Pre–service teachers' use of authentic assessment to assess secondary school English grammar

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Abstract: Any form of learning needs to be assessed in order to measure the learning outcomes. This does not exclude English grammar. Assessment is known as an important influence on the teaching and learning process. However, not much has been done to find out how pre-service teachers on teaching practice conduct authentic assessment. Pre-service teachers have the obligation to assess learners in order to improve their teaching and in a bid to demonstrate their application of theoretical knowledge. The purpose of this study was to explore how pre-service teachers used authentic assessment activities to assess English grammar during their teaching practice to influence meaningful learning. A qualitative case study design was employed where 10 pre-service teachers comprised that sample. The sample was purposefully selected on the criteria that the participants majored or minored in English as their teaching subject. These were selected from a population of 130 University of Livingstonia pre-service teachers who were undertaking teaching practicum during the time of data collection. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, document analysis and classroom observation. These methods were used because they have the advantage of collecting in-depth data from the sample. All data were transcribed and thematic analysis was employed to make conclusions. Results showed that a majority of pre-service teachers usedtraditional approaches to assess learners as opposed to authentic assessment. With these findings, the study recommends that teacher education institutions should improve their methodology courses by inclusion of authentic assessment activities and peer teaching.

Keywords*: Authentic assessment,English grammar, Pre-service teachers, traditional assessment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Brown (2019),defines assessment as a process of attaining evidence that may be used to make decisions about learners, programs, curricular and all educational policies. Assessment is a central activity to teaching and learning because it is a process of gathering information about a student's learning and serves to improve the teaching and learning (Bordoh, Eshun, Quarshie, Bassaw, and Kwarteng,2015). According to Nasab (2015), assessment is the process of following students' improvement through enabling active participation of the learning in the teaching and learning. Through assessment, teachers are able gather key information aimed at improving their teaching and enhancing learning, hence all assessment should positively contribute to students' learning (Villarroel, Bloxham, Bruna, and Bruna & Constanza Herrera-Seda, 2017).

Since assessment is part of students' learning, there is growing need for teachers to use authentic assessment (AA) which is context based. Unlike traditional assessment which focusses on written tests or oral examination of knowledge, AA aims to bring about meaningful learning among students through activities in which they actively participate to create their own knowledge (Ozan, 2019). Thus, there have been calls for a shift from traditional testing to more authentic assessment. Many scholars have defined authentic assessment as assessment that replicates real-world standards and challenges. Koh (2017), defined authentic assessment as a measure of students' intellectual achievement and understanding where students should actually demonstrate their creativity and critical thinking. In other words, authentic assessment requires students to demonstrate deep understanding of the content. Authentic assessment is a contextualized, real world view of linking knowledge to students' everyday life (Villarroel, et al., 2017). The aim of AA is thus to replicate what happens in the real-world in classroom activities. Authentic assessment focusses on students' competencies needed for future encounters. It is theorized that through authentic assessment, meaningful learning could be realized (Brown, 2019). Thus, this study aimed at fulfiling the following objectives (1) to identify types of assessment used by pre-service teachers to teach English grammar 2) to explore the benefits of authentic assessment in teaching English grammar.

II.　　LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment in general is a process of gaining evidence that is used in decision making about curricula, programs, students and educational policies being implemented. This can be done through two distinct types of assessment; traditional or alternative assessment also known as authentic assessment. According to Brown (2019), education has a goal to make learning meaningful and relevant to everyday experiences of learners. Thus, meaningfulness of learning can be evaluated through meaningful assessment. Bachman and Palmer (1996) cited in Brown, (2019), indicate that meaningfulness of assessment is the inclusion of differentaspects of a student involved in a task. This kind of assessment which leads to meaningfulness of learning is authentic assessment.

