

Assessment for learning strategies: Amharic Language Teachers' Practice and Challenges in Ethiopia

Hailay Tesfay Gebremariam

Arba Minch University, Ethiopia

Email: hailay33@gmail.com

Abate Demissie Gedamu

Arba Minch University, Ethiopia

Email: abachad22@gmail.com

Received: 04 May 2021

Reviewed: 13 March 2022

Accepted: 25 June 2022

Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract

Assessment for learning, which is one of the assessment genres, is a means of gathering information during teaching and learning and it is helpful to determine students' success in learning. The article aims at examining the understanding of Amharic language teachers on the strategies and challenges of assessment for learning practices. To meet this objective, participants were selected through the cluster random sampling technique for a questionnaire survey (n=180) from all levels of general education (i.e., grades one to twelve). Twelve (12) teachers for an in-depth interview and four (4) teachers for an informal conversation were also selected through cluster random sampling and . The data acquired through the closed-ended items of the questionnaire was analyzed by a one-sample t-test while the data obtained through an open-ended items of the questionnaire; interviews, and informal conversation were analyzed qualitatively through verbal descriptions. The results from a closed-ended questionnaire show that teachers practice of assessment for learning strategies in the classrooms. Conversely, the data from the open-ended questionnaire shows that most of the teachers' relied on the assessment of learning. Besides, their awareness of assessment for learning strategies was found limited. Moreover, lack of transparency, lack of knowledge and experience, school administrative problems, lack of training, and reliance on assessment preference are the challenges that teachers faced while attempting to implement assessment for learning strategies. Based on the findings, recommendations were also forwarded.

Keywords: Amharic language teachers; assessment for learning; assessment for learning strategies; challenges in assessment practice; language assessment practice

Introduction

Assessment is a central point for educational progress since it is a tool that assists teachers during and after teaching and learning. Recent trends of educational studies (Askalemariam, 2015a, 2015b; Black & William, 2006, 2009; Bordoh, Eshun, Quarshie, Bassaw & Kwarteng, 2015; Hailay, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Sintayehu, 2016; Sultana, 2019; Winarso, 2018) show that assessment plays a great role in shaping teaching and learning process both positively and

negatively. To this effect, assessment literacy is critical in improving teaching and learning in language classrooms (Sultana, 2019) since valid learning is measured by the kind of assessment tasks (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Hailay, 2018a, 2018b). Therefore, teachers are expected to understand the difference between assessment of learning and assessment for learning to design appropriate assessment tasks that enhance effective learning.

Assessment not only diagnoses and identifies students' learning needs but also is used to assist improvements across the education system in a cycle of continuous improvement. Students and teachers may use the information gained from assessment to determine their next teaching and learning steps (Black and William, 1998; Hailay, 2017). Besides, the primary attention of teachers should rest on the assessment knowledge, assessment methods, and feedback provision from classroom assessment tasks. In other words, teachers are expected to gain information about students learning from the assessment tasks and improve their teaching methods and ensure the learning of their students by involving students through self and peer assessment, portfolio, conferencing, and cooperative group work interactions.

However, teachers' awareness and practices of assessment for learning seem questionable. Assessment is expected to ensure authentic learning through real-world problem-solving tasks (Bordoh, et al., 2015; Teshome, 2015). This implies that assessment is used as a means of learning. Similarly, assessment may also be considered as an ingredient in improving the quality of learning outcomes. This type of assessment is carried out with the orientation of learning as the mastery of educational goals in various ways. Therefore, assessment practice is the applicability of the principles of assessment for learning, employing strategies; such as peer-assessment, self-assessment, and feedback, and it involves pedagogic style, student-teacher interaction, self-reflection of teacher and student, motivation, and a variety of assessment processes (Hargreaves, 2005; Maclellan, 2017 William, 2011).

