

# Implementing Alternative Assessment in a Communicative English Skills Course at Three Ethiopian Universities<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study examined the implementation of an alternative assessment in a course, Communicative English Skills Course (CESC), at three Ethiopian universities. The study mainly focused on multi-assessor strategies, multiple assessment tools, and comprehensive, progressive, continuous, and relevant assessment used by instructors at these three universities. Two sets of questionnaires, an instructor questionnaire and a student questionnaire, were administered to collect its data from 128 instructors and 241 students. A maximum variation sampling was used to select instructors from the three universities and stratified sampling to select students from these three universities. Data sets were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test. There are two findings of this study that are worth mentioning. First, an instructor-based assessment strategy (M = 4.0) dominated the process of evaluating student learning in CESC. Second, the overall assessment strategies employed by instructors at the three universities lacked progressiveness, continuity, and relevance, and focused more on reading, grammar and vocabulary than on the other language domains of CESC. There are two implications for this study. First, most of the instructors at the three universities preferred traditional assessment (TA) methods to alternative assessment (AA) methods and found the former more convenient to use in CESC than the latter. Second, the instructors denied the apparently existing mismatch between their assessment practices and CESC's recommended assessment methods.

## Resumen

Este estudio examinó la implementación de una evaluación alternativa en un curso, Curso de habilidades comunicativas en inglés (CESC), en tres universidades etíopes. El estudio se centró principalmente en las estrategias de evaluación múltiple, las herramientas de evaluación múltiple y la evaluación integral, progresiva, continua y relevante que utilizan los profesores de estas tres universidades. Se administraron dos conjuntos de cuestionarios, un cuestionario para instructores y un cuestionario para estudiantes, para recopilar datos de 128 instructores y 241 estudiantes. Se utilizó un muestreo de máxima variación para seleccionar a los docentes de las tres universidades y un muestreo estratificado para seleccionar a los estudiantes de estas tres universidades. Los conjuntos de datos se analizaron utilizando estadísticas descriptivas y la prueba U de Mann-Whitney y la prueba de Kruskal-Wallis. Hay dos hallazgos de este estudio que vale la pena mencionar. Primero, una estrategia de evaluación basada en el instructor (M = 4.0) dominó el proceso de evaluación del aprendizaje de los estudiantes en CESC. En segundo lugar, las estrategias generales de evaluación empleadas por los profesores de las tres universidades carecían de progresividad, continuidad y pertinencia, y se centraban más en la lectura, la gramática y el vocabulario que en los otros dominios lingüísticos de CESC. Hay dos implicaciones para este estudio. En primer lugar, la mayoría de los instructores de las tres universidades prefirieron los métodos de evaluación tradicionales (TA) a los métodos de evaluación alternativos (AA) y encontraron que los primeros eran más convenientes para usar en CESC que los segundos. En segundo lugar, los instructores negaron el desajuste aparentemente existente entre sus prácticas de evaluación y los métodos de evaluación recomendados por CESC.

## Introduction

This study examined the relevance of alternative assessment (AA) in the context of Ethiopian higher education. This related specifically to a communicative English Skills course (CESC) offered at Ethiopian universities. Assessment has been an essential area in English language teaching (ELT) for more than half a century, and it is an area of dynamic academic investigation (Al-Mahrooqi, & Denman, 2018; Davies, 2013; Monib et al., 2020; Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). In particular, as Abbas (2012) and Mekonnen (2014) contend, studies have identified that two opposing modes of assessment, traditional assessment (TA) and AA, have influenced ELT assessment in higher education.

In respect to CESC, TA refers to conventional or standardized methods of testing, and usually entails multiple-choice, true/false, matching, and gap-filling test items. For its part, AA involves a more informal and continuous process for evaluating students' language ability and students are asked to carry out real-life

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activities that resemble the authentic application of what they have learned (Agustina, 2011). Tran (2012) defines AA as evaluation processes that can be employed in an instructional setting, and which can be readily applied to learning tasks in a particular classroom situation (also see Monib et al., 2020). The field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), in particular, has witnessed a paradigm shift in assessment since the 1970's from the mere use of TA to more alternative forms of assessment (Asabe, 2017). This alternative form of assessment has resulted in the active involvement of learners in the form of peer-assessment and self-assessment to determine student performance with a view to making it as more authentic and holistic as possible (Al-Mahrooqi, & Denman, 2018; Brown, 2012; Shrestha, 2014).

In relation to the application of AA in the Ethiopian higher education context, both continuous assessment (CA) and the active learning method (ALM) became officially operative after 1994, following the implementation of the Ethiopian Educational and Training Policy (Ministry of Education, 1994). Particularly, Ethiopian universities practice standardized cumulative and more judgmental methods to assessments (Teferra et al., 2018). This is largely because standardized tests and examinations are regarded as the measurement of the outcome of a lesson that students are taught during a certain period of time (Abiy, 2013; Al-Mahrooqi, & Denman, 2018; Mekonnen, 2014; Monib et al., 2020; Motuma, 2015; Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). However, Abiy (2013) asserts that this form of assessment is insufficient for ascertaining students' language progress. For this reason, currently, there is an inclination to use AA to gauge what learners know and can do in a more dynamic approach (Abiy, 2013; Mekonnen, 2014; Temesgen, 2017). This shift is influenced by the underlining assumption that there is a correlation between assessment and instruction within the Ethiopian higher education context (Abiy, 2013).