Authentic Assessment

According to Brown (2019), authentic assessment is a type of assessment where students are required to complete real-world tasks that show meaningful application of important knowledge and skills. Moria, Refnaldi, and Zaim, (2017, p.1) further define authentic assessment as "a process of engaging worthy problems or important questions in which students have to use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively". This entails engaging students in realistic environment where they are assessed using real-world activities which they are familiar with. Studies in the area of authentic assessment have been widely conducted (e.g. Brown, 2019; Frey, Schmitt, & Allen, 2012; Koh, Delanoy, Thomas, Bene, Chapman, Turner, & Hone, 2019; Rennert-Ariev, 2019). These studies agree that encouraging authentic assessment is one of the best practices in classroom assessmet and education. Fitriani (2017), argues that authentic assessment uses contextualized tasks which enable students to display their authentic capabilities. Thus, authentic assessment activities fall under contextualization strategies supported by the constructivist principles. Similarly, Waggins (1989, p. 705) argues that "if we wish to design an authentic test, we must first decide what are the actual performances that we want students to be good at". In addition, Villarroel, et al. (2017), describe authentic assessment as practicality and contextualization when teaching and assessing content taught and learned. Therefore, if teachers give tests requiring students to apply the knowledge they have learned to real-world settings, it can be taken as authentic assessment because it tests students' performance on meaningful tasks.

Characteristics of Authentic Assessment

Newman, Brandt and Wiggins, (1998) cited in Frey, Schmitt and Allen (2019), indicate that assessment stands to be authentic once it measures activities that are meaningful to students outside the classroom. For meaningful learning to occur, the learner should be allowed to construct their own knowledge through authentic assessment.

According to Koh (2017), conditions for authentic assessment activities provide chances for learners to cultivate higher order abilities such as critical thinking and complex problem solving.

Researchers (Brown, 2019;Frey, et al. 2019; Herrington, & Herrington, 2006;   Koh, 2017; Koh et al., 2019; Purnawarman, & Darajati, 2020;Wiggins, 2011) agree on the following conditions for assessment to be authentic; Firstly, contextualizethe tasks assigned to students and they should be challenging and involving application of knowledge in different contexts. This demands that the student should possess problem solving and higher order thinking abilities. These in turn promote deep processing of information. Secondly, success criteria and expected performance standards are clearly communicated to students. Third, self-assessment on the part of students should be encouraged through revising and monitoring their work. Therefore, it mainly requires collaboration and significant time on the part of students. Lastly, students should present and support their work to real audiences through peer or self-assessment.

In addition, Herrington and Herrington, (2006), states that these characteristics or principles allow teachers to build learning situations through authentic contexts that guarantee that assessment really measures that students can effectively use their knowledge in realistic situations . Therefore, demonstration of real-world abilities remains the dominant aspect of authenticity.Herrington and Herrington, indicate that"Authentic assessments are also contextualized; that is rather than assembling disconnected pieces of information, the tasks are set in a meaningful context that provides connections between real-world experiences and school-based ideas. These assessments are connected to students' lives…" (p.4). In this regard, authentic assessment, entails active participation by both teachers and learner.

Types of Authentic assessment activities

According to Brown (2019), andFeuer and Fulton (1993), there are numerous types of authentic assessment activities that are open for teachers to use in classroom. Inayah, Komariah, and Nasir, (2019) adds that, any different kinds of tasks in authentic assessment are used to evaluate students including both written and verbal scoring schemes. These are problem solving or projects, performance assessment, essays, portfolios and self-evaluation. Performance assessment is assessment that requires students to demonstrate application of knowledge (Fitriani, 2017). This can be done through allowing students to produce something. On the other hand, portfolios are a collection of students' work over a period of time to check their progress (Arslan, & Gümüş, 2020; Ok, (2014). Wangchuk (2002), indicated that portfolio assessment can also be seen as continuous assessment that indicates students progression of competence for a period of time. Another form of authentic assessment is problem solving or project assessment. This type of assessment involves activities or tasks to be concluded by students within a period of time. These tasks could be investigations in form of mini-research activities where data is gathered, organized and presented. Essays assessment involve generating and constructing open-ended item by students (Imande, & Simeon, 2023).

Traditional Assessment

The term traditional assessment has been defined in different ways by different scholars.   Quansah (2018), defines traditional assessment as the methods of testing which involve usually production of on paper documents, suchas examinations or quizzes. According to Brawley and   Education (2009), traditional assessment is the paper and pen type of tests used to decide what students remember. Traditional assessment, thus requires a student to recall the information learned. Examples of traditional tests include multiple choice, quizzes, weekly tests, true or false tests, shorts answer and essays (Quansah, 2018). Researchers agree that such kinds of assessmentsfocus on students' ability to memorize information which is of lower cognitive skill (Abosalem, 2016; Mansory, 2020; Quansah, 2018).However, such type of assessment has been faulted for its inability to allow learners to meaningfully apply the knowledge. This led to scholars' motivation to look at alternative assessment methods, one of which is authentic assessment.