The nature and dynamics of teachers' perceptions on assessment practices need more studies. The importance of assessment for learning has been given a bit attention all over the world. As to Sintayehu (2016), "assessment has been recognized as an integral part of everyday classroom instruction and a key tool to ensure the quality of learning" (p. 24). In the same line of discussion, Maclellan (2017) and Hailay (2017) also concluded that assessment for learning is the core of learning; it helps students to solve real-world problems. Nevertheless, few studies have been carried out on assessment practices (including continuous assessment) in different education levels in Ethiopia. There are attempts on the practicality of alternative assessment (Hailay, 2017, 2018b), assessment and classroom learning (Black & William, 1998), practices and challenges of alternative assessment in English classrooms (Hailu & Fekede, 2015), assessment as learning (Earl, 2003), language assessment principles and classroom practices (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010), and Language teachers' assessment literacy (Sultana, 2019). However, it appears that their results did not accurately show the ongoing assessment for learning. Moreover, other studies revealed that language teachers prefer to do something, like to employ the traditional way of assessment for its simplicity to correct and save time (Bordoh, et al, 2015; Maclellan, 2017; Hailay, 2018b). On top of this, language teachers are mainly test-oriented and had insufficient awareness of assessment for learning (Sultana, 2019). Therefore, assessment of learning is test-oriented which enhanced rote memorization of some content limiting authentic problem-solving learning (Hailay, 2018b).

Although assessment for learning has many advantages, its implementation in classrooms has faced many challenges. Some of them included teachers' deficiency of awareness of concepts and their goals assessment for learning, a predicament to implement assessment in large class sizes,

high noise levels and its time-consuming nature, teachers' difficulties in implementing assessment for learning strategies in the classroom context, the mismatch between teachers' belief and orientations of assessment for learning; and absence of assessment criteria (Askalemariam, 2015a, 2015b; Hailay, 2018b). As well, teachers' preference of the objective type of tests to save time (Hailu & Fekede, 2015) and to minimize workload are the other challenges. The stated situations affected teachers' assessment of students' ongoing learning process.

Assessment in the instructional process achieves two major purposes. The first is to help the students to develop effective learning in classrooms. This type of assessment is called assessment for learning in which its goal is to help students' learning progress and to upgrade their knowledge and skills through learning in authentic practice (Teshome, 2015; Sultana, 2019). Several studies (Abate & Getu, 2020; Black & William, 1998, 2009; Earl, 2003; Farrel, 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 1996, 2002; Popham, 2008, 2017; Sultana, 2019) have affirmed that this assessment type tends to an ongoing process of learning and teaching to ensure that the course objectives and the syllabus goals are met.

As Black and William (2006) stated assessment for learning has two main purposes; (1) providing information from students about their learning progress to the corresponding teacher(s) and administrator(s), and (2) providing feedback to the students about their learning progress to help them determine how to close any gaps between their performance and the targeted learning goals. Black and William (1998, 2009) and Johnson and Johnson (1996, 2002) also indicated that classroom-based assessment enhances students' academic achievement and their social growth as they interact with their peers to share goals of learning. Concerning this, classroom assessment is the ongoing process of gathering and synthesizing information from the progress of students' learning (Popham, 2008, 2017). As to Hailay (2018b), higher education institutions' instructors have a low understanding of assessment conceptions and implementations. Consequently, students who completed their education from teacher training colleges are still unable to analyze and apply their knowledge to solve problems. Education, in effect, is unable to transform the student from the stage of knowledge recipient to the status of knowledge producer and problem solver.

The educational system in Ethiopia has a mission to develop productive citizens. The system encourages teachers to employ a so-called continuous assessment type, at all levels of education, though its implementation is found to be similar with traditional type of assessment (Black and William, 2006, 2009; Sintayehu, 2016; Teshome, 2015). According to Sintayehu (2016) and Sultana (2019), to be a productive citizen, a student must be capable of performing meaningful tasks in the classroom. Teachers must help their students to become proficient at performing the tasks which students will encounter with in their career. The other purpose of assessment for learning is to improve learning and teachers' teaching skills (Earl, 2003; Hailay, 2018a; Imran, 2012; Koh, 2015). Based on this, assessment for learning is an ongoing process that arises out of the interaction between teaching and learning (Lysaght and O'leary, 2013, 2017; O'malley and Valdez, 1996).