In CESC, the term *communicative* incorporates three inseparable theories: the theory of communicative course design, the theory of active learning method (ALM), and the theory of alternative assessment (AA) as used by Al-Mamari et al. (2018) and Motuma (2018) (see Figure 1).

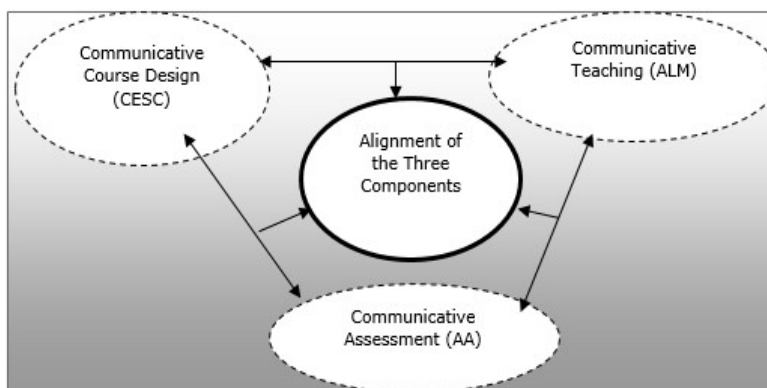


Figure 1: Alignment of the communicative language teaching components

The communicative course design, in the context of CESC, underlines communicative language teaching and assessment practices. This includes content-based instruction (organizing activities around certain contents or subject-matters); theme-based instruction (linking the contents to the language skills); experiential learning (stimulating concrete learners' experiences); episode hypothesis-based instruction (using series methods following a story line); and task-based learning (organizing activities around authentic and integrated tasks) (Ansarey, 2012; Brown, 2010; Davies, 2013; Smith, 2000; Ur, 2010). This is because CESC focuses on a whole set of real-world and well-integrated skills, and interactive and practical tasks that require the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach and assessment methods to help students develop English language competence.

### Implementing AA in CESC at Ethiopian Universities

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the implementation of alternative assessment (AA) in CESC as part of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) at three Ethiopian universities (Addis Ababa University, Wollaga University, and Ambo University). The purpose of the implementation of AA strategies in CESC, in particular, should be seen in relation to the quality of teaching CESC at Ethiopian universities, in

general, and at the three universities, in particular. This is because AA is a central element of a successful teaching-learning process in CESC (Herdiawan, 2018). Therefore, the types of AA strategies students are subjected to determine their success in CESC (Teelken, 2018). Scholars, such as Herdiawan (2018), Rojas Serrano (2017) and Teelken (2018), maintain that aligning AA tools and strategies with teaching-learning strategies and with the nature of the objectives of CESC, can help instructors and students achieve quality education. To this end, much effort is needed to promote the implementation of AA to enhance the quality of assessment and the quality of teaching and learning in CESC (Teelken, 2018).

To support the importance and the relevance of AA in CESC, Shrestha (2014) argues that the assessment practices of CESC are different from the assessment practices of most specific language courses, including productive and receptive language skills. This is because the complex components of the language domains in CESC require EFL instructors to use various types of AA tools and strategies to assess students' performance (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Bachelor, 2017; Herdiawan, 2018; Minda, 2019). In other words, EFL instructors are not expected to assess CESC using discrete-item tests in the current context of CESC (Minda, 2015; Ministry of Education,, 2017; Motuma, 2014; Shrestha, 2014). For example, in the 1950's and 1960's, multiple-choice and true/false items were implemented concurrently with teacher-centered approaches (Gil & Lucas, 2013; Herdiawan, 2018; Rojas Serrano, 2017). In spite of this, the goal of CESC is to help students develop knowledge, interest, and skills in integrated English language domains through ALMs (Ministry of Education, 2017). Therefore, AA is an indispensable technique to assess both students' knowledge and their performance in CESC (Bachelor, 2017; Minda, 2019).

Based on the above, this study set out to answer the following research questions:

*What components of AA do EFL instructors currently employ to assess CESC Addis Ababa, Wollaga, and Ambo Universities?*

*What are instructors' responses to AA strategies used in CESC at these three universities?*

*How do English major students respond to their instructors' AA in CESC at these three universities?*

## **Research Methodology**

This study employed a convergent, parallel, mixed research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Demir & Pismek, 2018; Shannon-Baker, 2016). The purpose of this design was to comprehensively address the research questions as stated above. Within this research design, a mixed-methods approach was utilized. The latter allowed for the integration of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Demir & Pismek, 2018), which were the types of data that were collected in this study.

## **Population**

The population for this study included the following entities and groups: universities, university instructors, and university students. In this context, Ethiopia has 45 universities clustered into four generations for managerial purposes. Cluster refers to the geographical location of the universities in the country, and the generation is about the time at which these universities were established according to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2004). First-generation universities (ten universities) were established before 2006; second-generation universities (ten universities) were instituted from 2007 to 2009; third-generation universities (ten universities) were set up between 2010 and 2014; and the recently-established universities are categorized as fourth-generation universities.

As highlighted below, only three universities were selected for this study. In all, there were 128 English language instructors and 953 English language students at the three universities when the study was conducted.

## **Sampling**

### Universities

Before the study was conducted, an ethical clearance was granted by the UNISA's College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The three government universities, Addis Ababa University, Wollaga University, and Ambo University were purposefully selected based on the cluster and the generation they belong to. The three selected universities belong to the first, second, and third generations, respectively.

