NHẬN THỨC CỦA GIÁO VIÊN VỀ VIỆC ĐÁNH GIÁ TRÊN LỚP HỌC

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Từ lâu, đánh giá luôn là công việc quan trọng và gây nhiều tranh cãi nhất cả về mục tiêu lẫn phương thức thực hiện. Bài viết này nhằm tìm hiểu nhận thức chung của giáo viên về việc thực hiện đánh giá trên lớp học thông qua phương pháp phỏng vấn nhóm tiến hành tại Khoa tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Hà Nội. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy giáo viên có quan điểm tương đối rõ ràng về các nguyên tắc thực hiện đánh giá trên lớp học và tính hữu dụng của nó, đặc biệt là những lợi ích mang lai bởi sự tham gia của người học vào quá trình đánh giá. Nghiên cứu cũng đồng thời chỉ ra một số góc khuất trong nhận thức của giáo viên và những khó khăn họ gặp phải khi thực hiện đánh giá trên lớp. Vì vậy, nghiên cứu kêu gọi nỗ lực của cả các nhà quản lý giáo dục và giáo viên nhằm củng cố nhận thức về đánh giá trên lớp học trong bối cảnh triết lí giáo dục đang thay đổi.

Từ khóa: *nhận thức, đánh giá, đánh giá trên lớp học*

Assessment has always been a crucial part of education. This study explores teachers' general perceptions of classroom-based assessment (CBA) through focus group interviews conducted at the English Department, Hanoi University. The results show that the participants had a relatively clear idea of the basic principles of CBA and recognize its usefulness, especially the benefits of involving their students in the assessment process. It also sheds light to some hidden corners of teachers' perceptions and some obstacles hindering their CBA practices. The study then calls for due attention from both educational administrators and teachers to be paid to improve the perceptions of CBA in the context of changing educational philosophy.

Key words: *perception, assessment, classroom-based assessment*

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENT

Introduction

It is undeniable that assessment plays a central and vital role in language teaching and learning. With an aim to enhance, empower, and celebrate student learning, classroom-based assessment has been implemented in various forms and procedures in EFL/ESL contexts (Cheng, Rogers & Hu, 2004) to improve or modify instruction and to bring students' learning into focus. Classroom-based assessment is designed and undertaken during regular class time (place) by the teachers (subject) who drives the design of assessment methods and decision making regarding teaching and learning in order to make judgments on the students' performance (object) (Hill & McNamara, 2011).

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It, thus, is necessary to explore how teachers perceive CBA, how they describe their practices as well as what they find troublesome in order to facilitate their implementation. Indeed, a study of the teachers' perceptions and descriptions of CBA practices would help provide administrators and EFL teachers with assessment knowledge to expand and in turn, raise the quality of their future CBA practices.

Literature review

Worldwide, there is a movement away from where assessment is recognized only as one part of a cycle of teaching phases, such as the end-of-the-month report card, to a position in which assessment is an integral part of everyday instruction as it is used for continuous improvement of teaching and learning (Shermis & Vesta, 2011). CBA, thus, is defined as assessments designed and undertaken during regular class time (place) by the teachers (subject) - who drives the design of assessment methods and decision making regarding teaching and student learning - in order to make judgments on the students' performance (object) (Hill & McNamara, 2011).

Generally, conceptions about CBA can be categorized into two main trends, with the first one being limited to teacher-based assessment and the second one extended to external non-teacher-based assessments taking place inside classrooms. Kha (2013) presented a review on Vietnamese educational assessment system with a discussion on the significance, benefits and features of CBA in theory.

Particularly, the study noted that teachers have little awareness or low motivation towards on-going assessment.

Gonen and Akbarov (2015) explored the relationship between higher education instructors' perceptions and their implementation of CBA. The study found that the instructors' perceptions seem generally to be in line with the principles of CBA, including the awareness of a link between the students' learning and assessment. However, the participants also revealed that in some cases they did not have a chance to put their beliefs into practice due to the central assessment system of the institution, intensive syllabuses in very restricted time, and students' educational backgrounds brought from the general education system.

To conclude, relatively little has been uncovered about the issues relating to CBA in tertiary level, especially in the Vietnamese context. As Hill and McNamara (2011) assert, few studies have focused on the theories or standards the teachers use when implementing CBA. Therefore, they have called for more research to investigate CBA at different levels of education, including EFL tertiary classrooms.