The purpose of assessment in the instructional process is related to the connection of teaching and learning. As Black and William (1998; 2006; 2009) indicate assessment is the instrument of learning. Any system of learning is also impossible to be implemented without a three-cornered model: (1) Curriculum; syllabus and textbooks or references, (2) instruction; teaching and learning; (3) assessment. But, the center of the learning model is practice. Lysaght and O'leary (2013, 2017) pointed out that assessment for learning strategies the framework of assessment for learning practice in classrooms. These are classified into four audits namely;

learning intentions and success criteria, questioning and classroom discussion, feedback, and self and peer assessment.

It is believed that Amharic language teachers' assessment for learning practice is significant to learning and teaching progress. The current study aims to shed light on the language teachers' practice of assessment for learning strategies and its challenges in the classrooms. To explore this main objective, the following two specific research questions are posed.

1. Do Amharic language teachers practice assessment for learning strategies in their classrooms?
2. What are the potential challenges in practicing assessment for learning strategies in Amharic language classrooms?.

Research method

In the Ethiopian educational sector, the widest spoken and researched language, Amharic is offered at all levels of general education (grades 1-12) as subject matter as well as a medium of instruction in elementary schools (grades 1-6 only) and in some locality it's only given as a subject in Amhara, Benshangul, and South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State of the country. To address the research questions of this study, the cross-sectional descriptive survey design was supplied. It is appropriate for canvassing opinion on the research issues with the employment of both quantitative and qualitative (Mixed) datum-data to develop sights into the basic investigation of the study focus.

Participants

Since the number of Amharic language teachers was unmanageable, multistage sampling techniques were used. There were a total of 456 schools in the Gamo zone, Ethiopia. Sampling was relevant for the numbers of schools in the zone were huge and unmanageable. After receiving an official approval letter for conducting this study from the concerned university authorities, the study was selected from twelve (12) elementary (1-8) and six (6) secondary (9-12) schools from Gamo zone, southern notations, nationalities, and peoples' regional state (SNNPR), Ethiopia. These schools were selected using cluster random sampling. In these sampled schools, nine hundred eighty-three (983) Amharic language teachers are found. Among these, 180 teachers were selected as respondents for the questionnaire. In addition, twelve (12) Amharic language teachers were selected from six schools by cluster random sampling for the in-depth interview. Using convenience sampling, four (4) Amharic language teachers participated in personal conversations. Thus, responsible for the practice of assessment for learning strategies in language classrooms were checked by the oral discussion approach.

The data obtained from the part of the questionnaire inquiring about the teachers' demographic information revealed that 28 (15.6%) of the teachers had one to three years of teaching experience, 24 (13.3%) of the teachers had four to six, 128 (71.1%) of them had more than six years of teaching experience. In terms of their sex, 68 (38%) the participants were male and 112 (62%) were female. Regarding their academic background of the teachers, 71 (39.4%) of the teachers were BA degree holders, 107 (59.4%) were Diploma holders and the rest 2 (1.1%) were MA specialist teachers. For clearance, 55 (29.9%) of the teachers were from elementary (1-4 grades) schools, 79 (42.0%) teachers from the junior (5-8 grades) schools, and 46 (25.6%) were from secondary (9-12 grades) schools.

Data gathering instruments

A questionnaire, an in-depth interview, and an informal conversation were administered to Amharic language teachers to collect relevant data for this study. Both the questionnaire and the in-depth interview questions were adopted from Lysaght and O'leary (2013, 2017) crafted for assessment for learning audit at different levels of schools and environments. The instruments were translated to and administered in Amharic, which is the medium language of instruction in elementary (grades 1-6) and as a subject in junior and high school (grades 7-12). The detailed information of the instruments was as follows.

Mixed questionnaires

The questionnaire was aimed to elicit the understand teachers on assessment for learning. The participants were asked about the purposes and principles of assessment, the differences between test and assessment, the role of teachers and students in the classrooms, and the approaches. The questionnaire is composed of three sections. The first section is made up of nine different types of items that on covers the demographic information of the participants.

