

eISSN: 2581-9615 CODEN (USA): WJARAI Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/wjarr Journal homepage: https://wjarr.com/

	WJARR	HISSN 2581-9615 CODEN (UBA): HUARAI		
	W	JARR		
	World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews			
		World Journal Series INDIA		
Check for updates				

(REVIEW ARTICLE)

Assessing the Grammatical Rules Proficiency among Polytechnic and Colleges of Education Students in Anambra State Using Evidence Centered Design Assessment

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 24(01), 1081–1088

Publication history: Received on 27 August 2024; revised on 06 October 2024; accepted on 09 October 2024

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.1.3057

Abstract

Language assessment is a broad concern in Applied Linguistics because it focuses on the measurement and judgment of learners' proficiency, and the efficiency of the learning practice used by the learners as well as the teaching method employed by language teachers. This research paper adopted Evidence Centered Design (ECD) as its theoretical framework to form the bedrock of this study. The ECD methodology is an assessment approach or design which underscores the central sole of evidentiary reasoning in assessment. ECD assessment deisgn is used in this study to explore the efficiency of Evidence Centered Design in the assessment of English language proficiency level of the Igbo speakers of 200 undergraduates from three polytechnics and one college of education in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative and quantitative research design, primary and secondary source of data to help the researcher make predictions and judge the communicative competence of these learners by using diagnostic model of test to determine their interactive knowledge in the use of parts of speech. The study used simple percentage which is the statistical analysis acceptable in Language studies, to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire and the test. The findings from this study proved the validity of ECD assessment in determining language proficiency.

Keywords: Evidence Centered Design; Assessment; Proficiency; ECD methodology and validity

1. Introduction

Language learning has raised the interest of many Applied Linguistics scholars. After the Second World War, the linguists tried to propose strategies and theory that can help in language learning. They are concerned with examining the relationship between native speakers' knowledge of a language and learners' knowledge of the target language and the teaching and learning methods that will help achieve positive results in language learning. That is the reason why various teaching methods and learning strategies were proposed by scholars to ensure efficient teaching and learning of Second Language (SL). Language assessment as a tool in language learning and teaching is the corner stone of any teaching and learning practice because teaching without assessment is like a deep well without water. The teacher as well as the learner may not be able to give a precise report on the learners' language progress and proficiency.

In Nigeria, the English language has assumed the place of second language; it is the language of instruction, administration, trade and commerce due the integration of many nations necessitated by colonialism. For the national development and social integration of these people with heterogeneous culture and different languages, as such, the English language is accepted as the language of interaction among these people (Ushuple, Lucy Mishina; Iskandar, Iskander, 2019). Despite the fact that Nigeria has other national languages but none has been accepted to serve as the national language or used as the language of administration, instruction nor trade and commerce due to political

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reasons as such, the English language has maintained its function as a connector to the culturally heterogeneous and multilingual nation as Nigeria, also taking the position of the first language because there is need for social interaction among these people, especially those who were born and raised in various cities of the country because the choice of language is difficult in those parts of the country as opined by (Ushuple, Lucy Mishina; Iskandar, Iskander, 2019), (Ike,2003) cited in (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2012), (Osuofor, 2002) cited in (Ewulo, 2015). The English language is seen as a tool for human development since it crosses the border of ethnic and linguistic diversification in a country like Nigeria; it is the tool that is used to communicate in research fields and education space.

In academic space, the English language is promoted because it is the language of instruction not only that, English Language is one of the two core subjects in Nigerian school curriculum, Consequently, a minimum of credit pass is required in the WASSCE certification to qualify for admission into any Nigerian tertiary institution. This is because proficiency in the English language is required from learners to communicate and understand basic instructions in every academic space in Nigeria and that is why the English language is taught in Nigeria is majorly premised on academic purpose which is teaching the English language skills necessary for academic progress.

The English language as the language of instruction in Nigeria, it has taken a very crucial spot in academic environment in Nigeria. In Nigeria a minimum of credit level in WAEC is required to gain admission in any Nigeria university; so the English is not only prominent but important for academic advancement in Nigeria. Consequently, it is expedient to also explore the assessment tool that should be used to assess the proficiency of these learners and suggest the best possible assessment technique to be employed in Nigeria schools to ensure that the essence of learning the language is achieved.

