



Original Research

Teachers' Conceptions, Practices and Challenges of Assessment for Learning in Secondary Schools of East Wollega Zone, Oromia Regional State

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate secondary school teachers' conceptions, practices, and challenges of assessment for learning in East Wollega Zone, Oromia Regional State, using a concurrent research design. After clustering 18 districts of East Wollega Zone into four areas, eight secondary schools were selected by a simple random sampling technique. Then, 202 teachers, 4 principals, and 8 department heads were selected from the sample schools by a simple random sampling technique. After the data was collected using interviews and questionnaires, quantitative analysis was made using descriptive statistics, while theme analysis was used for qualitative data. The result revealed that teachers perceive assessment as important for learning as it develops confidence and accountability for students' learning and improves low achievers' performance. However, task-based activities were not included in the assessment technique, and slow learners earn high marks in group assignments. Few teachers make their students recognise unethical acts like being dependent, copying assignments from one another, and cheating on the exam. Large class sizes, shortage of time, and teacher load were seen as major challenges to implementing assessment for learning. Finally, it was recommended that teachers prepare different assessment techniques that involve students to become more active in their learning and improve their performance. Furthermore, training has to be facilitated by Zonal Education Bureaus with the consultation of Wollega University's College of Education and Behavioural Science for secondary school teachers on how to investigate students' problems, give focused, timely feedback, measure students' learning outcomes, and manage a large class size.

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INTRODUCTION

The term conception refers to general mental structure, encompassing beliefs, meanings, concepts, propositions, rules, mental images, preferences, and the like (Thompson, 1992). In this paper, conceptions describe teachers' overall perception and awareness of

assessment. Teachers' conceptions or beliefs become key factors, being regarded as essential determinants of the instructional activity and of the students' learning process. Different scholars have different conceptions regarding assessment for learning. For

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instance, there is a conception that states that assessment improves teaching and learning by giving useful feedback to students, making them responsible for their own learning (Dayal and Lingam, 2015). On the other hand, assessment for learning is considered as it shoulders institutions and teachers with responsibility; hence, it negatively affects teachers, students, curricula, and teaching because it could disregard students' abilities and provoke them with anxiety (Brown, 2002). In addition, it could have different effects on teachers over their autonomy and professionalism as well as distract their attention from the established goals in connection to students learning (Brown, 2002).

There are three widely recognised assessment approaches that reflect three different focuses of learning: assessment of learning (AoL), assessment for learning (AfL), and assessment as learning (AaL). Assessment of Learning represents the assessment conception of measurement and judgements of performances at the end of learning. Assessment practices in many educational contexts are often inclined to link teaching and learning with this kind of assessment.

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However, both Assessment for Learning and Assessment as Learning take the learning process as significant and emphasise the role of assessment in supporting learning. What makes AaL different from AfL is that AaL places special attention on the role of the learner and promotes active engagement of learners, while AfL places stronger emphasis on the role the teacher plays in promoting learning. AaL could be said to be an "assessment of the learning-to-learn paradigm," while AfL is an "assessment in support of the learning paradigm" (Berry, 2008, p. 11).

Hence, assessment for learning (AfL) has been advocated as one of the most promising pedagogical approaches for enhancing student learning. Research suggests that engaging students in AfL helps them improve their achievement, develop meta-cognition, and support motivated learning and positive self-perceptions. It helps determine how effectively teachers guide and support students to learn deeply, to understand and act in ways that transfer instruction to novel situations, and to develop autonomy, self-awareness, and persistence as learners (Linquanti, 2014). For more clarification, the following figure summarises assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning.