For evaluating learning strategies in classroom practice, the second section included four sub-dimensions in a five-point Likert scale agreement options. The first sub-section covered the learning intentions and success criteria including 16 items (e.g., Assessment techniques are used to assess pupils' prior learning, Pupils are reminded of the learning intentions during lessons, and Success criteria are differentiated according to pupils' needs). The second part was about the questionnaire and classroom discussion which includes 16 items (e.g., Assessment techniques are used to facilitate class discussion, Pupils can explain to others what they are learning, Questioning goes beyond the one right answer style), while the third sub-section includes 12 items (e.g., Teachers' praise of pupils' work, Teacher-made tests are used diagnostically to identify strengths and needs in teaching and learning, Assessment techniques are used during lessons to help the teacher determine how well pupils understand what is being taught) that have relation to the feedback provision. The fourth part was about self and peer assessment alternatives with 14 items (e.g., Lessons on new topics begin with pupils being invited to reflect on their prior learning, Pupils use each other as resources for learning, Assessment techniques are used to create an environment in which pupils can be honest about areas where they are experiencing difficulty).

The third section was an open-ended type of questionnaire consisting of five (5) items (e.g., What is assessment for learning? Does it differ from assessment of learning?, What are the potential challenges in the practice of assessment for learning in language classrooms?) that are related to teachers' understanding of assessment for learning strategies, the practicality of the strategies, and their alternative approaches in the classrooms. Entirely the questionnaire contained 58 items. The questions were closed-ended on a 5-point Likert scale, with items labeled as strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). However, to ensure the validity and accuracy of the closed-ended questionnaire data, five open-ended questions were used to generate in-depth qualitative data on the practice of assessment for learning.

Before the actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted to enhance the reliability and validity of the data gathering instruments. To check the effectiveness and to make improvements on the instruments that have been translated from English to Amharic, the piloted study was conducted with 20 Amharic language teachers enrolled in the summer program. Besides, two high school Amharic language teachers were selected and invited to comment on the clarity and appropriateness of the items of the questionnaire for the study.

After running the data from the pilot study, the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was found to have a Cronbach's alpha value (.89) for the entire scale. The reliability

values of each dimension were; (1) Learning Intentions and Success Criteria (.552), (2) Questioning and Classroom Discussion (.642), (3) Feedback (.644), and (4) Peer and Self-Assessment (.864). Thus, the English version of the instrument can consistently measure what is supposed to measure compared with the internal consistency reliability of Lysaght and O'leary (2013, 2017) which was .861 in its Cronbach's alpha value. Therefore, the Amharic version of the practice of assessment for learning strategies questionnaire is consistent enough to achieve its aim.

In-depth interview

To get a deeper understanding of teachers' practice of assessment for learning strategies twelve (12) teachers from various levels of education were polled and interviewed to their level of understanding and challenges they faced while the practice of assessment for learning strategies in language classrooms. The core motivational question was "What are the potential challenges in the practice of assessment for learning in language classrooms?" From this point of view Amharic language teachers are forwarded their experiences on the challenges faced during the implementation of assessment for learning strategies.

Informal conversation

To get information about the challenges that the teachers faced while practicing of assessment for learning in language classrooms, personal conversations were held with four (4) Amharic language teachers in the 2020/2021 academic year. The informal conversation focused on the challenges teachers faced during the implementation of assessment for learning.

Procedures

The data collection took place in the academic year of 2020-2021. The data collection procedures had multiple stages. Before obtaining the data, school teachers were first informed briefly about the relevance and context of the study. Then, they were asked for their consent to participate in the study. Next, the questionnaire was administered to help the participants fill them correctly that followed by interviews and informal conversations.

Finally, the close-ended questionnaire was encoded into the SPSS-25 version for the analysis. The open-ended questionnaire, interview, and informal conversation data were also recorded and transcribed for analysis, to triangulate the teachers' practice of assessment for learning strategies and challenges faced in the practices.