1.1. Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to assess the credibility of Evidence-Centered-Design as an assessment tool to determine learners' proficiency of the rules of grammar in the target language, particularly in the structures. Other objectives include:

- To know if these students understand the function performed by each word in a structure.
- If the written knowledge of the students are equal to the actual performance in the language. the review of related literature is organized to cover the following sub headings which are as follow:
 - $\circ \quad \text{Conceptual review} \quad$
 - Theoretical review
 - o Empirical review
 - o Research model

2. Review of Relevant Concepts

2.1. Language Assessment

Assessment, generally, is a process where an assessor takes note of students' performance of classroom activities. Assessment can be a daily activity or carried out intermittently. (Brown D. , 2003), in *Language assessment: principles and classroom practices*. Newyork: Longman, explains assessment as an ongoing process that encompasses a wider domain in various ways like: when a student responds to a question, offers a comment or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes assessment on the student's performance. This assessment may be on the written work of the student; which can be done by the student, the teacher and other students. Assessment as an activity involves testing, measuring or judging the progress, the achievement or the language proficiency of the learners; the focus is on the students' learning and the outcome of teaching (Sarosdy, Judit; Bencze, Tamaz Farczadi; vadnay, Marianna, 2006).

(Riconscente, Mislevy, & Corrigan, 2015), view assessment as a chain of reasoning that links evidence to claims about learning ,specifically, with focus on the process of reasoning from the particular things people make, say or do to draw inferences about their knowledge, skills and abilities.

Assessment and learning are inseparable activities because assessment is carried out during learning process; a teacher observes learners' response to questions and other feedbacks that learners give during classroom interactions. Assessment is not a planned routine unlike what is obtainable in test taking. Also, the judgment of the teacher is not the only tool used in judging the performance of the learners; but it includes the judgment of the teacher, the student and other students who are members of the class

In Second Language assessment, which can also be called Second Language Testing, assessment is concerned with measuring ethical issues that arise in settings where individuals' proficiency in a language that is not their mother tongue or first language (L1) is being assessed, or where their knowledge and skills are being assessed in a language that is not their L1 (Bachman, 2010, p. 1).

(Davies, 2007, pp. ,86), enumerates three functions of language assessment which are to:

- Provide information about language skills; to ascertain the extent of a learner's proficiency when compared to the native speakers' proficiency.
- Measure the language development of learners based on applying the cultural residues in the target language.
- Assess the metalinguistic aspect of the language.

Language proficiency assessment of L2 learners measures the language ability of these learners and what they can do with the language. Assessment involves two processes; proficiency and performance. As noted earlier, assessment is the corner stone of teaching and learning therefore the importance of language assessment cannot be over emphasized. Language assessment plays a pivotal role in Applied Linguistics by "operationalizing its theories and supplying its researchers with data for their analysis of language knowledge or use" (Clapham, 2003, p. 148). Assessment gives teachers as well as the learners the feedback on learning and teaching progress. The teacher makes a decision on whether to: improve, adjust, change the teaching methods or the curriculum, and the learners, on their part, see areas in the language which they need to improve on. Bachman (1991) in (Alderson, Charles; Banerjee, Jayanti, 2002) views language testing as the development of a theory that considers language ability on the basis of interactional model of language test performance that include two major components: language ability and test method. They further opine that in assessment what is measured is what one knows about the language, (cognitive knowledge) and how to use the language (performance ability).

Assessment as an act within evaluation; as evaluation, it is a systematic way of gathering reliable and relevant information for the purpose of making decision and the result obtained is used to assess and decide the achievement or progress of learners in the target language, the quality of materials used in teaching and learning, the appropriateness of the objectives, the teaching methodology, the syllables and so on. Through evaluation, a teacher will be able to weigh the effects of the tools employed in teaching and learning, and many decide to change or make an adjustment on either one, or on all the teaching techniques used and this entail monitoring the progress of the learners' cognitive ability (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018). In this assessment, the teacher analyses the performance of the learners since it is a progressive exercise, there is a need for progressive report on the learners' performance. Within assessment is "Test." In other words, test is a form of assessment, which is also referred to as, "assessment technique". The difference between assessment and test is that the latter is graded while the former is not. This definition although posits that assessment is different from test falls short of stating categorically what is the essence of test and to give a clear description of activities involved. However, coming to the responsibility of the teacher in language assessment, both tests on assessment are same owing to the fact that what the teacher does in assessment is the same during test. The teacher may decide to record the assessment or ignore the recording of scores, the same as in the test.