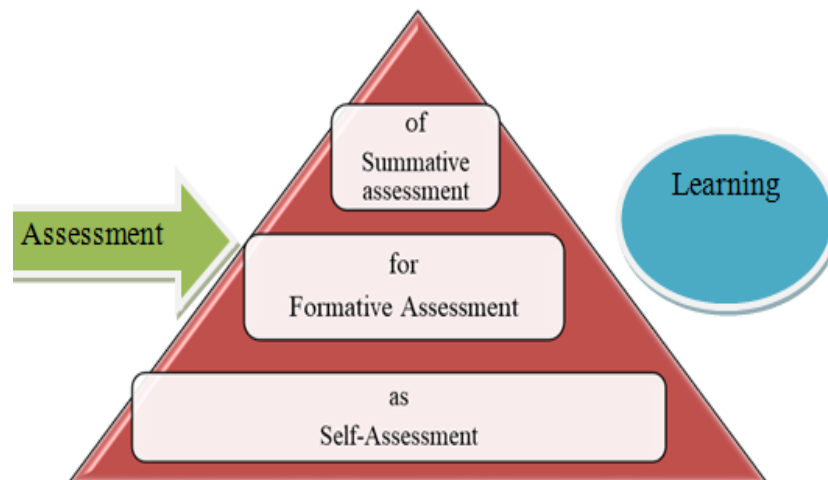


Figure 1: Pyramid of assessment as, for and of learning; Source: Arega, 2014

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The above pyramid revealed that AaL gives emphasis on the role of learners and promotes active engagement of learners; AfL, on the other hand, puts weight on the role the teacher plays in promoting learning. Thus, both AfL and AaL take the learning process significantly seriously, emphasising the role of assessment in supporting learning. However, AoL is the final judgement of students learning performances. Hence, the pyramid shows the interrelated assessment techniques, as both AfL and AaL are complementary to AoL.

The purpose of AoL is summative, intended to certify learning and report to parents and students about students' progress in school, usually by signalling students' relative position compared to other students. In assessment *for* learning, teachers use assessment as an investigating tool to find out as much as they can about what their students know and can do and what confusions, preconceptions, or gaps they might have. Therefore, investigation results provide the basis for determining what teachers need to do next to take student learning forward. AaL emphasises the role of the student not only as a contributor to the assessment and learning process but also as the critical connector between the two. It occurs when students personally monitor what they are learning and use the feedback from this monitoring to make adjustments, adaptations, and even major changes in what they understand (Okas, n.d.).

Assessment for Learning (AfL) was introduced in the 1960s by Scriven to differentiate it from summative assessment techniques (Scriven, 1967). Different authors use the term differently. Some use AfL as an updated term for formative assessment, others use AfL and formative assessment synonymously, and still others see one term

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under the other broader term (e.g., AfL as 'informal' formative assessment). On the other hand, some authors (e.g., Swaffield, 2011) see a difference between AfL (e.g., teaching and learning processes) and formative assessment (e.g., the purpose of certain assessments to guide future learning). In this research, AfL is synonymous with formative assessment.

Assessment for learning is an approach to the teaching-learning process that creates feedback to improve students' performance. It aims at closing the gap between learners' current situation and where they want to be in their learning and achievement (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation [CERI], 2008). In assessment for learning (AfL), skilled teachers gather data on their students' performance through different techniques, and the students become more active in the learning process and gain confidence in what they are expected to learn and to what standard. Thus, AfL strategies are directly linked to the improvement of student performance. Research shows that these strategies particularly help low-achieving students enhance their learning, as they significantly affect students' approaches to learning. This clearly shows that assessment for learning is vital to the education process, as teaching and learning are reciprocal processes that depend on and affect one another (Jones, 2005).

Assessments for learning assess students competence gained during the teaching-learning process. It provides educators with ongoing feedback, allows them to identify at-risk students early, adjusts instruction accordingly, and monitors student progress (Bennett, 2017). Hence, the more information we can gather about students as they engage and advance in the learning process, the more equipped educators are with vital insight and data to adjust instruction and intervention

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plans. This will help students continue to move forward in their education.

Furthermore, Jones (2005) states that assessment for learning is all about informing learners of their progress to empower them to take the necessary action to improve their performance. The strategy is to be implemented in such a way that quality feedback is provided to learners. The individuality of feedback, by its very nature, has the capability to support weaker learners and challenge more able learners. Therefore, teachers need to create learning opportunities where learners can progress at their own pace and undertake consolidation activities where necessary.