### English language instructors

As pointed out above, at the time the study was conducted, there were 128 English language instructors teaching CESC at the three universities (see Table 1). All of them were included in the study based on the maximum variation sampling technique. This was done to represent diverse variations within these instructors (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015). Before data were collected, copies of a consent letter were sent out to participants to invite them to take part in the study.

S/N	Items	AAU		AU		WU		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender									
1	4. Male	7	12.3	5	14.3	6	15.8	18	14.1
	5. Female	48	87.3	30	87.3	32	84.2	110	85.9
	Total	55	100	35	100	38	100	128	100
Experience									
2	4. Experienced	33	60	12	34.3	13	34.2	58	45.3
	5. Less experienced	22	40	23	65.3	25	65.8	70	54.7
	Total	55	100	35	100	38	100	128	100
Level of Qualification									
3	A. Assoc. Prof. and	2	3.34	1	2.86	2	5.26	5	3.91
	B. Asst. Prof/PhD	12	21.82	2	5.7	5	13.16	19	14.84
	C. MAIMED	41	74.55	32	91.43	31	81.58	104	81.25
	Total	55	100	35	100	38	100	128	100
Pedagogical Training									
4	A. Pedagogically	37	67.3	11	31.4	17	44.7	65	50.8
	B. Pedagogically	18	32.7	24	68.6	21	55.3	63	49.8
	Total	55	100	35	100	38	100	128	100

Table 1: Instructors' background information

### Students

In all, 241 students from the three Ethiopian universities were selected for this study. These were first-year, English major students. They were selected through a stratified sampling technique using Kothari's (2004) formula as shown below:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e^2(N-1) + Z^2 p \cdot q}$$

Where n = sample size

- Z = 95% confident limit (interval) under normal curve which is 1.96
- p = proportion of population to be included in the sample that is 0.3
- q = non-occurrence of event = 0.7
- N = Total number of household = 953
- E = margin of error or degree of accuracy (accepted error term 0.05)

$$\text{Thus; } n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.3)(0.7) (953)}{(0.05)^2 (953-1) + (1.96)^2 (0.3) (0.7)} = \frac{768.819408}{3.186736} = 241$$

Therefore, based on the actual size of the population of students at each of the three universities (see Table 2) during the study period, 241 students were selected from the population of 953 students using a stratified sampling technique. This type of sampling technique maintains the proportionality of the sample size to be selected from each university and gives equal chance for every individual in the population. Here, too, before data was collected, copies of a consent letter were sent out to participants to invite them to take part in the study. Table 2 indicates how the appropriate sample size for each university was arrived at.

S/N	Universities	Population	Constant no (C)	Sample size
1	Addis Ababa University	549	0.253	139
2	Ambo University	136	0.25	34
3	Wollaga University	268	0.25	68
Total	953	0.25	241	

Table 2: Sample of students at each of the three Ethiopian universities

### Data collection

Data was collected through questionnaires, which were electronically sent out to participants in the first semester of 2020. The questionnaires consisted of statements that were scored in terms of a five-item Likert scale by ticking or circling either a number 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 against each statement. The numbers were allocated the following values: 5 = always; 4 = often; 3 = sometimes; 2 = rarely and 1 = never.

### Data analysis

The data obtained through questionnaires were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis and represented in percentages, weighted means, standard deviations, and rank orders based on the recommendations of Demir and Pismek (2018), and Shannon-Baker (2016). Data sets were categorized into the following themes: multi-assessor strategies; multiple AA tools; and comprehensive assessment; and progressive, continuous, and relevant assessment. As responses were collected from two groups of respondents from each university, namely, instructors and students, the Mann-Whitney U Test was employed to identify the difference between the responses of instructors and students in relation to the implementation of AA in CESC.

Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to determine the difference in the three universities' participants' responses to the aspects mentioned above. The Mann-Whitney U Test, which is an alternative to the t-test, and the Kruskal-Wallis Test, which is an alternative to an ANOVA, are useful when the difference between the sample sizes of two independent populations is large, when the test is nonparametric, and when the type of data is ordinal (Demir & Pismek, 2018), as was the case with the current study. In order to triangulate the data, the Mann-Whitney U Test was supplemented by a t-test where the number of the two groups was equal or nearly equal. The data were analyzed using SPSS® Statistics 26.0. For all statistical tests, alpha was pre-set at = 0.05 as a conventional practice to accommodate the fact that a given finding has a 5% chance of not being true (Everitt & Skrondal, 2010).

## Results

### Implementation of multi-assessor strategy in CESC

To determine the most frequently used AA strategies in each language domain in CESC, both EFL instructors and the students responded to questionnaires sent to them at the three universities. Based on the responses of the two sets of participants from the three universities, the mean scores for each statement were computed as summarized in Tables 3 and 4 (also see Appendices A and B for more information on CESC's language domains).

S/N	AA strategies	Language domains in CESC						Weighted mean
		Speak.	Read.	Writ.	Listen.	Vocab.	Gram.	
1	Instructor assessment	4.1	4.8	3.1	2.4	4.7	4.9	4.0
2	Peer assessment	2.2	3.4	2.1	1.4	3.1	3.8	2.67
3	Self-assessment	-	2.2	1.1	1.8	2.7	2.2	1.67
4	Invited quest assessment	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0
5	Combination of at least two forms	2.2	2.6	1.6	1.2	2.6	2.7	2.15
	Weighted mean	1.7	2.6	1.6	1.36	2.62	2.72	2.1

Table 3: Instructors' responses on the use of multi-assessor strategy in CESC by mean

The matrix in Table 3 presents the mean values of the implementation of multi-assessor strategy (rows) compared to the attention given to each component of CESC (columns). Thus, along with the rows of the table, the weighted mean 4.0 shows that instructors always assessed student learning in CESC for their own sake or using TA rather than using peer- and self-assessment, as well as invited guest assessment strategy in all the six language domains in CESC. Even within the instructor assessment, the mean values 2.4 and 3.1 indicate that listening and writing skills were given less attention in comparison to grammar (4.9), reading (4.8) and vocabulary (4.7).

