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Original Research

Secondary School Teachers' Classroom Assessment Practices

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Abstract

Classroom assessment is a teacher habit. They evaluate students and improve their learning using various evaluation technologies. Teacher competence is crucial to activity success. Secondary instructors' classroom assessment practises were the study's main focus. Select secondary schools in East and West Wollega Administrative Zones were studied. The survey included 194 male and 103 female teachers. The data was collected via classroom assessment questionnaires by teachers. The study used percentage, mean, SD, and factorial ANOVA to analyse the significance of variables at α =.05. The study found that teachers had modest classroom assessment and weak revision methods. Traditional assessment methods were preferred by teachers. Students' grades typically incorporated non-achievement variables. Teachers with more expertise improved their classroom assessment procedures. In their years of teaching, female instructors were better at classroom assessments than male teachers. A weekly teaching load increase significantly reduced teachers' classroom assessment practice, but prior student assessment training increased it. Thus, in addition to enhancing pre-service preparation, all instructors should get ongoing classroom assessment training. Experience exchange among instructors should also be utilized to improve teaching and assessment skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment of student learning is a regular activity of a classroom teacher. A large proportion of teachers' classroom time is devoted to tasks related to assessments (Agu et al., 2013). Classroom assessment is a technique used to ensure how students are learning. The more teachers know what and how students are learning, the better they can plan learning activities. Students' assessment in a classroom ranges from identifying readiness for learning to starting learning, sustaining learning, and deciding about teaching (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992). In this mission, teachers plan assessments, decide methods and set items, administer assessments, mark or grade and evaluate performances, give feedback, and analyse items. To implement these activities, teachers need to have skills and interests. Importantly, teachers' practices of classroom assessment have a significant contribution to the quality of student learning (Sewagegn, 2013;

Alkharusi, 2011; Alkharusi et al., 2012; Dessie, 2015; Bedilu, 2014; Birgin & Baki, 2009; Sun & Cheng, 2014; Vlachou, 2018; Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003).

However, many factors are observed to impede the contribution of classroom assessment to the success of students' learning. Noticeably, school, student, and teacher-related aspects contribute greatly to that classroom event (Brookhart & Durkin, 2010). Regarding teachers' classroom assessment, several issues have been identified to influence it (Alkharusi, 2011, Dessie, 2015; Duncan & Noonan, 2007; Vlachou, 2018). Teaching experience, subject type taught, teaching load, gender, grade level taught, and training background in student assessment were reported as some factors influencing teachers' practices of classroom assessment (Alkharusi, 2011; Alkharusi et al., 2012).

Thus, classroom assessments require skill and experience to improve the learning of students and to make convincing decisions about student learning. Nevertheless, as reported by Agu et al. (2013), most tests administered in secondary schools contain ambiguous and misleading material. This shows that teachers cannot prepare quality classroom assessments. As a result, examining the current status of teachers' practices of classroom assessment becomes worth contributing to finding areas of weakness and then seeking ways to overcome the shortcomings.

Statement of the Problem

Assessment is a prevailing teaching method that can enhance student learning in particular and the quality of education in general. It informs teachers on how well their students learn and how they are teaching. Teachers then use the information to revisit the effectiveness of the methods they use in teaching. As McMillan (2008) noted, effective teaching decisions are based on the course of actions that teachers take to understand their students and match the actions with assessment strategies. For that reason, teachers spend a significant amount of their professional time on classroom assessment issues. They plan and construct classroom assessment activities. They administer assessments, evaluate students' performances, provide feedback, and evaluate the measuring instruments. Nevertheless, there is variation in implementing classroom assessments among teachers.

Hence, there are at least two justifications for this study. First, many of the studies conducted in Ethiopia were not comprehensive. For example, though Bedilu (2014) has tried to measure Bahir Dar Secondary School teachers' competence in educational assessment, the study hasn't examined differences in assessment practices related to some demographic variables of teachers. On the other hand, Dessie (2015) has focused only on science education teachers. Second, although teachers are expected to conduct classroom assessment practices that agree with the recommendations of the experts in educational measurement, for example, as Gronlund (1998) suggested, teachers' classroom assessment traditions are rarely consistent with the recommended guidelines. Yet, many unanswered questions remain regarding the important factors that generate

differences in classroom assessment practices among school teachers.