AfL goes beyond more psychometric and behavioristic traditions of assessment that focus on measuring individual students performance in specific domains against externally norm-referenced distributions of attainment. Assessment for learning is part of effective planning as it is central to classroom practice and promotes understanding of goals and criteria. It recognises all educational achievement and focuses on how pupils learn. It helps learners know how to improve and develop the capacity for peer and self-assessment and is also a key professional skill (Oxford University Department of Education, 2013).

The recent drive towards assessment for learning and assessment for 21st century skills raises a set of new challenges for both teachers and students alike (Ras, Whitelock, and Kalz, n.d.), as it originated as a response to the need for current pedagogical tendencies that link with constructivist rather than more traditional approaches to teaching and learning. With respect to this concept, Sintayehu (2016), in his finding, claimed that continuous assessment, or AfL, is part and parcel of instruction that has to be considered to assure the quality of education. Black and Wiliam (1998) also discovered that students

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who learn in a formative (AfL) way achieve much more and obtain better results than others who learn using other methods. They also showed that formative assessment (AfL) is at the heart of effective teaching; it has a strong positive effect on achievement. AfL is now established as one of the most powerful ways of improving learning and raising standard achievement.

Assessment for learning is frequent, interactive, and effective in identifying learning needs to adjust teaching to education systems. It promotes constructive cultures of evaluation and assessment for learning. However, it has been commonly associated with testing by many teachers at any educational level, and summative tests are more accountable for student achievement. With respect to this concept, Esere and Idowu (2009) stated that continuous assessment (assessment for learning) has not made the expected contribution to students' school performance due to inherent problems in its operation. Furthermore, the lack of connection between education systems and school and classroom approaches to assessment and evaluation was also one of the challenges. In relation to this issue, Diamond (1998) also described that the fundamental problem in assessment practices was the mismatch between the learning targets established and the methods and criteria teachers use to assess their students. On top of the above-stated concepts, there are also barriers to assessment for learning practice, including perceived tensions among teachers considering it a challenging practice. With regard to this concept, Black and Wiliam (1998) claimed that teachers' tests encouraged superficial learning, concentrating on the recall of isolated details, usually items of knowledge that pupils soon forgot after they took the test.

This shows that teachers did not properly prepare the test items that help assess higher learning outcomes, which may be because of

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the fear of scoring a large class size within a given time. This in turn makes students focus on shallow studying exercises to recall and remember what they have learned rather than concentrating on grasping concepts in details that pave the way for creativity. In such a situation, the students may not be able to perform as expected if they take other examinations than the classroom test. In

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relation to this concept, the Ministry of Education [MoE] (2015) in the education sector development programme (ESDP) document stated that the score students have in their schools or classrooms do not match their performance. Table 1 below shows the huge gap between targeted students' scores and what they have achieved at all school levels.

Table 1

National Learning Assessments (NLA) results against targets set in ESDP IV (%)

(2014)Grade		4(2012)		8(2012)		10(2014)		12(2014)	
(Assessment year)		Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
Benchmark Scoring above	50% or	75	25	70	7.5	70	23	70	34
Benchmark Scoring above	75% or	25	2.3	25	0.1	25	3	25	4

Table 1 above shows that students' scores at the National Learning Assessment are below what is expected. However, in contrast to the above-stated concept, students' academic records in the sample schools show that their scores were very high. This implies that there is a mismatch between these two assessment results. Due to this, it was believed that a study had to be conducted in secondary schools on the assessment process, as it is one of the most difficult areas of professional practice.

Moreover, from the researchers' previous experience, most teachers understand well the other side of continuous assessment called assessment of learning, which is mainly concerned with giving grades and evaluating students' performance after continuous tests or examinations. Furthermore, the researchers presume that teachers at the mentioned level might lack awareness about the different types of assessment techniques, which might have resulted in inappropriate practices and caused

different challenges to their realistic use. In relation to this concept, Friedlander and Serban (2004:104) stated the challenge that "there is a lack of knowledge about assessment processes, tools, and models. They added that, at any given college, few faculties and staff have been formally trained in developing measurable and valid learning outcomes, aligning the curriculum with learning outcomes, developing assessment questions, and developing and implementing a plan for assessing those outcomes that are manageable, meaningful, and sustainable. Fisseha (2010) also added that the current state of formative assessment (assessment for learning) is not in line with the best practices to enhance student learning and realise curriculum intentions.