The rows in the table demonstrate that instructors did not invite any guest to assess any language domain in CESC during the period of the study at the three universities. However, the analysis of the instructional materials showed that the invited guest assessment strategy is frequently recommended to measure students' learning outcomes in CESC. Similarly, the weighted mean values 1.67, 2.15, and 2.67 imply that instructors sometimes employed peer-assessment and self-assessments and rarely integrated any two language skills in their assessment in CESC. In conjunction with the columns of the matrix, the weighted mean values 2.72 and 2.62 show that instructors employed a multi-assessor strategy more frequently to assess grammar and vocabulary knowledge respectively compared to listening (1.36), writing (1.6) and speaking (1.7) in CESC. Generally, the overall weighted mean value 2.1 implies that the instructors' practice in implementing a multi-assessor strategy in all language domains in CESC is insignificant. Nonetheless, the CESC module suggests a variety of AA strategies to match assessment strategies with the nature of the learning objectives in CESC.

S/N	I am often assessed by:	AA implementation in CESC by mean values						Weighted mean
		Speak.	Read.	Writ.	Listen.	Vocab.	Gram.	
1	Instructor assessment	3.8	4.6	2.1	1.8	4.6	4.4	3.55
2	Student peer assessment	2.0	2.1	2.3	1.2	3.0	3.5	2.35
3	Student self-assessment	2.1	3.7	2.8	1.5	4.5	1.9	2.75
4	Invited guest assessment		-	-	-	-	-	0.0
5	Combination of the three assessment forms	1.2	2.3	2.6	1.1	2.3	2.2	1.59
Weighted mean		1.82	2.54	1.96	1.12	2.86	2.4	2.12

Table 4: Students' responses to the implementation of multi-assessor strategy by mean values

In Table 4, the rows illustrate the implementation of an AA strategy to assess the entire language domains, and the columns show how a language domain in CESC is assessed by a variety of AA strategies. Concerning students' responses to the use of multi-assessor strategies, the mean value 3.55 in this table indicates that instructors often assessed student work in CESC for themselves. Moreover, the mean value 2.73 shows that slightly more than half (55%) of the 119 students pointed out that their instructors hardly ordered them to assess their own work in CESC. Students also disclosed that they were rarely assessed by their peers (2.35) or by means of a combination of instructor, peer- and self-assessment strategies (1.59).

### **Implementation of multiple AA tools in CESC**

As displayed in Table 5, instructors seldom used inter-student interviews (0.67) and audiotape recordings (1.0) to assess language domains in CESC at the three universities. The weighted means 3.37, 3.33, and 2.89 also exhibit that instructors gave relatively more emphasis to reading, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge respectively, than to listening (2.00), writing (2.18) and speaking (2.4) in implementing AA tools. To develop a stronger argument for this issue, Table 6 presents the analysis of the students' responses to the implementation of AA tools in each language domain in CESC.

S/N	AA Tools	Language domains in CESC						Weighted mean
		Speak.	Read.	Writ.	Listen.	Vocab.	Gram.	
1	Test items	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.4	4.8	4.8	4.75
2	Question-answer	3.8	4.9	2.6	2.1	4.1	3.7	3.53
3	Informal observation	2.1	3.4	2.6	2.1	2.8	2.4	2.57
4	Peer teaching	2.2	2.9	1.8	1.0	2.4	2.1	2.07
5	Inter-student interview	2.2	-	-	2.2	-	-	0.67
6	Audiotapes	1.7	-	-	1.1	3.2	-	1.0
7	Small group work	1.3	4.2	3.2	0.6	3.8	3.8	2.82
8	Individual work	2.2	4.6	2.8	2.9	4.9	4.8	3.7
9	Class work	1.3	3.9	1.4	2.3	2.7	2.4	2.33
10	Homework/assignment	2.4	4.9	2.6	1.3	4.6	4.9	3.45
Weighted mean		2.4	3.37	2.18	2.00	3.33	2.89	2.69

Table 5: Instructors' responses to the implementation of multiple AA tools in each language domain in CESC by mean and weighted means

As illustrated in Table 6, instructors used homework/assignments, and very little individual and group work, projects, and peer-teaching activities to decide only 8% of their grades. On the other hand, the mean values in the brackets indicate that vocabulary (3.74), grammar (3.64) knowledge, and reading (3.53) received relatively higher attention than listening (2.88), speaking (2.90), and writing (3.38) at the three universities.