Purpose of study

This study explored the general perceptions that teachers have regarding CBA at the English Department (ED), Hanoi University (HANU), thereby raising EFL teachers and administrators' awareness of CBA and helping them improve their assessment practices at tertiary level. In particular, the researcher

aimed at examining how the teachers understand assessment in general at tertiary level as well as CBA in particular, how they perceive criteria for effective assessment as well as how they evaluate their practices and difficulties they encounter when conducting CBA.

Method of study

The study adopted a focus group approach to collect understandings and views of teachers about language assessment in general and CBA in particular at tertiary level.

Focus group interviews

Taking the focus group approach, the study employed two semi-structured open-ended focus group interviews. Focus group interviews are indeed advantageous for this study since interviewees are cooperative with each other and some individuals are hesitant to provide information (they may be reluctant to provide information in any type of interview). Moreover, the interaction among interviewees can elicit more of their viewpoints as well as agreement or disagreements with others' understandings of an issue than that yielded from an individual question-and-answer format of interview or a questionnaire (Cresswell, 2012).

Participants

Eight teachers were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study, and two focus groups of four were formed to be interviewed. All participants are female, ranging in the age from late twenties to early forties with at least four years of English teaching experience and currently teach speaking skills at the ED, HANU. They all have had MA degrees in Teaching English as a Second Language or English Studies from either a Vietnamese or an English speaking university. Such background can play an important role in forming their understandings of language assessment.

Data collection

Two focus group interviews with eight teachers were conducted in the faculty office after teaching time to ensure privacy, quietness and good sound quality of the recordings. In any interview, interview protocols were used to ensure all questions were answered with the flow of natural conversation. Open-ended questions were asked and responses were elicited from all individuals in the groups. Each interview lasted for about half an hour and was audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed with the assistance of NVivo queries that makes the processes of coding more convenient. The researcher followed the coding process suggested by Cresswell (2012), which is an inductive process of narrowing data into a few themes.

Findings and discussion

Teachers' beliefs about English language assessment at tertiary level

The first theme drawn from the ED, HANU teachers' answers in the interviews was regarding the definition of assessment at tertiary level. The analysis

shows that teachers share similar ideas and have basic understandings of assessment. In general, all of the interviewees defined assessment as 'a process, not a single activity' in which teachers 'collect information about their students' learning to identify their current level at the time of being assessed'. They believed that assessment should not take place once or twice at the end of a term or an academic year only. In other words, they claimed that assessment serves both formative and summative purposes.

In the interviewees' viewpoints, assessment can be carried out to serve different purposes, including summary of learning (five interviewees), learning diagnosis (three interviewees), checking understanding (six interviewees), determining student readiness in learning (one interviewee), motivation for learning (three interviewees), identification of learning difficulties (six interviewees), learning and teaching evaluation (four interviewees), and learning and teaching modification (seven interviewees). Generally, all eight interviewees claimed that the main purposes of assessment were for both teaching and learning. Two teachers particularly emphasized the necessity of assessment as information collected from such an activity can 'help them evaluate the relation between student learning and teacher teaching as well as the quality of the curriculum'. This finding shows that the teachers' understandings of assessment match most definitions of assessment provided by researchers on this field, such as Chapelle and Brindley (2002).

Regarding agents of assessment, all of the eight interviewees claimed that teachers should play the key and leading role in the process of assessment. They should be 'the people who design the assessment tasks, perform the assessment tasks, interpret the information collected and give comments for their students'. However, five teachers believed that students may also actively participate in assessment process. They stressed that by being an active agent, students could 'become more aware of their learning and pay more attention to what they have yet achieved in their learning'. In this sense, self-assessment and peer-assessment were inferred to be the active engagement of learners in their learning process, from sharing with the teacher the learning goals, the criteria for success and the procedure to carry out the assessment to developing their learning autonomy. This understanding agrees with the discussion of assessment by Heritage (2007) and Rea-Dickins (2007).

Teachers' beliefs about effective assessment

The teachers' viewpoints of the criteria for successful assessment were identified and analyzed. Regarding this issue, in the interviews, the participants showed various threads of thoughts with some similarities and differences. There were three teachers who believed that in order for assessment to be effectively carried out, it was crucial that both teachers and students thoroughly understand the purposes of assessment in advance of the performance of assessment. It can be inferred that to these respondents, clear

purposes of assessment play a key role in the success of assessment as it would drive the way teachers perform, interpret and use the results of assessment. Indeed, only with specific and vivid purpose can teachers choose appropriate methods of assessment to employ as well as necessary information from students to collect (Angelo, 2004).