In the research report published by Alberta Education (2012), it advocates for Developmentally Appropriate Assessment; this form of assessment calls for the use of a range of assessment strategies, where language learners are tested in various ways to demonstrate their competence in the target language, beyond classroom activities. The Developmentally Appropriate Assessment (DAA) approach gives room for students to show what they know in an environment that is safe to take risks associated with learning. Applying DAA to language assessment implies assessing learners not just in writing but also in reading, comprehension and speaking, also in the social use of the target language because language should be all inclusive if assessment should be carried out, in order to give a standard feedback on the language ability of the learners in the target language.

2.2. Relationships between Assessment and Evaluation

There are different opinions on what assessment should be; this gave rise to many definitions and opinions of assessment. Nevertheless, the core aim of assessment is to determine the outcome of an input. Assessment gives the progress report of teaching. The essence of assessment is to determine the level of knowledge and the ability of learners as well as the academic progress of learners in a subject area. In other words assessment is the hallmark of teaching and learning. There are different forms of assessment, they are: formal and informal, formative and summative, performance based, diagnostics, placement, proficiency, aptitude and achievement assessment (Winna, 2023). Assessment provides the raw information of the efficiency of the tools employed used during learning and at the same time provide learners

with the evidence of the success of the learning strategy employed by them. Whichever form of language assessment employed during language learning, all work towards improving the proficiency of the learners.

(Sarosdy, Judit; Bencze, Tamaz Farczadi; vadnay, Marianna, 2006), made a distinction between evaluation and assessment; while evaluation concentrates on the approach or methodology, assessment is an act on the methodology used. In other words, assessment, examines the implication of the methodology used to find out the strength and weaknesses associated with the approach or approaches employed though various systematic exercise involved in assessment. Assessment involves testing, measuring or judging the progress, the achievement or the proficiency of the learners. The focus is on the students' learning and the outcome of the teaching. Evaluation may be one part of assessment. (Opara S. , 2016) supports (Sarosdy, Judit; Bencze, Tamaz Farczadi; vadnay, Marianna, 2006) in the view that evaluation is an umbrella framework covering assessment, feedback and decision making. Evaluation of assessment determines the success or the failure of, the strength weakness of approaches and techniques employed in the teaching and learning program. Assessment involves: testing, measuring or judging the progress, the achievement or the language proficiency of learners. The major focus is on students' learning and assessment.

Assessment as a systematic collection reviews and uses the information on the progress report of learners for the purpose of improving learning and development. The data collected at each point in time is used to judge many factors observed during learning process. Assessment is carried out by instructors in stages, and the data analyzed to arrive at a conclusive report on learning.

2.3. Proficiency Measurement

Proficiency is the ability of second language learner to express his or her thought in the target language with the structural accuracy, sufficient vocabulary, speak smoothly and effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social and professional topic. Proficiency includes having the knowledge and the application of the cultural idiosyncrasies in the target language (Rao 2016; Opara 2016; Davies 2009). Proficiency goes beyond the knowledge of the fabric of the language: vocabulary, pronunciation, the grammatical structure and other rule governed aspect of grammar. Proficiency in language pervades through actual use of language; observing the ethnographic use of the language, as such attention should be paid to social use of language whilst proficiency is considered (Leung, 2022). (Leung, 2022, p. 76), veers proficiency should be able to address some empirical questions such as:

- What do 'local' and 'situated' mean? Do they only refer to in-person here-and now language communication? Does it include digitally mediated multilateral communication that can involve participants in different physical and temporal sites? Is there a need for conceptualizing different kinds of 'situated local language practice' with different analytic schemata (that can inform proficiency/ies)? For instance, private local (e.g.domestic social interaction)? Public local (e.g. the classroom or work place)?
- How would the different kinds of interactional initiatives (e.g. a participant asking a question to elicit further information) and responses be understood and evaluated in situated local proficiency terms? Do we need to pay attention to the content/subject matter of social interaction? How should the monolingual-translingual dimension be addressed? Whose (which participant/s) views and opinions should be taken into account? Do we need to factor in salient issues in social investigations such as class, ethnicity and gender? How do we recognize participant volition and emotional intelligence in social communication? Would these aspects of language use be gradable/ratable non-arbitrarily?
- Is there a need to establish the longevity or durability (in terms of real-world usefulness) of situated local language proficiencies? How often should we revisit any description of proficiency?
- Is there a principled way of determining the number of situated local proficiencies that would be needed in different educational, institutional, occupational professional and social settings?
- How might local proficiencies relate to one another?