S/N	AA Tools	Language domains in CESC						Weighted mean
		Speak.	Read.	Writ.	Listen.	Vocab.	Gram.	
1	Test items	4.9	4.8	4.7	3.6	4.8	4.9	4.62
2	Question-answer	3.2	3.6	3.3	1.2	3.9	3.8	3.17
3	Informal Observation	2.1	3.1	2.5	2.2	2.7	2.3	2.48
4	Peer teaching	1.9	3.2	2	2.0	1.5	2.3	2.15
5	Inter-student Interview	3.1	3.3	-	2.0	-	-	1.4
6	Audiotapes	1.3	-	-	1.8	3.7	-	1.13
7	Small group works	1.1	2.6	3.3	1.7	3.9	3.6	2.70
8	Individual works	4.6	4.7	4.6	3.3	4.8	4.7	4.45
9	Class works	1.4	4.8	2.1	2.1	4.4	4.8	3.27
10	Assignment/homework	4.3	4.8	4.7	2.4	4.8	4.6	4.27
Weighted mean		2.79	3.40	2.72	2.41	3.34	3.1	2.96

Table 6: Students' responses to the implementation of AA multi-assessment tools in each language domain in CESC by mean and weighted means

### ***Use of comprehensive and progressive assessment strategies in CESC***

The symbol “f” refers to the frequency of the items as displayed in Tables 7 and 8. With respect to the comprehensive use of AA in CESC, the mean values in Table 7 demonstrate that most (82.6%) of the instructors often assessed students’ grammar (4.13), vocabulary (4.17) and their reading skills (4.3), using test items in CESC. Evidently, they rarely (2.24) used a variety of AA techniques to assess the intended learning objectives in CESC. Similarly, they infrequently assessed students’ motivation (2.62), writing (2.7), speaking (2.74) and listening (2.86), as well as students’ ability in integrating the four language skills (3.25) in CESC. Moreover, they hardly checked students’ attitudes towards the nature of CESC (2.49) at the three

S/N	How often do you:	Statistics	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Weighted mean
1	Use a variety of assessment techniques to assess a language objective in the course?	f	-	-	51	57	20	128	2.24
		%	-	-	39.8	44.5	15.6	100	
2	Assess at least two or more than two language objectives in the course in integrative way?	f	23	21	59	15	10	128	3.25
		%	18	16.4	46.1	11.7	7.8	100	
3	Assess the vocabulary knowledge of the students in the course?	f	51	58	9	10		128	4.17
		%	39.8	45.3	7.3	7.8		100	
4	Assess the grammar knowledge of the students in the course?	f	49	51	23	5		128	4.13
		%	38.3	39.8	18	3.9		100	
5	Assess the attitude of the students towards the course?	f	12	11	35	40	30	128	2.49
		%	9.4	8.6	27.3	31.3	23.4	100	
6	Assess the motivation of the students towards the course?	f	13	14	41	31	29	128	2.62
		%	10.2	10.9	32.0	24.2	22.7	100	
7	Assess the speaking skills of the students in the course?	f	11	14	45	47	11	128	2.74
		%	8.6	10.9	35.2	36.7	8.6	100	
8	Assess the reading skills of the students in the course?	f	59	48	21	-	-	128	4.3
		%	47.1	37.5	16.4	-	-	100	
9	Assess the writing skills of the students in the course?	f	12	11	42	50	13	128	2.7
		%	9.4	8.6	32.8	39.1	10.2	100	
10	Assess the listening skills of the students in the course?	f	f	9	14	47	50	8	2.86
		%	%	7.0	10.9	36.7	39.1	6.25	
Weighted mean									3.15

universities.

Table 7: Instructors’ responses on the comprehensive use of AA in CESC by percentages and means



In Table 8, the mean values 4.16, 4.25, and 4.13 show that 185 (85%) of the students thought that their instructors often assessed their reading skills, grammar, and vocabulary knowledge respectively at the three universities. Similarly, students expressed the view that their instructors sometimes assessed their speaking skills (2.65) and checked their interests in CESC (2.54) and in AA tools (2.51) concerning the teaching-learning process in CESC. Students complained that the instructors rarely checked their students' motivation towards the CESC (1.85) at the three universities. On the whole, instructors did not comprehensively apply their assessment strategies in CESC (2.96) at the three universities.

S/N	How often does your instructor:	Statistics	Usually	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Weighted mean
1	Assess your motivation towards the course?	f	-	-	58	77	93	228	1.85
		%	-	-	25.4	33.8	40.8	100	
2	Assess your interest towards the course?	f	21	23	59	65	50	218	2.54
		%	9.6	10.6	27.1	29.8	22.9	100	
3	Assess your vocabulary knowledge in the course?	f	99	63	51	10	-	223	4.13
		%	44.4	28.3	22.9	4.5	-	100	
4	Assess your speaking skills in the course?	f	49	51	93	25	-	218	2.65
		%	22.5	23.4	42.7	11.5	-	100	
5	Assess your reading skills in the course?	f	101	81	35	10	-	227	4.16
		%	44.5	35.7	15.6	4.4	-	100	
6	Assess your writing skills in the course?	f	13	14	71	81	49	228	2.39
		%	5.7	6.1	31.2	35.5	21.5	100	
7	Assess your listening skills in the course?	f	-	25	45	97	53	220	2.19
		%	-	11.4	20.5	44.1	24.1	100	
8	Assess your grammar knowledge in the course?	f	109	68	51	-	-	228	4.25
		%	47.8	29.8	22.4	-	-	100	
9	Assess your interest towards the assessment tools they use?		22	21	57	63	55	218	2.51
			10.1	9.6	26.2	28.9	25.2	100	
Weighted mean									2.96

Table 8: Students' responses to the comprehensiveness of AA in CESC by percentages and means

The mean value, 3.62, in Table 9 shows that instructors at the three universities often checked their students' individual learning differences in CESC. They also occasionally ascertained the suitability of their assessment tools (2.72) to the CESC instructional activities. However, instructors intermittently used AA to determine students' language ability (3.02), their learning progress through feedback (3.05), and their problem areas for remedial consideration (2.91) at the three universities. To that end, they occasionally gave interventions to fill students' learning gaps (2.58) in CESC. They also occasionally determined the suitability of an AA tool to the learners' learning outcomes (2.78), individual learners' learning styles (2.86), and to the language objectives (2.91) in CESC. However, instructors reported that they rarely (2.24) ascertained the appropriateness of their assessment tools to both students' individual learning styles and students' levels of language proficiency in CESC.