Thus, this study attempts to answer the following two research questions:

1. *What is the current status of teachers' classroom assessment practices in secondary schools?*
2. *Do classroom assessment practices for teachers significantly vary with their teaching experience, teaching load per week, gender, and prior training background?*

Teachers' Practices of Classroom Assessment

Professionals in Educational Measurement advise school teachers to follow the guidelines of assessment when implementing classroom assessment strategies to ensure the quality of student learning. However, the study's findings show that teachers were not strict about following the guidelines. Dandis (2013) revealed that teachers were using written exams with sporadic alternative assessments. Teachers were experts in writing traditional and objective item types of assessment methods (which focus on surface learning), but they were incapable of writing performance and alternative assessment methods that increase deep learning (Birgin & Baki, 2009; Vlachou, 2018).

A study conducted on teachers' classroom assessment practices revealed that teachers were not well-prepared to meet the demands of classroom assessment (Alemu, 2013). They lacked the skills to prepare performance assessments, interpret test results, and use adequate information to set grades. In connection with this, a study titled. Classroom Assessment Practices of Ohio Teachers', Mertler (1998) found that teachers had not been given ample time to conduct statistical analyses of their assessment data. According to Stiggins and Conklin (1992), many teachers did not define levels of performance or plan scoring procedures before instruction, nor did they record results during an assessment. Moreover, teachers were found to incorporate non-achievement factors such as effort, attitude, and motivation into setting grades (Griswold, 1993), and they rarely applied weights in grading to reflect the differential importance of various assessment components. Dessie (2015) and Modupe and Sunday (2015) complained that teachers were not strictly following the guidelines of classroom assessment in their assessment practices. They were found to be predominantly implementing the traditional method of assessment (Dessie, 2015).

According to Stiggins and Conklin (1992), classroom assessment practice was found to be possibly influenced by grade levels and by the type of subjects teachers were teaching. Higher-level teachers showed a trend of increasing concern for the preparation of objective assessment tools compared to those teaching at lower grade levels, similar to mathematics and sciences teachers, who teach other subjects. Teachers teaching mathematics at higher grade levels were found to attach more importance to and use more frequently homework and teacher-made tests than lower grade-level mathematics teachers (Adams & Hsu, 1998). Frey and Schmitt (2010) reported that performance-based assessments were more frequently used by language and art

teachers than other subject teachers. Study reports indicate that science teachers perceived themselves as more skilled in implementing assessment strategies than English language teachers, and art teachers seemed more cautious in developing performance assessments and analysing assessment results than other subject teachers (Alkharusi, 2011).

Dessie (2015) and Mohiuddin (2015) showed that teachers' classroom assessment practices were observed to be different for gender and teaching experience. Female teachers appear to be more skilled than male teachers in writing test items and communicating assessment results (Alkharusi, 2011). Teachers who served longer were superior in implementing quality classroom assessments than new teachers. Furthermore, Alkharusi (2011), Sewagegn (2013), and Zhang and Burry-Stock (2003) revealed that those teachers who had received training in measurement showed a higher level of self-perceived assessment skills than those who hadn't been trained in measurement. Teacher candidates who were elected to enrol in an educational assessment course were found to exhibit higher levels of confidence in educational assessment knowledge and skills than those who did not have formal instruction in assessment (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010).

Once again, Alkharusi et al. (2012) disclosed that the classroom assessment practices among teachers were significantly different concerning their load of teaching. Teachers with an optimum load of teaching may have time to plan, develop, construct, mark, provide timely feedback, and evaluate the quality of the assessment they use. Mohiuddin (2015) reported that teaching load and teaching experience were found to have significant variance with the classroom assessment practices of teachers. The practice of analysing classroom assessment results correlated positively and significantly with the attitude towards quantitative aspects of assessment and self-perceived competence (Alkharusiet et al., 2012).

The above discussions indicate that teachers have unique experiences implementing classroom assessment strategies. Their practices for implementing classroom assessment tools varied across their characteristics. Hence, it becomes worth contributing to examining the status of the teachers' classroom assessment practices to improve the learning of students in particular and the quality of education in general.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Models of assessment of student learning suggest that perceived assessment competence and the demographic characteristics of teachers have influences on classroom assessment practices. Teachers who had confidence in their skill of assessment combined and attempted to balance traditional and alternative forms of classroom assessments in test construction. They care for any type of administration of the classroom assessment. Confident teachers often give and get feedback and make necessary improvements to their classroom assessment instruments. The model highlights whether teachers can assess the ability to contribute solutions to real-life problems, the ability to make inferences, the ability to analyze ideas,

and the ability to access information to guide decision-making.