2.4. Relevant Theories for the Study

Evidence-Centered-Design (ECD) by Mislevy, Steinberg and Almond (2003) and (Mislevy,Robert J.; Riconscente,Michelle M., 2005) is adopted as a guide to this study. The ECD of assessment is an assessment design built on three models which are student model, evidence model and task model. This assessment does not rely on the perception of the assessor but also incorporates the judgment of the students premised on the reality or evidence of their knowledge from the task carried out. Evidence Centered Design assessment is basically designed for people in expert systems, software designs, and the legal argumentation. The main objective of this design is to elicit cognitive knowledge from the written knowledge, thus "understanding the relationship between what a learner has known and what he or she can use the known to do, in other words, application of knowledge to reality" (Mislevy,Robert J.; Riconscente,Michelle M., 2005, p. 1). In ECD assessment design, the examiner can identify the valued work, task features,

representational forms, performance outcomes, valued knowledge, knowledge structure and relationships and knowledge task relationship. ECD assessment relevance can still be in use in assessing proficiency levels of language learners. The report opines that ECD assessment is relevant in all fields of discipline thus, "...ECD affords intradisciplinary investigations while simultaneously providing structures that facilitate communication across various kinds of expertise, each as it contributes in conjunction with the others to instantiate an assessment argument" (Mislevy,Robert J.; Riconscente,Michelle M., 2005, p. 2). 'Common language' here, refers to knowledge representation from the assessment carried out, or what one can refer to as the true test of knowledge. The ECD assessment theory strongly admits that it tests and ascertains "the concrete aspects of task development.... illustrate the fundamentals of evidentiary reasoning, the thinking that links observable but fallible data to a targeted claim by means of a warrant, a rationale or generalization that grounds the inference" (Mislevy,Robert J.; Riconscente,Michelle M., 2005, p. 1). It measures proficiency; skills, ability and knowledge (Arielli-Attali, Meirav; Ward, Sue; Thomas, Jay; Deonovic, Benjamin; Von-Davier, Alina A., 2019). No doubt this type of assessment may have proven its success in other fields of discipline, and its relevance in language proficiency testing, and to give a valid result in language testing to be proven.

(Alderson, Charles; Banerjee, Jayanti, 2002), posit that language testing involves not only the psychometric and technical skills required to construct and analyze a test but also knowledge about language. Assessing language ability goes beyond paper and ink knowledge, but incorporates what one knows about the language and how the language is used in a particular environment, Bachman (1991) in (Alderson, Charles; Banerjee, Jayanti, 2002) argues that language ability consists of language knowledge and metacognitive strategies, and test method should not only include characteristics of environment but also rubric input, expected response and the relationship between input and expected.

3. Methodology, Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researchers tested the validity of language assessment design ECD for the determination of language proficiency among two hundred English language learners in polytechnics and colleges of Education in Anambra State. The research covered selected polytechnics and Colleges of Education in Anambra State, South-East Nigeria. The study targeted six hundred population, however two hundred volunteered to participate in the study, as such, the number of participants used in this study were randomly selected based on their availability.

The plans and procedures for research adopted for this study is mixed methods research. It is an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) cited in (Creswell, 2009). This design was used to investigate the validity of ECD as language assessment tool for higher education students. Primary and secondary sources of data were used. The primary data was obtained from the test takers' response to the questionnaires and cloze test in word class. The response from the questionnaire was used as the students' model of the ECD assessment design while the cloze test measures the cognitive ability of these test takers based on their response to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire used for the study was designed using 5-point nominal scale but later reduced to 3: Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree. This decision was made to ensure accuracy of the validity of the responses collected. The questionnaire was used to weight and justify the three models in Evidence Centered Design Assessment Technique which are; student model, evidence model and task model. The second part of the analysis is a cloze test, comprising of 25 questions on exercises in functions of parts of speech in sentence.

The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage. The simple percentage analysis measures and analyzes data by taking the frequency in the category divided by the total number of respondents and multiplying by 100%. For the observable data, the data will be analyzed by the functions of the words, which is acceptable in language science.