Benefits of using authentic assessment to teaching English grammar

Cook (2021), in his study concluded that traditional testing is not meaningful for learners to show understanding and comprehension, rather, authentic assessments needs to be used to solve that problem by being meaningful. For a learner, meaningful learning is when he or she senses genuine value in the assessment and is helpful to building on what they have learned. Therefore, the assessment has to be authentic and meaningful because it reproduces what the learner has learned. Thus, teachers need to assess students during learning to evaluate their understanding of content, knowledge and skills (Singh, 2017). Such kinds of assessment enhance learning of grammar content because teachers are able to pinpoint their students' weaknesses and strengths**.** A study by Rukmini and Saputri (2017), which aimed at describing the implementation of authentic assessment to measure students' English productive skills, concluded that teachers of English in schools have implemented authentic assessment to measure students' English productive grammar skills. The expectation therefore is that teachers should give assessments that will provide a record of students' retention of information that the teacher is trying to teach (Wiyaka, Prastikawati, & Adi, 2019).Further research has also established that performance assessment which is one type of authentic assessment, offers students with an opportunity to exhibit the knowledge gained in the particular subjectarea including English grammar (Ashford-Rowe, Herrington, & Brown, 2014).

Moria et al. (2017), point out that teachers should pay attention to assessment in the teaching and learning process since it can be a tool or a measurement to see the success of teaching and learning process. For this reason, teachers, including pre-service teachers should use authentic assessment because it occurs within the learners' context and assesses their performance in a realistic context.There are several types of authentic assessment from which teachers can select any type of authentic assessment they wish to use, based on the need to assess. When learning assessment is centered on authentic assessment, it enhances transfer of learning and retention of information (Villarroel, et al., 2021). Furthermore, students must be given the opportunity to participate in the construction of meaning. The necessity to develop contextualized assessment practices that are meaningful for students and closely connected to real-world challenges has been increasingly recognized in education. If correctly applied, authentic assessment has the potential to increase achievement through measuring a variety of student abilities (see Wiewiora, & Kowalkiewicz, 2019).

Use of different types of assessment for teaching English grammar has been widely researched globally and in Malawi (Brown, 2020; Darajati, 2020; Inayah, Komariah, & Nasir, 2019). A study by Inayah, Komariah, and Nasir, (2019) on the use of authentic assessment in a speaking classroom in South Africa mentions that the achievement in English can only be accomplished when students are able to execute the language task they have learned. In another study, Katinskaia and Yangarber (2021) on assessing grammatical correctness in language learning, in Russian and English students revealed that grammatical errors still occurred among students.

III.   METHOD

Research design

The study employed a qualitative case study design to explore pre-service teachers' use of authentic assessment to assess the learning of English grammar in line with the objective during their teaching practicum. Case study designs concern rigorous exploration of an individual element i.e. a person, a group or a community. The type of case study was a single case study. The use of qualitative and University of Livingstonia pre-service teachers comprised the single case. Qualitative case study was preferred because it allows the researcher to gather in-depth data and giving a holistic view of the problem and information about a single phenomenon (Baskarada, 2014; Heale, & Twycross, 2018; Yin, 2009; Yin, 2014). Hence, the study employed a qualitative single case design in order to collect data from participants in their natural settings.

Sample

Ten (10) pre-service teacherswere purposefullyselected from a population of 130 University of Livingstonia student-teachers. Theinclusion and exclusion criteria were that participants were studying English Language as their minor or major subject . Nine secondary schools were conveniently sampled because that is where the participants were placed for teaching practicum in Northern Malawi.

Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used to collect data. Instruments included interview guides and observational schedules. In addition, document analysis of lesson plans, schemes and records of work, syllabus and textbooks were analyzed for assessment strategies planned by participants. The methods provided in-depth information about the practices of participants during teaching practicum(Ishak, & Bakar, 2012). During semi-structured interviews with all participants, an audio recording device was used to record. Classroom observations provided information about the actual assessment practices during the lesson. The researcher was a non-participant observer in the process of classroom observation. Before data collection, informed consent was sought from participants. All data was treated with confidentiality   stored in USB flash folders which were only accessible by the researcher (Lin, 2009). To ensure anonymity, participants' names were not disclosed or recorded anywhere. All types of data collected was triangulated to formulate more trustworthy results (Lemon, & Hayes, (2020).