S/N	How often do you:	Statistics	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Weighted mean
1	Check the alignment between your assessment tools and the instructions?	f	9	13	49	53	4	128	2.76
		%	7.0	10.2	38.3	41.4	3.1	100	
2	Implement continuous assessment in the course?	f	13	17	54	41	-	125	3.02
		%	10.4	13.6	43.2	32.8	-	100	
3	Determine students' individual learning differences in CESC?	f	9	14	59	39	7	128	3.62
		%	7.0	11.0	46.1	30.5	5.5	100	
4	Determine students' learning styles in CESC?	f	7	13	57	42	5	124	2.24
		%	5.7	10.5	46.0	33.9	4.0	100	
5	Check students' learning progress through feedback?	f	18	11	59	40	-	128	3.05
		%	14.1	8.6	46.1	31.3	-	100	
6	Identify the problem area for remedial attention in CESC?	f	7	14	38	61	8	128	2.91
		%	5.5	11.0	29.7	47.7	6.3	100	
7	Implement continuous feedback based on the assessment results (scores)	f	8	11	46	62	-	127	2.72
		%	6.3	8.7	36.2	48.8	-	100	
8	Implement continuous interventions based on the assessment results (scores)?	f	10	7	39	63	9	128	2.58
		%	7.9	5.5	30.5	49.2	7.0	100	
9	Check the suitability of an AA tool to language objectives in CESC?	f	11	23	37	57	-	128	2.91
		%	8.6	18	28.9	44.5	-	100	
10	Check the suitability of an AA tool to learners' learning styles?	f	12	17	39	56	3	127	2.84
		%	9.5	13.4	30.7	44.1	2.4	100	
11	Check the suitability of an AA tool to learners' learning outcomes?	f	17	9	41	51	10	128	2.78
		%	13.3	7.0	32.0	39.8	7.8	100	
Weighted mean									2.86

Table 9: Instructors' responses on the progressiveness of AA in CESC by percentages, means and weighted means

The mean values in Table 10 represent students' opinions about the fact that their instructors occasionally used AA to determine their learning gaps (2.72), to close gaps with tutorial sessions (2.67), and to give them feedback based on the assessment results (2.65). Students felt that their instructors rarely gave tutorials (2.56) to assist them according to their assessment results. Notably, students complained that instructors sometimes assessed what they had not taught (2.63), which means instructors occasionally set assessment items in relation to the intended learning objectives in the CESC module (2.64). This finding implies that the instructors rarely assessed what they taught in CESC, which, according to Rahman et al. (2019), can have a negative backwash effect in teaching CESC. Also known as washback effect, this particular effect refers to student readiness for a test and a mismatch, or a proper match of course content aspects, curriculum aspects, learning materials, and instructor activities (Alebachew & Minda, 2019; Kuang, 2020). In the current study, the negative backwash effect related to the mismatch between instructors' assessment practices and CESC's recommended assessment methods.

S/N	How often does your instructor:	Statistics	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total	Weighted mean
1	Assess what you have been taught in the course?	f	9	13	89	103	4	218	2.63
		%	4.1	6.0	40.8	47.3	1.8	100	
2	Implement continuous assessment in the course?	f	15	19	94	91	11	230	2.72
		%	6.5	8.3	40.9	39.6	4.8	100	
3	Asks your problem area for tutorial action in the course?	f	9	14	99	89	7	228	2.67
		%	4.1	6.4	45.4	40.8	3.2	100	
4	Give you continuous feedback based on your result assessment?	f	11	13	97	92	11	224	2.65
		%	4.9	5.8	43.3	41.1	4.9	100	
5	Give you tutorials after his/her assessment result in CESC?	f	10	11	89	90	18	228	2.56
		%	4.6	5.1	40.8	41.3	8.3	100	
6	Set all assessment items from the module to assess your language?	f	7	14	98	91	8	228	2.64
		%	5.5	11.0	44.95	41.74	6.3	100	
Weighted mean									2.65

Table 10: Students’ responses to the progressiveness, continuity, and relevance of AA in CESC by percentages, means and weighted means

As shown in Table 11, reading, grammar, and vocabulary items 522 (82.6%) generally dominated the assessment items at the three universities. Reading activities received greater attention at Ambo and Wollaga universities, followed by grammar and vocabulary items. At the Addis Ababa University, however, grammar, 66 (28.45%) was given more attention than reading in CESC. Vocabulary was the third-most assessed language domain in CESC at the three universities. However, listening 9(1.4%), writing 45 (7.1%), and speaking (8.9%) were overlooked by instructors at the three universities.