Teachers using formative assessment approaches and techniques are better prepared to meet diverse students' needs through differentiation and adaptation of teaching to raise levels of student achievement and achieve

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greater equity in student outcomes (CERI, 2008). This is because when they are doing assessments for learning, teachers collect a wide range of data so that they can modify the learning strategy for their students. Hence, among other issues necessary for the quality of education, teachers' assessment skills are also mandatory, as they are central to the teaching-learning process. Therefore, it is worthwhile to look into the teachers' conceptions and practices of assessment for learning and the challenges they might face in the course of implementing it. To this end, the following research questions were raised to be answered in this research:

1. How do teachers conceive of assessment for learning?
2. To what extent is assessment for learning practiced and implemented in the selected secondary schools?
3. What are the major challenges that affect the implementation of assessment for learning?
4. What type of assessment techniques do teachers use to support students' learning?
5. To what extent are secondary school teachers skilled in performing assessment for learning?

The fundamental aim of this study was to investigate secondary school teachers' conceptions, practices, and challenges of assessment for learning. The result of this research will benefit teachers in examining their own perceptions, practices, and challenges in assessment for learning. It motivates students and helps them identify the problem areas of learning to improve their achievement. Furthermore, it could inform educational experts in the zone and other concerned bodies to examine the major challenges in implementing effective assessment and plan for immediate or long-term measures to solve the prevailing problems.

Research Methods

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A mixed research approach was employed in this study, as the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods provides a better understanding of a research problem than either research approach alone (Creswell and Plano, 2007). To collect the quantitative data, a questionnaire was used, whereas a semi-structured interview was employed to collect the qualitative data.

Design

A concurrent research design was used. This is because data for both quantitative and qualitative analysis that can help with triangulation as well as complementary analysis were collected at the same time frame for the research process.

Participants

Teachers, department heads, and principals of the secondary schools were participants in this study. The total of 18 districts in the zone was clustered into four areas based on the geographical direction in which they were situated. Thus, proportionally, six (33%) districts were selected by simple random sampling techniques. The western cluster of the zone consists of 5 districts, out of which Diga and Leka Dulecha were selected; the eastern cluster consists of 5 districts, out of which Sibbu Sire and Guto Wayu were selected. The northern cluster has 4 districts, out of which Ebantu district was selected, and the southern cluster consists of 4 districts, from which Sasiga district was selected.

Then, out of the total 14 schools in the sample districts, based on the size of the districts and the number of secondary schools in each district, 8 (57%) of the schools were proportionally selected by a simple random sampling technique. Accordingly, from the

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western cluster, Diga and Leka Dulecha districts, 2 schools, one school from each district; from the eastern cluster, Sibule and Guto Wayu districts, 2 schools, one school from each district; and from the rest of the South and North clusters, 2 schools from each sample district were selected and included as the sample for the study. Consequently, using the simple random sampling technique, from the sample schools, out of 438 total target teachers' populations, 219 (50%) sample teacher respondents were selected using the Yemane (1967) sample size determination formula. That is, $n = \frac{N \cdot e}{1 + N \cdot e}$, where: n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision. Then, using a 95% confidence interval, the alpha level or precision level is 5%, which is 0.05. Hence, when the formula was applied $n = \frac{438 \cdot 0.05}{1 + 438 \cdot 0.05} = 209$. In addition to the calculated sample size, ten samples were added to maximise the returned response rate from the sample size. Thus, the sample size selected was 219 teachers, 4 principals, and 8 department heads; a total of 231 samples were proportionally selected.

Instrument

A carefully designed assessment for learning (AfL) questionnaire was developed by the researchers and used to elicit responses about the teachers' conception, practice, and challenges of assessment for learning. The instrument contained 51 questions, out of which 19 items measure teachers' conception, structured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The other consists of 18 items on practice and 14 items on challenges of assessment for learning, structured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from all the time (5) to not at all (1).