Data analysis

Thematic analysis of the data was conducted following steps as outlined by Flick, (2013). Interviews were transcribed and categorized according to their sets. MAXQD 2022 version,a computer software was then used for coding the transcribed data (Bazeley, 2019). In addition, classroom observation and document analysis data were typed and categorized accordingly in line with research questions. Meaningful themes were assigned to all codesafter categorizing them and finding patterns and relationships (Linneberg, & Korsgaard, 2019). Finally, a summary of the major and minor themeswas made and presented through descriptions and tables before conclusions were made.

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of this study are presented in line with the objectives of the study. These include; types of assessment used by pre-service teachers to teach English grammar and benefits of authentic assessment to teach English grammar.

Types of assessment used to teach English grammar

The study sought to explore the type of authentic assessment activities that pre-service teachers used to assess English grammar. Participants responded to the question, *What assessment methods do you use to ensure that the grammar aspect you have taught has been effectively learnt and can be used by your learners?*
 A participant articulated that;
I use class exercises to test if students were able to follow the lesson. Weekly and monthly tests are used to find out the progress of students in terms of the grammar aspect taught and projects are used for practical use of language. (PT4, Semi-structured interviews, 4/5/22, 10:01AM)

Similar to what PT4 articulated, more participants had this to say,   PT8 said "*Aaa I mostly use tests at the end of the term*" another *participant* PT 2 added that "*I use continuous assessment methods like written tests and oral tests using   different topics in class where students debate on the particular topic.* In addition, PT 5 expressed similar views saying *"I use exercises and give compositions as home work"*. Further to this, one more participant PT 3 said *"I usually give exercises and tests through the multiple choice questions".*Griffith, and Lim, (2012) state that teachers have a task to find suitable ways to assess whether a student can use information

learned to different real-world contexts effectively. Similarly, participant T9 said *"Aaaa I mostly use tests at the end of the term".* Additionally, PT 4 emphasized on the types of assessment he used;

A good example of how I assess learners to find out if they have knowledge of grammar is through using Cloze Procedure Passages (CPP). This strategy is useful for especially for classes where students are asked to fill the blank spaces with appropriate words to check their understanding, interpret and use the target language correctly. (PT 4, Semi-structured interviews, 26/4/22, 10:01AM)

From the interview extracts above, the participants used both authentic and traditional methods of assessment. While others used both tests and debates, some only used traditional cloze passages or authentic composition writing. According to Norova, (2020), traditional assessment include conservative methods of testing such as standardized tests, use pen and paper exercises, multiple-choice, true or false or matching type test items as well as cloze tests. On the other hand, Koh (2017), observes thatauthentic assessments (AA) includes open-ended tasks that require students to construct extended responses, write compositions, role plays or to produce a product in a real-world context. Other authentic activities include projects, portfolios, writing an article for newsletter or newspaper, role plays, debates, and oral presentations others.

These findings seem to suggest that the pre-service teachers who participated in the study used a combination of authentic and traditional methods to assess learning of English grammar since some pointed out that they sometimes use continuous assessment methods and debate in addition to compositions. Other participants still used traditional weekly or monthly tests which may encourage rote memorization and not understanding.

However, findings show that a majority of the participants used class exercises and tests to assess learners which are traditional assessment methods (Norova, 2020). PT10 said,
"I assess learners through class exercises and weekly tests, it helps me to check learning in my class. To understand those learners who participated and those who did not participate. I make up classes to those who do not understand".
PT2 also said *"I give them exercise and tests". "It helps students improve their writing and training them for the future. To check learning".* Cheng (2020) in a study found out that in-service teachers used tests, passages, sentences, pictures, discussions and games to make the teaching and learning contextualized. Observational results further show that participants used traditional methods as opposed to authentic assessment methods to assess students.

Table 4: Assessment methods used during lesson observation

Question	Activities/evidence of strategy use	Remarks
What kind of assessment methods does the pre-service teacher use during and after the lesson?	*PT10: The pre-service teacher assessed students through class exercise which he marks a few in class and asked students to take the rest of the exercises books to the staff room.*	*Students individually do the exercise which the teacher marks.*
	PT8: The pre-service teacher gave group exercise and asked students in groups to present responses to the whole class.	*Students work on the exercise in groups and present to the whole class. They actively participate in the group exercise.*

	PT3: *The pre-service teacher gave individual exercise and goes round to mark exercise. The question was for students to 'Identify the adverb and state what type of adverb it is'.*	*Students work as individuals on the exercise.*