Data analysis approach

The quantitative data obtained through the questionnaire were encoded into SPSS to examine if there were statistically significant mean differences between expected and observed mean of assessment for learning strategies practice, a one-sample t-test was used. Nevertheless, the data elicited from the open-ended questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and informal conversation data were coded and categorized thematically and described verbally

Findings

The data from the questionnaire was used to answer the first research question that is: Do Amharic language teachers practice assessment for learning strategies in their classrooms? Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire, the Amharic language teachers' practice of assessment for learning in language classrooms is provided in table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' use assessment for learning strategies by One-Sample t-test Statistics

Assessment for learning strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Learning Intentions and Success Criteria	180	3.10	.42	98.95	1,179	.001
Questioning and Classroom Discussion	180	3.24	.43	101.59	1,179	.001
Feedback	180	3.13	.46	91.50	1,179	.001
Peer and Self-Assessment	180	3.10	.65	64.15	1,179	.001

As shown in table 1, a one-sample t-test was performed to find out whether Amharic language teachers are familiar with the assessment for learning strategies. The results indicated statistically significant positive mean differences for the four strategies of assessment for learning practice from the expected mean (3.00) at (t(df), t-value, $p < 0.01$). The results show that Amharic language teachers are familiar with the assessment for learning strategies in classroom practice. On the other way, the open-ended questionnaire data portrayed that 80% of Amharic language teachers have missed the correct answers. Some of the teachers wrote the strategies are forms of assessment such as true/false, oral questions, group work, individual work, classwork, homework, and so on. Even, for the question "What is assessment for learning? and Does it differ from assessment of learning?" more than half (50%) of the teachers provided wrong definitins for assessment for learning and how it differs from assessment of learning. For clarity let us see some of the teachers responses as follows:

Assessment for learning is continuously transferring knowledge from the teacher to the students through teaching [by lecture method] (Teacher, 88).

... is simply assessing language skills weekly to rank the students' achievement and the teacher's teaching practice (Teacher, 68).

... is the way of constructing questions for students. ... (Teacher, 122).

... indicated the weekly quizzes of the school program (Teacher, 112).

... is a type of test. ... The only difference is [that assessment] includes oral questions and homework, classwork, the one-to-five form of group work, ... (Teacher, 76).

... is a type of test. ... for example, it includes a final exam, weekly and monthly tests, homework, group works, and classwork (Teacher, 54).

The data from the open-ended questionnaire shows that there is controversy about the teachers' understanding of assessment for learning theory and its strategies in classroom practices.

From the data of the in-depth interview and informal conversation, participant teachers reported that the challenges they faced are shortage of professional training, lack of transparency in the assessment science, lack of experience to use assessment appropriately, insufficient knowledge to apply assessment, students' preference of assessment, the low performance of students, squat efficiency in assessment practice, educational curriculum gaps, school problems and differences in the assessment preferences. The main challenges faced in the language

classroom assessment practices that are reported by the teachers are thematically categorized as follows.

Lack of transparency

According to the data obtained from the in-depth interview seven (58%) participants teachers were used assessment for learning principles for grading students' achievements. There is no clear delimitation of assessment for learning (assessment for learning development through classroom practice) and assessment of learning (assessment for grading purpose) and students' knowledge about the assessment process in the real-world classrooms. Two interviewed teachers noted as follows.

... There is no common guideline for using continuous assessment for all teachers and all schools. We simply use our interests and students' preferences ... (Teacher, 05).

... There is no transparency of assessment practices in the [language] classrooms. Yet we offer test-based assessment regardless of "what you call assessment for learning" ... (Teacher, 03).

Describing the challenges faced in the language classrooms in the case of practicing assessment for learning strategies, another teacher pointed as follows.

It is not clear if it is possible to apply [the assessment for learning] in a large class [size] with 24 and above class [periods of teaching] per week for every teacher. We can't assess each student's performance in each period of our classes. We use a simple lecture method ... we offer marks through classroom tests or group work, mid-exam, and final exams (Teacher, 06).

School administrative problems

The maintaining of students' information is not well known in all schools (1-12). Based on the 58% of participant teachers' reports, many schools simply use a percent-based formula of continuous assessment. Five (42%) teachers gave their responses, on school administrative related problems, with the same sense of description.

