in language teaching. These

findings align with those of Wood (2017), emphasizing that incorporating a variety of assessment methods fosters effective interaction between teachers and learners, nurturing the development of lifelong and reflective learners equipped with comprehensive language skills. The consensus underscores the importance of employing diverse activities (Sakhaei et al., 2024) for ongoing evaluation while integrating periodic, more extensive assessments to ensure a holistic understanding of students' language proficiency at the grade level. Chandio and Jafferri (2015) further advocate the use of additional formative assessment to gain a deeper insight into the learner's performance. This supports the recommendation by the Department of Basic Education (2020b) that teachers of EFAL should employ alternative forms of formative assessment as an essential tool to enhance the language proficiency of the learner.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Assessment techniques used by EFAL teachers in grade four were explored in this study. The insights derived from the EFAL teachers' experiences in South Africa highlight the indispensable role of employing diverse evaluation techniques, including discussions, essays, presentations, and technology-infused projects, in comprehensively assessing students' language competencies. These findings underscore the significance of these assessment methods and shed light on the multifaceted challenges encountered in the process of selecting appropriate assessment strategies. One of the primary challenges identified revolves around the persistent struggle to strike a balance between maintaining fairness and inclusivity. It is essential to ensure a consistent, yet diverse range of assessments that cater to the unique and varying needs of different learners. This means that a mix of written essays, lively class discussions, and creative visual projects are crucial in this situation. This way, each student gets an opportunity to showcase their understanding in a way that feels natural to them. The data gleaned from the discussions and opinions of these educators revealed a mosaic of diverse approaches adopted by EFAL teachers. These encompassed a range of assessment methodologies, encompassing regular quizzes, dynamic classroom discussions, and engaging projects tailored to foster ongoing assessment. These continuous assessment methods were complemented by more comprehensive evaluation tools such as presentations or term tests, offering a holistic perspective on students' language proficiency.

Connecting these observations to activity theory reveals the involved interplay between the teachers, the learning environment, and the assessment strategies they employ. Activity theory highlights the dynamic relationship between individuals and their context, emphasizing the teacher's active role in navigating the diverse forms of assessment strategies within the classroom

environment. The adoption of varied assessment approaches by these educators reflects their active engagement and adaptability, showcasing how they leverage a collective strategy to support students' language learning and holistic development within their unique educational setting.

From what the findings of this study revealed, the following implications can be drawn. Grade four EFAL teachers are encouraged to channel their efforts towards prioritizing alternative formative assessment methods, offering a comprehensive overview of the learner's output, instead of exclusively focusing on the summative form of assessment, which primarily addresses learners' progression. Teachers are advised to employ a variety of assessment methods to obtain an accurate depiction of the learner's development, catering to individuals with diverse abilities and ensuring the fulfilment of each learner's unique needs. Future research endeavours should delve into the repercussions of the transition of language and its implications on the teaching and assessment procedures in EFAL classrooms, aligning with the directives outlined in the CAPS policy. Researchers should advocate improved resource allocation, providing teachers with essential tools and technology necessary to implement diverse assessment methods effectively. Teachers need to develop inclusive guidelines or frameworks for selecting assessments that draw a balance between formative and summative methods, considering fairness and inclusivity. Teachers should also encourage student involvement in the assessment process, allowing them to reflect on their learning journey and contribute feedback to effective assessment methods.

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