(Source: Researcher's field notes)

Benefits of using authentic assessment to teaching English grammar

The study also unveiled some benefits of using authentic assessment. Participants responded to the question; *Would there perhaps be a particular reason why you prefer that form of assessment? Any advantages?* One participants PT 2 said: *"Every weekend I give them report writing. I just want to train them to know how to write. It helps students improve their writing and training them for the future".* Making a similar point, PT 5 said: *"It enables teacher to check learning, students capture what they did not understand".* Yet another participant PT 6 said: *"Because it was saving time".* PT 8 also indicated that: *"…it is important for the teacher to know what students know and do not know for planning lessons. It is important to understand and makes teacher plan better ways of teaching them".*

Participant PT 3 made the point even clearer:

"This is a way to check if they understood and making sure that they are practicing what they learned. You are able to notice their weaknesses and you can repeat where they did not do well. Through class exercises. They have to also have to check their understanding".

The interview results above show that using authentic assessment has a lot of advantages for both the teacher and the learner. Firstly, using authentic assessment enables the teacher to check students' learning. This in turn helps them to improve their teaching since the assessment gives them feedback on areas of improvement. "Authentic assessment is an effective measure of intellectual achievement or ability because it requires students to demonstrate their deep understanding, higher-order thinking, and complex problem solving through the performance of exemplary tasks" (Koh, (2017, p. 1). Studies agree that an authentic assessment is desirable to know the improvement of students' learning in the process of teaching (Brindley, 2003; Cook, 2021; Herrington, & Herrington, 2006; Purnawarman, & Darajati, 2020). It helps to observe and decide on the strengths and weaknesses of students to enable contemplation the next action and it is a way in which teachers give regular feedback to students.

Results from the current study have a;lso shown that authentic assessment allows students to improve their writing and trains them for future real world experiences. Recent studies have agreed that authentic assessment enables students to use what they learn in classroom settings for real-world encounters. Authentic assessment also enhances learning because learners easily retain what they learn. Villarroel et al. (2021), in their study concluded that authentic assessment enhances transfer of learning and retention of information. Other studies also corroborate that using authentic assessment helps learners to remember content (Inayah, Komariah, & Nasir, 2019; Mardjuki, 2018; Rukmini, & Saputri, 2017). In addition, use of authentic assessment encourages creativity in students (O'Malley, & Pierce, 1996; Sahyoni & Zaim, 2017).

Use of authentic assessment is said to be beneficial because it provides clear information about students' achievement (Fatimah, 2014; Morales, & Fernández, 2019). Furthermore, findings of the current study have reaveled that authentic assessment allows the teacher to monitor learner improvement systematically. This is seen through the interview excerpts by some participants who stated that the assessment they use enables them to take note of progress in grammar learning. Similar findings are recorded by a few more researchers (e.g. Fatimah, 2014; Kabel, 2020). The classroom observations that were conducted also confirmed how beneficial

the types of assessment activities were to both teachers and students. It was, for instance, observed that teachers were able to give immediate feedback to learners and in turn, the learners easily performed various activities authentically.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Authentic assessment is basically assessment methods in which students are required to perform real-world activities that can also be applied in different contexts. It is a contextualized way of collecting information to check progress of learners. The current study sought to explore pre-service teachers' use of authentic assessment to assess secondary school English grammar. The study first sought to identify types of assessment used by pre-service teachers to teach English grammar. Secondly, the study explored the benefits of authentic assessment to teach English grammar.

As has been demonstrated , different types of authentic assessment were used by pre-service teachers. A majority of them used continuous assessment activities in addition to written exercises and tests. Others used debates and role plays to enable students demonstrate their understanding of the grammar lessons (Afrianto, 2017). In addition, a few used portfolios, though some used traditional weekly tests. The study also showed benefits of using authentic assessment. Authentic assessment has been found to be beneficial for both teachers and students. It enables teachers to get and give quick feedback to learners. In addition, the study found that authentic assessment enhances learning because students easily retain the grammar content they learn when assessed using authentic activities (Ghufron, 2019; Kabel, 2020; Zaim, & Arsyad, 2020).

Looking at the evidence from the current study, it is recommended that pre-service teachers as well as in-service teachers should utilize the different authentic assessment methods to teach English grammar in order to enhance learning. In so doing, the teaching and learning processes will be more authentically beneficial.

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