However, three other teachers perceived successful assessment in such more general perspectives that require assessment to be 'fair, planned and criterion-based'. Regarding the first concept, one teacher emphasized that assessment can only be effective if strict fairness is ensured. She explained that students need to have equal opportunity to demonstrate the extent of their learning. In particular, the performance and scoring of assessment should not be influenced and distorted by factors unrelated to the purpose of assessment, such as students' gender and background or teachers' own bias and judgment.

Moreover, the respondents insisted that the time allowed for students to complete an assessment activity must be suitable with its level of difficulty and workload, which is also an aspect of fairness. This idea was in line with that of McMillan (2001), claiming that fairness is one of the crucial factors in assessment as it relates to student knowledge of learning targets and assessments, opportunity to learn, student prerequisite knowledge and skills, absence of bias and avoidance of stereotypes.

It was also agreed by the interviewees that assessment cannot be effective if it is not conducted according to a systematic plan, including purposes, methods, and uses, determined from the beginning to the end of a term as well as an academic year. They explained that successful assessment cannot be spontaneous becausHile without planning, the tasks may not have proper focus and the information needed may not be gathered. In other words, the plan of assessment can enable the teachers to have an overall picture of what and who have been assessed as well as those have yet been. This viewpoint is similar to those documented in Liao (2009)'s study, in which the interviewed primary school teachers were found to believe that one important element of effective assessment is to follow a determined plan throughout their practice.

Lastly, two out of the eight respondents described sound assessment as criterion-based. They believed that assessment instruments 'cannot collect useful information about student learning if specific criteria are not provided'. They explained that it is vital to make sure the assessment tasks 'actually assess what they intend them to' and assessment criteria act as a useful tool to them in that. Besides, one teacher also noted that being criterion-based also makes assessment become fair as it helps help teachers avoid personal discrimination or bias when scoring and interpreting assessment results, thus, promote the effectiveness of assessment tasks. As a result, they supported the use of assessment specifications during an assessment procedure. However, they also noted that

specific specifications are necessary for assessment tasks that require markings only. For more regular assessment within classroom, the teachers revealed that they based mostly on the general criteria.

Overall, the analysis shows that the respondents were somewhat aware of the importance of validity, in other words, the accuracy of an assessment - whether or not it measures what it is supposed to measure and reliability, in other words, the extent to which assessments are consistent (McMillan, 2013). Indeed, besides fairness, it can be said that validity and reliability still appeared to be solid foundations in the teachers' concepts and principles of assessment although they were not directly mentioned. Nevertheless, their understandings remained not thorough since what they have described were just one part of reliability in language assessment.

Teachers' beliefs about CBA

The second theme drawn from the interviews relates to how the teachers at the ED, HANU perceive CBA. National Research Council (2001) claimed that the first thing that comes to mind for many people when they think of CBA is a midterm or end-of-course exam, used by the teacher for summative grading purposes. On the contrary, the teachers' responses revealed that such practices represent only a fraction of the kinds of assessment that occur on an ongoing basis in an effective classroom. One teacher defined CBA as '… a process of assessing students through in-class activities with the active participation of the students'. In

another teacher's words, 'CBA is the assessment integrated into instructions of the teachers in the classes'. It was added by another teacher that 'this process is mainly based on teachers' observation and note taking during the classes'. They stressed that this type of assessment is different from normal tests as sometimes marks are not required. Especially, three teachers mentioned the purposes of CBA when they explained its definition. Their answers revealed that the teachers understand CBA as a tool serving both teachers - teaching and students - learning.

However, among the interviewees, there was one teacher who seemed rather reluctant to share her definition of CBA. Surprisingly, only half of the respondents believed that what they have actually been doing with their classes is CBA, although they were able to provide some general aspects of its definition as described above. In general, compared with the definition provided in Chapter Two of the study, which clearly identifies the subject, object and place of assessment performed, it can be inferred that the teachers' understandings of CBA still remain somehow limited as they neither provided much information in detail about it nor truly confidently talked about it.

Teachers' reflection of their own assessment practices

The last theme drawn from the interviews was the respondents' reflection of their own CBA practices. The teachers provided various answers with regards to the kinds of assessment they conduct in their speaking classes. In general, while

CBA was not mentioned directly, there were two directions drawn from their answers: based on purposes and based on methods of assessment. Regarding the first way, three teachers described their practices as 'those including assessment for learning and assessment of learning,' in other words, formative and summative assessments.