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Interviews were conducted with the department heads and school principals of the sample secondary schools to get additional information concerning the issue, as both department heads and principals were part and parcel of the assessment for learning.

To ascertain the validity of the instruments, expert opinion was sought from Wollega University behavioural science department lecturers on the content validity and format of the questionnaires and interviews. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted, and necessary modifications were made through correcting confusing and ambiguous questions. Finally, the instrument was prepared for the final research and administered to the respondents.

Data Analysis

SPSS version 22 descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyse the quantitative data. Whereas qualitative data were analysed, described, and interpreted through themes, conceptualization, and explanation,

RESULTS

To collect data, survey questionnaires and interview methods were used. A total of 219 questionnaires were distributed to the target population. However, 202 (92%) of the total sample size responses were retained. The questionnaire consisted of four sections, namely: demographic information, teacher's conception, practice, and challenges of assessment for learning. Then, the results of the study were analysed orderly based on sections of the questionnaires. Finally, the data obtained through questionnaires and interviews was analysed and interpreted in line with the basic research questions raised.

Quantitative Analysis of the Findings

Table 2

Demographic variables of secondary school teachers

No.	Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Sex	Male	182	84.7
		Female	32	15.3
		Total	214	100
2	Age	21-30 years	82	38
		31-40 years	104	48
		41-50 years	28	14
		Total	214	100
3	Educational qualification	BA/BSc	182	84.7
		BED	20	9.3
		MA/MSC	12	6.0
		Total	214	100
4	Work experience	≤ 2	10	4.7
		3 to 5	60	27.9
		6 to 9	42	20.0
		10 and above	102	47.4
		Total	214	100

Table 2 shows the demographic distribution of secondary school teachers' participation in the study. As shown in Table 2, there were 182 (84.7%) male participants, while 32 (15.3%) were female participants. This indicates that the number of female participants was very small compared to the number of male participants. With respect to age, 104 (48%) of them were found in the age range of 31 to 40 years old, while 82 (38%) of them were found between 21 and 30 years of age. This shows

that most respondents' ages were between 21 and 40, which is a young age.

Concerning educational qualifications, 182 (84.7%) were BA/BSC holders, 20 (9.3%) were BED graduates, and 12 (6%) were MA/MSC holders. This implies that the majority of them were first-degree graduates. With regard to work experience, 102 (47.4%) of them served between 3 and 9 years, while 102 (47.4%) served for 10 years and above.

Analysis of the Instrument using Reliability, Mean, Median, and Standard Deviation

Table 3

Summary of test statistics with Cronbach Alpha

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Minim.	Max.	Mean	Median	Std.
Teachers' conception	.87	43	93	77.44	79	9.4
practice of AfL	.83	31	111	52.52	53	9.7
Challenge of AfL	.85	35	82	64.12	66	10.7

Table 3 presents the Cronbach's alpha values of the instrument and a descriptive statistical summary of the variables under study. Cronbach's alpha values for each questionnaire were high, ranging from .83

to .87. This implies that these instruments have strong reliability and can be used to measure the constructs. Besides, the mean and median of each variable were almost proportional, which shows a normal distribution of the data.

Teachers' Conception about Assessment for Learning in Secondary Schools

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of teachers' conception about assessment for learning

Bundle of items	Mean	SD
Facilitate instruction and understanding for better performance	4.4	1.18
develop confidence, accountability and students interaction	3.9	.94
Help students to revise and monitor their learning progress	4.2	1.08
Enable giving quick individualized feedback	2.7	.62
Motivate and arouses students desire for further learning	4.1	1.09
Create better opportunity to improve lower attaining students	4.6	1.14

NB. Less than 3.0 below average; 3.0= average; 3.1-3.5-above average; 3.6-4= high; 4.1 and above= very high

As can be seen from Table 4, most bundles of items were high and very high. Specifically, teachers' perceptions of assessment for learning as it facilitates instruction for better performance and enables students to revise and monitor their learning progress were rated very high, as their mean was 4.4 and 4.2, respectively. On top of this, teachers' conceptions of assessment for learning in creating better opportunities to improve lower-achieving students' performance and motivate and arouse students' desire for further learning were

also rated very highly, as their mean was 4.6 and 4.1, respectively. Moreover, teachers' conception of assessment for learning in terms of developing students' confidence and accountability for their learning was also high, as the mean was 3.9. However, the perception of teachers that assessment for learning enables teachers to give individualised feedback is below average (2.7).