Not only has perceived competency in assessment made a difference in assessment practice, but also personal characteristics such as teaching experience, teaching subject, training received, gender, workload, level of education, and teaching level are some of the teachers' factors that influence assessment practices. Teachers have unique experiences, backgrounds, and preparations, which could be sources of differences in the practices of classroom assessment. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model adapted from the literature reviewed.

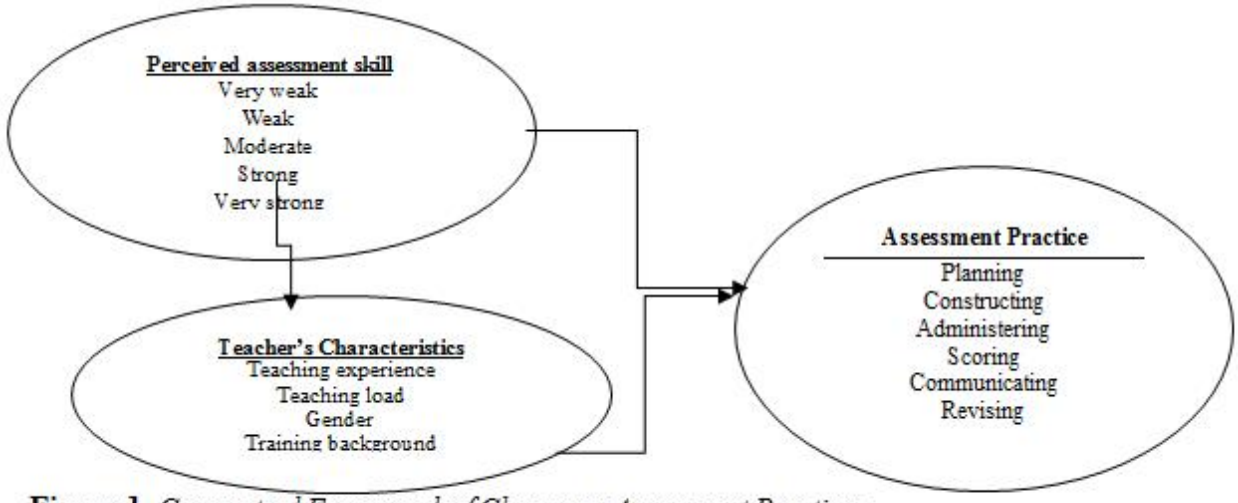

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework of Classroom Assessment Practices*

Method of the Study

A descriptive survey research method was employed to conduct the study. This method is a powerful and useful tool for collecting data on human characteristics, such as their beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, behaviours, and practices (Gay et al., 2012).

Population and Samples of the Study

The population of the study was teachers in secondary schools. The teachers were selected from two administrative zones of the Oromia Region in Ethiopia, namely the East and West Wollega Zones. There were about 4428 (male 3732 and female 696) teachers in the two zones during the study period. The convenience sampling technique was used to select 12 secondary schools from the two zones (6 from the East and 6 from the West Wollega Zones) for the primary reason of easy accessibility for data collection. From the twelve selected schools, 20 per cent of males were randomly selected from each school. The simple lottery method was used to select 20 per cent of male teachers. The census sampling technique was used to select female teachers to get an equivalent number of male and female participants for comparison purposes. Accordingly, a total of 407 (258 male and 149 all-available female teachers) samples (Gay et al., 2012), were selected for the study.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument of this study was adapted from the Assessment Practices Inventory (8.0) of Zhang and Burry-Stock (2003). The adaptation of the instrument was supported by the information obtained from the literature. The Assessment Practices Inventory (8.0) of Zhang & Burry-Stock (2003) contained 65 closed-ended items and six sub-scales. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 94 for the total scale and 89 to 77 for the subscales. Following the purpose of the study and information obtained from the literature, 51 items were taken and adapted. Then, the improved instrument was given to 4 experts (2 measurements and 2 curriculum instructors) to determine its adequacy for the study. Subsequently, suggestions from the experts were included in the items before they were distributed to 60 secondary school teachers for pilot testing. Of the distributed questionnaires, 53 were returned and found to have complete responses and were subjected to analysis.