... Most of the schools used 60% continuous assessment and 40% final exam. The practice of continuous assessment in the targeted schools is not an assessment for learning; it is simply a series of quizzes graded on a percentage scale ... (Teacher, 08).

The majority of participants (92%) agreed that unless there is punishment, there should be a percentage of quizzes on their mark lists based on administrative directions (school culture). In this case, the school administrator follow-up this process of assessment in different mechanisms. For example, the data obtained from informal conversation shows that different schools have different formulas of continuous assessment, but all are wrongly practicing according to the assessment for learning principles.

Lack of experience and knowledge

The other challenge faced in the assessment for learning practice is a lack of experience and knowledge to use it appropriately. Majority (67%) of the participant teachers stated that the inadequacy of experience and knowledge; on how to apply the science of assessment for learning, and inadequacy of students' knowledge and experience in using assessment for learning (peer and self-assessment) as the basic challenges. Teacher 167 writes in the open-ended questionnaire that:

“to use the purpose of assessment for learning, I use always, students to work in a group; it is a one-to-five technique”. Teachers find it difficult to involve students in their learning by assessing their learning and peers; it needs knowledge and experience that most teachers lack.

On the other hand, six (50%) of the participant teachers assumed that assessment for learning is difficult to implement in the language classrooms; it is expected as time-consuming in large class sizes and unmanageable to give corrections to all of the students.

Lack of training

As for the basic attributes behind their shortfall in assessing learning, one reason is the lack of implementation skills. The Amharic language teachers reported that they have not taken any training on how to assess students' learning in language classrooms. In this regard, ten (83%) teachers pointed out that *“there is no training at all, everybody doesn't care about it”*. Lack of implementation skills inhibited assessment for learning practices in the language classrooms. As a result, the majority of Amharic teachers preferred assessment of learning, than assessment for learning due to the reasons pointed out above.

Reliance on assessment preferences

Most of the targeted teachers (68%) claimed that many students preferred the traditional approach of assessment; they are closed with paper-pencil techniques. They don't like new approaches to the assessment because of a lack of knowledge and experience to realize the advantage of assessment for learning in language classrooms. Even the teachers' expectations are sometimes affected by their interests.

Of the Amharic language teachers, 80% of them mentioned that objective questions are their preferences. The students' preference also depends on final and national examinations. Teachers also make an effort to cater to their students' interests. Related to this, teacher 02 described in the informal conversation as follows.

... the majority of students have no idea about the diagnostic assessment. They simply favor group work to gain equal marks with the leader of the group and classroom quizzes.

Although the quantitative data showed that Amharic language teachers were familiar with the assessment for learning strategies in classroom practice, the qualitative data showed the majority of the participant teachers were unconcerned about assessment for learning. Instead of assessment for learning, more than 75% of the participants practiced assessment for learning on its ease of preparation and suitability for correction. In addition to this, the participant teachers mentioned their practice of assessment for learning was influenced by the techniques of questions in the assessment type. Some informants agreed with the acceptance of assessment for learning referred to the type of tests that are final examinations, weekly and monthly tests, programmed tests.

Discussion

The data obtained from the Amharic language teachers through questionnaires, interviews, and informal conversations confirmed the participant teachers' familiarity with assessment for learning strategies in language classrooms. The data also showed that the challenges that the teachers faced during the implementations of assessment for learning. Regarding teachers' practice of assessment for learning, that data acquired through questionnaire contradicts with the

data collected through informal conversation. This shows that there is a controversy between the result of quantitative and qualitative data. According to the quantitative data, Amharic language teachers are familiar with the assessment for learning. This result agreed with the previous studies (Abate & Getu, 2020; Hailu & Fekede, 2015; Hailay, 2017, 2018a). However, on the side of the qualitative data, the participant teachers were not familiar with or don't like to practice the assessment for learning strategies in the language classrooms.