Language domains	Frequency of the items at each university									Total frequency				Rank
	Addis Ababa University			Ambo University			Wollaga University			CA	SA	T	%	
	CA	SA	T	CA	SA	T	CA	SA	T					
Speaking	9	12	21	6	12	18	3	14	17	18	38	56	8.9	4
Reading	33	30	63	39	26	65	36	40	76	108	96	204	32.3	1
Vocabulary	24	28	52	30	16	46	18	20	38	72	64	136	21.5	3
Grammar	36	30	66	33	20	53	39	24	63	108	74	182	28.8	2
Listening	6	-	6	-	-	-	3	-	3	9	-	9	1.4	6
Writing	12	12	24	6	10	16	3	2	6	21	24	45	7.1	5
<b>Total</b>	120	112	232	114	84	198	102	100	202	336	296	632	100	

Table 11: Frequency of language domain items in the CESC assessments at the three universities

Table 12 illustrates the difference between instructors’ and students’ views concerning the implementation of AA components in CESC as represented by the Mann-Whitney U Test. The results of the Mann-Whitney U Test indicate that there is no difference between instructors’ and students’ views regarding the implementation of AA in CESC. In other words, both the instructors and the students had similar views about the implementation of multi-assessor strategies ( $z = 0.54$ ), the multiple AA tools ( $z = 0.69$ ) and the use of comprehensive assessment ( $z = 0.64$ ), and progressive, continuous, and relevant AA in CESC ( $z = 0.51$ ) at the three universities. The overall result of the Mann-Whitney U Test ( $z = 0.46$ ) confirms the same finding that there is no difference between the three universities in implementing AA in CESC. A Kruska-Wallis Test was also conducted to determine the difference between the opinions of the instructors and the students in relation to the three universities, as indicated in Table 12.

S/N	What components of AA do EFL instructors employ to assess CESC at the three universities?	Respondents		Sum of Ranks (R <sub>i</sub> )	U <sub>1</sub>	Z
		Instructor (1)*	Student (1)			
1	Implementation of multi-assessor strategies in CESC	2.1	2.12	7563	8454	0.54
2	Implementation of multiple AA tools in CESC	2.69	2.96	9757	9550	0.69
3	Use of comprehensive assessment in CESC	4.15	2.96	7032	6103	0.64
4	Progressiveness, continuity and relevance of AA in CESC	2.86	2.65	7598	7311	0.51
Overall implementation of AA in CESC		2.95	2.67	7163	7097	0.46

Table 12: Mann-Whitney U Test results concerning the implementation of AA components in CESC (The standard deviations ranged for 1.12-2.21 for instructors and from 1.13-2.31 for students)

Item	Universities	N	Mean Rating	SD	R <sup>2</sup>	T	P-value at 0.05
Implementation of AA in CESC at the universities	Addis Ababa University, Ambo University, Wollaga University	194	2.71	2.63	1424.76	0.257	0.579
		89	2.98	2.89	790.76		
		106	2.89	3.16	819.55		
Total		389	2.74	2.92	3035.07		

(R<sup>2</sup> represents the sum of mean ranks square of each university; df was 2)

Table 13: Kruskal-Wallis Test results regarding the difference among the three universities

As indicated in Table 13, there were 398 respondents in total, 194 from Addis Ababa University, 89 from Ambo University, and 106 from Wollaga University. The mean rank square of all the observations was 3035.07. The summary result of Kruskal-Wallis Test ( $t = 0.257$  with  $p = 0.579$  at  $p$ -value of  $< 0.05$ ) reveals that there were no statistically significant differences among the three sample universities in implementing the components of AA in CESC. In terms of the three research questions for this study, this means that: (a) instructors at the three Ethiopian universities employed more of traditional assessment strategies and less of alternative assessment (AA) strategies; (b) despite the instructors' claims that they (instructors) implemented a multi-assessor strategy in CESC all the time, that was, nonetheless, not the case; and (c) students negated instructors' assertions that they (instructors) employed AA methods.

## Discussion

The present study investigated the implementation of the components of AA in CESC at three Ethiopian universities. In this instance, it set out to answer three research questions:

*What components of AA do EFL instructors currently employ to assess CESC at Addis Ababa, Wollaga, and Ambo universities?*

*What are instructors' responses to AA strategies used in CESC at these three universities?*

*How do English major students respond to their instructors' AA in CESC at these three universities?*

The implementation of AA components was investigated as a function of who assesses and, what and how to assess student learning in CESC. As regards a multi-assessor strategy, the mean and the weighted mean indicated that an instructor-based assessment strategy ( $M = 4.0$ ) dominated the process of evaluating student learning. More than half of the students from the three universities also indicated that their instructors hardly ever used student peer assessment. In addition, instructors never used an invited guest assessment strategy to assess any of the six language domains. This particular result invalidates instructors' claims that they (instructors) always implemented a multi-assessor strategy. In contrast, CESC emphasizes the relevance of the invited guest, peer- and self-assessment strategies. Moreover, researchers in the field argues for the use of a variety of assessors to assess the language objectives in CESC in an integrative manner (Al-Mamari et al., 2018). Other researchers contend that the use of multi-assessor strategies facilitates the alignment between AA components and the nature of CESC in the context of CLT (Bourchaib, 2017; Kaboula & Elias, 2015; Kibbe, 2017). Compared with other related contexts, the instructors at the three universities neglected the use of an integrated assessment approach (Herdiawan, 2018; Kaboula & Elias, 2015; Palacio et al., 2016). In particular, this result is inconsistent with the sentiments echoed by Nasab (2015), Rojas Serrano (2017), Temesgen (2017), and Wubshet & Menuta (2015) that instructors should employ a multi-assessor strategy in all language domains of CESC.