During their answers, the interviewees also provided short and general definitions of each term. In details, they explained that assessment for learning or formative assessment was carried out in each lesson with an aim to check student understanding and achievement of what have been taught, thus, help students themselves be aware of what they have learnt as well as have yet learnt, and provide motivation for them to study. In this way, it can be seen that assessment takes place continuously throughout a term in different forms. Meanwhile, assessment of learning, which is in the form of end-of-term exams, was compulsory to test what students have achieved after a whole term. Overall, the perceptions of these interviewers were relatively in line with the literature review, claiming that the kinds of assessment can be identified thanks to the determination of the purposes and uses of assessment (Earl & Katz, 2006; Rea-Dickins, 2007).

For other teachers, kinds of assessment mean the variety of methods and tools they employ to 'collect information about student learning in order to assess their strengths, weaknesses and progresses', such as questioning, oral tests, questionnaires, observations, reports and projects. However, it was revealed that regularly, no observation checklist or notes are used when the teachers carry out observation activities within class. This practice was hindered by a number of obstacles, namely heavy workload, great consumption of time and limited teaching time.

Apart from these above mentioned methods, two of the teachers strongly emphasized the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment in their classes as they believed both teachers and students should drive the assessment tasks. They also noted that these kinds of assessment can somewhat help them reduce the workload of carrying out assessment in a large class. In order to enable students to assess themselves and their peers, the teachers often provide them with the scoring sheet or marking form with specific items and criteria. This practice of the teachers has, indeed, been promoted by Shepard (2000) as a strategy to not only empower the students within the classroom but also to ensure the reliability and validity of assessment results achieved from students.

Despite these two teachers' support for self- and peer-assessments, one teacher complained that she found it 'time-consuming and overloaded' to prepare detailed assessment specifications suitable for each self-assessment activity. She also worried that some of the students were not confident to assess themselves as well as their friends and it may take a lot of time to train them how to use the specifications. Discussing this problem, Russell and Airasian (2012) stressed that the teachers can make use of available rubrics because

rubrics not only list the success criteria but also provide descriptions of levels of performance. It would be helpful in facilitating students' use to monitor and evaluate their progress during an assessment task or activity.

Teachers' difficulties in conducting assessment

The teachers also revealed some difficulties they have encountered when performing assessment, including large class size and unclear marking specification. They complained that the big number of students of a class, which is normally from twenty-two to twenty-five, was an obstacle for them to assess each student regularly and correctly. Although they were aware that assessment is important, the time and activities in each lesson were not limited to assessment only, thus, it was difficult to perform assessment to all students and provide them with equal opportunities to be assessed. Assessment on a regular basis, in turn, becomes hard.

In addition, two interviewees also mentioned the relative vagueness of the marking scales for such assessments as homework and participation. The teachers said that in the assessment rubrics, there was no specific instruction or description of the criteria to assess and score students' homework as well as how much they participate in the class activities. As a result, they have had to develop their own criteria and the teacher with least experience worried that sometimes her in-class assessment was still affected by subjectiveness. Moreover, one teacher revealed that this issue also discouraged her from carrying out assessment regularly in every lesson as it may take her a lot of time and effort to design sound criteria to collect information about her students' learning. In fact, these difficulties are relatively similar to those faced by the teachers in other research studies in assessment, namely Shim (2009) and Lee (2010).

Summary of findings

The study explores the ED, HANU teachers' overall perceptions of assessment in general and CBA in particular through focus group interviews. In general, the teachers shared similar ideas about the definitions of assessment and CBA, including its purposes and agents. Besides, they believed that successful assessment should be fair, systematic and criterion-based which include student involvement and understanding of assessment purposes. The popular kinds of assessment performed in their classes include formative and summative (purpose-based classification) along with questioning, oral tests, questionnaires, observations, reports, and projects (method-based classification). They also revealed that their practices of CBA were mostly hindered by large class size with limited teaching and assessment time as well as unclear marking specifications.

Recommendations

Since there still remain some teachers who are not confident when implementing CBA, institutional efforts should be taken to equip teachers with assessment literacy

through workshops, seminars, short-term courses or even a customized teacher education program or organize projects on language assessment in general and CBA in particular. This would not only help develop teachers' own knowledge about CBA and their professional abilities but also promote a shared understanding of assessment criteria. In addition, teachers also need to be willing to refresh themselves to learn new knowledge and skills of assessment, reflect both on their own and in cooperation with their colleagues, as well as evaluate and adjust their teaching and assessment practices.

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