4. Results

Table 1 presents the result of this study after responses were subjected to proper statistical analysis. 6.7% of the population disagrees that they were exposed to target language from basic school, while 93.3 percent of the population strongly agrees that they were exposed to the English studies from their lower basic school till their upper basic school, there was no respondent who neither strongly agrees nor strongly disagrees with the first question. 5 percent of the population agrees that they were taught parts of speech of the target language and 95 percent strongly agree that the in lower and upper basic schools, with no percentage that neither disagree nor strongly disagree with the question. On the question of their ability to identify the parts of speech a word belongs, 5 percent disagrees and another 5 percent

agree to it, while zero percent strongly disagrees to it and 90 percent strongly agree that they can identify the word class which a word belong to in a sentence. Coming to the knowledge of the function(s) of a word in a sentence, 6.7 percent disagrees, 0 percent strongly disagrees, 53.3 agrees while 40 percent strongly agrees that they know the function(s) of words in a sentence. in the last question of the questionnaire, 26.7 percent disagrees, 0 percent strongly agrees to the question.

Table 1 Response from the questionnaire given to the respondents who were also given a test on the parts of speech. This questionnaire is the student model of assessment, which is one of the tripartite model of the ECD assessment approach. The respondent made a personal assessment of themselves on their knowledge of the target language and their ability to use the language.

Questions	Response in Percentage			
	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
English Language was learnt in my basic schools	6.7	0	0	93.3
Parts of speech was learnt in basic schools	0	0	5	95
Identification of parts of speech of words in a sentence	5	0	5	90
Knowledge of the functions of parts speech in the English Language	6.7	0	53.3	40
Knowledge of the English language is the same as the performance	26.7	0	66.7	6.7

Table 2 The result from the cloze test given to the respondents simultaneously with the questionnaire.

Scores	Frequency	Percentage
5-25	40	20
26-50	55	27.5
51-75	90	45
76-100	25	12.5
Total	200	100

40 participants scored within 5-25 marks, which is 20 percent of the population used in the study; 55 participants scored within 26-50 marks, and that is 90 participants scored within 51-75, while 25 participants scored within 76-100. 40 participants scored below 26; 55 participants scored between 26 to 50, though this is considered below average. performance while 90 participants above average, consisting 45% of the population, making it the highest population of the test takers are within the above average range of English Language performance test.

The research findings align with the research questions that guided the research process of this study. Also, the findings from this study have established the validity of ECD assessment design in language assessment. Comparing the 66.7 percent of the population who agreed that 'Knowledge of the English language is the same as the performance', with the 90 participants who scored 51 to 75 in the test, it shows that there is no difference between the knowledge and the performance in the target language. In other words, it can be ruled that a learners' knowledge in the target language may be equivalent to the performance.

5. Conclusion

The study attempted the application of the three models in which ECD assessment design was premised. It gave the respondents the ability to judge their ability in both knowledge and performance in the target language. Assessment has moved beyond teachers' assessment but now includes the learners' assessment of their ability. This ECD gives room for a true proof of ability. In the real sense of 'what I have is what I give out'. Through the response from the

questionnaire which is a manipulative structure meant to get the real individual ability of each respondent. Questionnaires are presented in the most possible confidential manner; so the participants can easily own up to their ability unlike when the question is asked with a disclosure of personality.

Assessment is pivotal in language teaching and learning because it gives both teachers and learners insight into their level of learning, for the former, it gives a proof of efficiency of the learning materials and techniques, while for the latter, it unfolds the extent of their knowledge in the target language.

The approach of assessment adopted by teachers may give false information on the expectation on performance the right result; therefore it is the test givers' responsibility to adopt the most imperative method that can provide him or her with a result that is more accurate.

This explains the need to adopt a proper method of assessment for a sustainable language development among learners, as well as implement a guide for language teachers and curriculum developers to capture and address pressing issues that should be captured during assessment. Then, if the measures mentioned are taken care of, language learning will be made easier for the learners, and the teachers can easily plot the progress of learning.

Recommendation

The method of language assessment can be reviewed, instead of the monotonous task of written test for the assessment language learning progress; the teachers may use interactive method of assessment where learners can express themselves freely in the target language.

The language curriculum should include interactive exercise, where learners engage in group discussions in a communication session.

Large classroom should be arranged in such a way that the teacher can efficiently supervise and monitor learners' progress in the target language.

Teachers should give room for the learners to freely express themselves, then, point out the weakness in each individual's performance.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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