The Challenges of Assessment for Learning in Secondary schools

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of the challenges of assessment for learning

Variables	Mean	SD
Time constraint	4.1	1.22
Inadequacy of Material resources	3.7	.62
Students negative attitude	2.6	.53
Teachers negative perceptions of assessment for learning	2.6	.52
Teaching load	3.8	.86
Absence of clear guidelines	2.5	.55
Teachers' inadequacy in preparing tests that measure higher learning outcome	4.0	1.11
Inability of using assessment result for planning future teaching	3.6	.61

NB. Less than 3.0= below average; 3.0= average; 3.1-3.5 above average; 3.6-4.0= high; 4.1 and above= very high

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In Table 5 above, the mean indicated that, among the bundle of items stated, considering challenges of assessment for learning, time constraint and inadequacy of material resources were seen as challenges, with a mean of 4.1 and 3.7 showing very high and high, respectively. Similarly, it was indicated that teachers' teaching load and their inability to use assessment result in planning for future teaching, with a mean of 3.8 and 4.0, respectively, were seen as highly challenging. Furthermore, teachers' inadequacies in preparing tests that measure higher learning outcomes with a mean of 4.0 were also

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considered a problem and highly challenging. However, the absence of clear guidelines with a mean of 2.5, students' negative attitude towards assessment for learning with a mean of 2.6, and teachers negative perceptions of assessment for learning with a mean of 2.6 were found below average, indicating that though it was challenging, it was not as significant as the other points mentioned above. This implies that teachers' and students' attitudes, as well as the absence of guidelines, were not challenging to conduct assessment for learning.

Practice of Assessment for Learning in Secondary Schools

Table 6

Descriptive statistics of practice of assessment for learning in secondary schools

Items	Mean	SD
Using different techniques in assessing	3.8	.91
Giving focused and timely feedback	2.7	.66
Focusing on teaching students for knowledge	3.7	.81
Developing confidentiality and recognizing unethical acts	2.6	.54
Measuring higher learning objectives	2.6	.58
Diagnosing students problem	2.3	.51

The descriptive statistics result of Table 6 revealed that teachers have the practice of assessing their students through different techniques, with a mean of 3.8 indicating high practice. Besides, teachers focused on teaching students for knowledge rather than only for the test, with a mean of 3.7 also seen as highly practiced. However, the practice of giving focused and timely feedback, developing students' confidence, and making

them recognise unethical acts was seen below average, as their mean was 2.7 and 2.6, respectively. Similarly, the practice of teachers measuring their students' higher learning outcomes by preparing tests that measure higher learning objectives and diagnosing students' problems was also found below average with a mean of 2.6 and 2.3, respectively.

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

From all the sample schools, it was found from participants that there is a practice of assessment for learning in their schools. This implies that assessment for learning is being implemented in secondary schools to improve teaching and learning.

There were different strategies used to implement assessment for learning in secondary schools. Among these strategies, class work, homework, assignments, and tests were implemented to assess their students, while others used homework, group and individual assignments, quizzes, and tests. In addition to the above-stated assessment mechanisms, project work was one of the techniques that were employed to assess the students' performance progress. This revealed that assessment for learning was implemented at every sample school using different assessment techniques, as mentioned above.

Assessment for learning benefits learners by improving their grade and increasing additional knowledge and skills. Assessment for learning helps learners get feedback that helps identify their weak areas in order to improve them and thereby become more confident in their learning. But, contrary to the above-mentioned ideas of assessment for learning contribution, assessment for learning consumes resources like time, one's energy, and paper. Besides, assessment for learning makes students study for a short period of time only for the test that focuses on a specific topic or chapter rather than on general knowledge. Thus, it does not help students accumulate knowledge in their long-term memory, which may help learners retain long-term information and learning. Furthermore,

in group assignments, the slow learners earn a high mark as the assignment was done by high-performing students.