Pertaining to implementing multiple AA tools in CESC, the current study has shown that most (95%) of the instructors relied on traditional assessment (TA), especially testing, for measuring student performance and for grading students in CESC at the three universities. In fact, according to students, only few instructors employed individual and group work, projects, and peer-teaching. According to Davies (2013), an excessive use of testing or TA to assess the intended learning outcomes can be counterproductive, particularly when there is a mismatch between assessment strategies and course objectives (Al-Mamari et al., 2018; Davies, 2013; Temesgen, 2017; Wubshet & Menuta, 2015). The study has also discovered that instructors at the three universities only occasionally assessed students' individual learning differences and the suitability of the assessment tools to CESC's instructional activities. In doing so, they failed to provide sufficient interventions and remedial tasks to address learning gaps students had in CESC. Rojas Serrano (2017) and Shrestha (2014) point out that this kind of assessment is fruitless.

Concerning AA comprehensiveness, the study has revealed that the assessment applied to CESC by instructors from the three universities was non-comprehensive, focused on discrete language items, and was disproportionate to the six language domains offered by CESC. The study has also demonstrated that the assessment used in CESC at the three universities lacked progressiveness, continuity, and relevance. For instance, the collective assessment at the three universities was targeted more toward reading, grammar and vocabulary items, and less toward the other three language domains. This is a view confirmed by students at the three universities, who indicated that their instructors often assessed their reading skills, grammar, and vocabulary knowledge. To this effect, reading activities received greater attention at AU and WU, followed by grammar and vocabulary items. At AAU, however, grammar (28.45%) received more attention than reading in CESC. Vocabulary assessment was the third-most emphasized language domain in CESC at the three universities. By contrast, listening (1.4%), writing (7.1%), and speaking (8.9%) skills were overlooked by instructors at all the three universities. According to Al-Mamari et al. (2018), Bourchaib (2017), and Kibbe (2017), incomplete assessment, point-by-point tests, and inconsistent assessment in language domains for CESC are the mainstay of TA. Nonetheless, they can create negative washback effects for CESC at the three universities. Moreover, the assessment employed by most instructors did not follow CESC's assessment guidelines. This mismatch was caused by instructors' attempt to assess the intended learning outcomes in CESC by using traditional testing strategies. However, Coombe and Hubley (2011) and Molla (2018) argue that instructors cannot assess the intended learning outcomes in CESC by simply following TA.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, the inference to make is that most of the instructors at the three Ethiopian universities misunderstand the conceptual difference between CA and AA, and the difference between TA items and AA components. There were inconsistencies between what they said and what they did in assessing the intended learning outcomes in CESC at the three universities. One observation from this study is that instructors were more optimistic and confident about their own assessment practices in CESC than the way, in which students perceived those assessment practices. Additionally, instructors' assessment tasks were mainly dominated by traditional test items and specifically characterized by an inclination to assign student grades in CESC.

These assessment inconsistencies imply two things. First, most of the instructors at the three universities preferred TA methods to AA methods and found the former more convenient to use in CESC than the latter. Second, the instructors denied the apparently existing mismatch between their assessment practices and CESC's recommended assessment methods. In this sense, most of the instructors' assessment practices at the three universities negated the intended learning outcomes spelt out in CESC. Nevertheless, the efforts of those instructors, however few they could have been, who tried to use some elements of AA in CESC are worth commending, particularly for the purpose of assessment as learning. They systematically prompted the students to apply their prior knowledge and helped students develop a sense of ownership of their learning.

Future research needs to consider the value of comprehensive and progressive assessment strategies when evaluating student performance in university courses, such as CESC, which are offered to EFL students. It should also acknowledge that TA has its own inherent weaknesses, and that AA needs to be employed to complement it. Importantly, future research has to ensure that any form of assessment is fully aligned to the stated learning outcomes of any university-level course.

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## Appendix A

### Communicative English Skills Course Module

Language Domains	Unit One	One Two	Unit Three	Unit Four	Unit Five
<b>Reading</b>	Comprehension and references	Comprehension and references	Comprehension and modelling	Comprehension and references	References and meaning in context
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Learning to learn vocabulary	Word parts to determine meaning	Synonyms and antonyms	Phrasal verbs and idiomatic expression	Collocation with population
<b>Speaking</b>	Self-introduction and introducing others	Public speaking: influencing others	Persuasive speech	Debating	Debate on population
<b>Listening</b>	Finding out about other people	Listening to lectures	Listening comprehension	Main and specific ideas	Dialogue on population density
<b>Grammar</b>	Grammar for facilitating meaning	Reported speech	Conditional sentences	Reported speech	Active and passive voices
<b>Writing</b>	Personal description	No activity is developed.	Job application Letter	Formal e-mails	Writing paragraph

## Appendix B

### The description of the language domains and language objectives in CESC

S/N	Language Domains/Skills	Descriptions of the basic language functions in relation to each skill
1	<b>Reading</b>	Scanning, skimming, reading for details, summarizing, understanding the structure of a text.
2	<b>Listening</b>	Listening for the gist, listening for details, recognizing discourse markers, noticing the structure of a lecture, understanding speaker intentions, recognizing signposting, attending, and following skills.



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3	<b>Writing</b>	Summarizing texts and writing different type texts.
4	<b>Speaking</b>	Introducing oneself and others, interviewing, discussing, stating and supporting propositions, stating one's opinions, organizing and taking part in a debate, making a persuasive speech, questioning.
4	<b>Vocabulary</b>	Working out meanings from context, synonyms, antonyms, collocations, definitions.
5	<b>Grammar</b>	Using conditional sentences, modals, voice sentence vis-a-vis its active form, tense, and reported speech.

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