The qualitative portion of the questionnaire result indicates that the participant teachers were not familiar with the practical skills of assessment for learning strategies in language classrooms. The result of the oral description shows that that participant teachers have less awareness of the assessment practice. This result confirms the findings of the previous studies (Askalemariam, 2015a; Black and William, 1998; Hailay, 2018b). The results of both the qualitative and quantitative data agree with and confirm the previous works and observations on assessment for learning literacy, classroom practice, and assessment practice preferences by Askalemariam (2015a, 2015b), Black and William (2006), Hailay (2018b), Hailu and Fekede (2015), Sintayehu (2016), Teshome (2015), and Sultana (2019).

The findings of the current paper are consistent with that of Hailay's (2018a) work that disclosed the extent to which Ethiopian higher education institutions Amharic language writing skill teachers' preference of assessment methods for writing skills, but didn't define assessment for and of learning concepts separately. In addition to this, Hailay (2017) found out that both teacher and learners preferred their old traditions, beliefs, and priorities and collaboratively work to create a richer pedagogical context. The results of the oral description for the second research question show that Amharic language teachers are less aware of assessment for learning strategies practice, owing to many challenges that teachers face such as; lack of transparency, lack of knowledge and experience, school administrative problems, reliance on assessment preferences, and lacunae. This implies that many teachers are uncertain and have a lack of knowledge and experience in the assessment practice described in the previous studies (Abate and Getu, 2020; Askalemariam, 2015a, 2015b; Hailu and Fekede, 2015; Sintayehu, 2016; Sultana, 2019).

Regarding the assessment preference, teachers are hesitant to use assessment for learning strategies in language classrooms. This confirms the studies of Askalemariam (2015a, 2015b), Teshome (2015), and Sintayehu (2016) that have indicated that many teachers don't have the skill and knowledge of assessment for learning practice in the classrooms; they prefer the traditional way of practice. Besides, Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), Hailay (2017, 2018a, 2018b), Maclellan (2017), Popham (2017), and Sultana (2019) concluded that language teachers are not good enough in the implementation assessment for learning in the classrooms; they lack pieces of training. As the work of Sultana (2019) indicated, the understanding of the language teachers about the assessment for learning practice is somewhat limited. Consequently, language teachers are unable to implement the curriculum goals for teaching the Amharic language.

However, the new challenges faced in this study are the lack of transparency regarding Principles of assessment practice in the learning context and school administrative problems. Thus, challenges are interchangeably affected by one another. If there is a school administrative problem in the guide and principles of using assessment for learning strategies in the classrooms, there is a lack of transparency. On the other hand, if there is a lack of transparency, the school culture may not be well organized and not situated to use assessment for learning strategies in classrooms.

Conclusion

In Ethiopian Education sector, using assessment for learning strategies in the language classrooms is partially mandatory. Because the modularized curriculum is designed to use individual learning, cooperative learning, and learner-centered practices, the Amharic language teachers did not involve their students in assessment practices. Teachers sometimes make their students work with their classmates (Bordoh, et al, 2015; Hailay, 2018a, 2018b; Sintayehu, 2016, Teshome, 2015). On the side of the qualitative description result of this study, Amharic language teachers didn't have awareness of assessment for learning as it leads learners to be involved in the classroom context; its practicality is very low compared to the curriculum goals expected and its practices depends on some different cases.

Generally, the findings are shown to draw recommendations as follows:

1. As Amharic language teachers are referred to the test-oriented approach of assessment due to the unfamiliarity with the new paradigm of assessment for learning, the ministry of education, higher education institutions, and educational bureaus in the southern nations, nationalities, and people's region should organize ongoing professional development opportunities, such as on-job assessment training.
2. The higher education institutions' community service offices should assess community problems based on this type of study and organize training for teachers on assessment theories and practices to develop student learning. Attending professional training like language assessment would equip teachers with the conceptualization of the dynamic nature of language assessment practice (Sultana, 2019).
3. Teacher education institutions should revamp the assessment for learning strategies in their curricular modules to appropriately equip teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills while they are being prepared for going out to the teaching profession.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this study paper.

Funding acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Arba Minch University, Research Directorate, for funding this research project under the College of Social Science and Humanities research coordination office, under the project code: GOV/AMU/TH23/CSSH/ELL-AM/03/13 for data collection and statistical analysis payment.

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