Teachers can use various assessment techniques to assess their learners. However, the assessment techniques that were considered the best methods of assessment for learning are tests, project work, and midterms. This is because, on the one hand, it can cover the contents in a given period of time. On the other hand, the technique urges all students to think and participate, at least to some extent. In addition to the aforementioned techniques, task-based activities, individual work, and class presentations were considered the best techniques as they increased students' confidence and capability. Of these, the quiz is also considered the best method of assessment for learning as it makes students attend the class regularly.

Practicing assessment for learning has its own challenges that obstruct teachers from implementing it properly. These challenges can include teachers' lack of sufficient skills on how to prepare assessments for learning that can assess all learning objectives in different content areas, from simple to complex learning outcomes. Having a large class size of students and a lack of sufficient classroom space to split the number of students is also another problem, as it hinders teachers from assessing students properly as intended to differentiate each student's capacity for learning. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, shortage of time, lack of resources and facilities like paper, printer, desktop, duplicator, and the like were

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considered the major challenges in assessment for learning in schools.

Discussions

This study was set out to examine teachers' conceptions, practices, and challenges of assessment for learning in some secondary schools in East Wollega Zone, Oromia Regional State. Based on the objective, the results obtained from the findings were discussed in relation to the literature. Accordingly, from the result, it was seen that the reliability of the instrument showed a strong Cronbach alpha coefficient, while the validity of the instruments was also checked by the experts in the area, who confirmed that they were valid. Demographically, out of the total target samples, the majority of them were BA/BSC holders and have served for 10 years and above. This indicates that almost all participants were first-degree holders with sufficient years of experience to validate the findings.

From the result of descriptive statistics, it was shown that teachers perceive assessment as facilitating instruction for better performance through developing students' confidence and accountability for their learning and enabling them to revise and monitor their learning progress. In relation to this idea, Birhanu (2013) and Desalegn (2014) also documented that CA, or AfL, is a good practice for improving students' performance through monitoring learning progress. From the result, it was also shown that teachers conceived assessment for learning as an opportunity to improve low-achieving students' performance. With respect to this concept, the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA, 2003) stated that

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assessment is not solely used to measure performance; it also operates to improve students' learning when it is used to move them from their current understanding to where they would like to be. The interview result also supported that teachers viewed assessment as important for learning as it builds students' knowledge and increases their interest in reading to improve their score. It is also used to differentiate students' ability levels, which helps to give comments on their performance.

Contrary to the above concept, some respondents viewed assessment for learning as an urge for students to study for assignments only, and it does not help students to have broad and deep knowledge of what they have learned to retain in long-term memory. This is because as the students complete one topic or sub-topic, they are immediately tested for that specific area of the lesson. The next quizzes, assignments, and tests are also about other concepts, leaving out the previous topic and continuing in that way, so that such an assessment cannot help students study all areas of the subject to have general knowledge. In addition to this point, some respondents viewed assessment for learning as not good, thinking that the lowest-scoring students could earn a high mark when assignments were given in groups and were done by the top-scoring student of the group.

However, in this study, assessment for learning is not perceived by teachers as it enables teachers to give individualised feedback to motivate and arouse students' desire for further learning. This may be due to the fact that teachers perceive giving individualised feedback as a tiresome task that

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consumes time and energy to implement when the number of students in a class is large. Similarly, Morgan and Watson (2002), in their previous finding, indicated that AfL demands too much class time to integrate, and AfL implementation limits the amount of curriculum teachers can cover within their program. In relation to this concept, Carless (2005) also noted that teachers believed AfL was good in theory, but it was not practical to implement. On the other hand, contrary to this finding, MoE (2006) states and urges that the purpose of continuous assessment (AfL) is to monitor the learning progress of students through providing constructive feedback. This shows that teachers have to be aware that one of the main purposes of assessment for learning is to provide focused feedback for the students to identify their strengths and weaknesses that help them improve their success through enhanced learning.

The techniques used in assessment for learning were classwork, homework, assignments, project work, quizzes, and tests. However, most respondents from the interview responded that tests, project work, and midterms were the best as they could help the learner and the teacher covers the content in a given period of time. Moreover, task-based activities or project work, which is learning by doing, also help learners retain knowledge for a long period of time and initiate students to work for further knowledge. Some respondents also indicate that individual work and class presentations are the best as they increase students' confidence and capability. Still, there were others who considered quizzes the best of all the techniques, thinking that they made

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students attend the class all the time without missing anything. With respect to this finding, MoE (2006) asserted that a teacher is expected to use continuous assessment (AfL) to monitor their students' progress, as well as understand the principles of continuous assessment through identifying the varieties of techniques that can be used.

Considering the challenges of assessment for learning, time constraints, inadequacy of material resources, teachers' teaching load, and their inability to use assessment results for planning for future teaching, Inadequacy in preparing tests that measure higher learning outcomes was also shown to be significant and considered a major challenge. Moreover, as indicated by the findings of the interview, the lack of knowledge of some teachers on how to prepare assessments for learning is also another challenge. On top of this, the large class size, lack of class room, shortage of time, and lack of resources and facilities were also stated as the other major challenges. With regard to this finding, Mabry, Poole, Redmond, and Schultz (2003) and Torrance and Pryor (2001) also identified time and class sizes as the practical barriers to assessment for learning.

With respect to the practice of assessment for learning, the result revealed that teachers were assessing their students through different techniques and teaching their students for knowledge rather than only preparing them for the test. This implies that teachers were doing well in imparting their knowledge to their learners. However, developing students' confidence and making them recognise unethical acts like cheating on the exam; copying assignments from other students,

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failing to contribute to group assignments, and being dependent were not practiced as intended. Moreover, teachers were not significantly practicing measuring the higher learning outcomes of their students, and they were also not practicing diagnosing students' problems to get a remedy for them. On top of this, providing focused and timely feedback that may show direction for the students was also not significantly practiced. But, with this specific concept, MoE (2006) claims that beyond the purpose of grading students' performance, AfL should monitor learning progress, provide students with constructive feedback, and identify learning difficulties. In line with this concept, USAID (2003) stated that continuous assessment is a powerful diagnostic tool that enables pupils to understand the areas in which they are having difficulty. Hence, from this result, it was indicated that secondary school teachers need to get training on how to develop their students' confidence, diagnose their student problems, give focused and timely feedback, and measure their students' higher learning outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

From the result, it was shown that teachers perceive assessment as important for learning as it facilitates instruction for better performance and motivates students for more learning activities. So that AfL develops confidence and accountability for students' learning through monitoring their learning progress. Hence, a planned AfL in line with the given purpose has to be initiated.

AfL is used to move students from their existing understanding to where they would like to be. Thus, assessment for learning creates a better opportunity to improve lower-

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achieving students' performance. Therefore, structured AfL accompanied by different techniques is mandatory to improve students' performance.

Slow learners earn high marks when assignments are given in groups. From this point of view, it can be concluded that in group assignments, teachers didn't differentiate students' marks according to their ability level. Hence, in marking group assignments, teachers have to create mechanisms that help to discriminate against students according to their ability level.

As a result, classwork, homework, assignments, quizzes, and tests were the techniques used in assessment for learning. However, task-based activities, project work, and class presentations were not used much as techniques in assessment for learning in assessing students. Therefore, teachers have to include task-based activities since the knowledge gained through them is long-lasting.

With regard to challenges of assessment for learning, it was concluded that inadequacy of material resources, large class size, teachers' overload and their inability to use assessment result in planning for future teaching, and teachers' inadequacy in preparing tests that measure higher learning outcomes were shown as the major challenges.

In assessment for learning, teachers were not seen practicing developing students by recognising unethical acts and diagnosing students' problems to provide focused and timely feedback. Therefore, it was recommended that Zonal Education Bureaus adjust training for secondary school teachers with the consultation of Wollega University College of Education and Behavioural Science on how teachers could help their students in

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diagnosing students' problems, giving focused and timely feedback, measuring their students' learning outcomes, and managing large class sizes.

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