After the data was screened and entered into SPSS, the item-total correlation was conducted. In this, 40 items that were significantly and positively correlated were again selected. For the 40 items obtained, alpha reliability coefficients were calculated. Accordingly, the total scale was found to have an alpha reliability coefficient of 83 with its subscales (assessment administration practices =.62, assessment communication practices =.67, assessment development practices =.72, assessment grading or marking practices =.69, assessment planning practices =.68, and assessment revision practices =.61). Finally, after necessary revisions were included and permission was obtained for data collection, the instrument was distributed to 407 teachers in selected schools. Of all 407 distributed questionnaires, 342 (84.03 per cent) were filled out and returned. Of the 342 returned questionnaires, only 297 were found complete and appropriate for analysis.

The procedure of data collection

Before the teachers were contacted, the school principals were briefed about the purpose of the study. On the acceptance of the principals, the teachers were asked for their voluntary participation in the study. The questionnaire was distributed to those teachers who agreed to fill it out. Subsequently, the collected data was entered into SPSS for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The data analysis of the study included both descriptive and inferential statistics. To determine to what extent teachers were practising for administration, communication, construction, grading or marking, planning, and revision of assessment practices, the percentage, mean, and standard deviation (SD) for each and the total items of the individual scale of the instrument was calculated. To determine differences in classroom assessment practices regarding the teachers' gender, experience, subject teaching, teaching load, and prior training assessment, a factorial ANOVA (analysis of variance) was conducted. The statistical significance of the analyses was tested at $\alpha = .05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Characteristics of the Respondents

The respondents' characteristics were examined in terms of sex, qualification, teaching experience, prior training background, and teaching load per week, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Category	f	Per cent
Sex	Male	194	65.30
	Female	103	34.70
	1st degree	7	2.40
Qualification	2nd degree	272	91.60
	3rd degree	18	6.10
	less than 6 years	95	32.00
Teaching experience	6-10 years	112	37.70
	Greater than 10 years	90	30.30
Prior training	Yes	144	48.50
	No	153	51.50
Teaching load per week	Less than 15	93	31.30
	16-25	97	32.30
	Greater than 25	107	36.00

From the total of 297 respondents, 194 (63.30%) and 103 (34.70 per cent) were male and female, respectively. The majority of teachers, 272 (91.6%), had a first degree, whereas 7 (2.40%t) and 18 (6.1% had a diploma and a second degree, respectively. Of the total participants, 202 (68.00%) of the teachers had a service of six or more than six years, and the remaining 95 (32.00%) had served less than six years. More than half (51.50%) of the respondents had received training in student assessment and evaluation. Of the total of 297 teachers, 107 (36.00%) had a teaching load greater than 25 per week. A relatively comparable number of teachers, 93 (31.30%) and 97 (32.30%) had a teaching load of less than 15 and 16–25, respectively.

The Status of Assessment Practices

This section of the study presents the extent to which teachers were practising assessments in the course they were teaching. To measure it, a 40-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale response rate (1 = very weak practice, 2 = weak practice, 3 = moderate practice, 4 = sound practice, and 5 = very strong practice) was employed. The questionnaire comprised six sub-scales, namely: assessment administration (5 items), communication (8 items), development (9 items), marking or grading (6 items), planning (7 items), and revision (5 items) assessment practices. Since the items had a 5-point Likert scale response, the average response rate of the items ranges from 1 to 5, comprising classes of 5 and a range of 4, which suggests class size intervals of 0.80 (Privitera, 2015). Thus, the scale value intervals for the average response rate become 1.00–1.79, 1.80–2.59, 2.60–3.39, 3.40–4.19, and 4.20–5-00 for very weak, weak, moderate, strong, and very strong practices in that order. The descriptive statistics of the status of practices in classroom assessment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Assessment Practices (N = 297)

Classroom Assessment Practices (Sub-scales)	Scale Value					*M*	*SD*
	1.00 - 1.79 Very weak practice f(percent)	1.80-2.59 Weak practice f(percent)	2.60-3.39 Moderate practice f(percent)	3.40-4.19 Strong practice f(percent)	4.20-5.00 Very strong practice f(percent)		
Planning	13(4.4)	127(42.8)	71(23.9)	85(28.6)	1(.3)	2.85	.70
Developing	11(3.7)	112(37.7)	70(23.6)	77(25.9)	27(9.1)	3.01	.79
Administration	28(9.4)	52(17.5)	65(21.9)	93(31.3)	59(19.9)	3.18	.97
Marking or grading	28(9.4)	92(31.0)	73(24.6)	102(34.3)	2(.7)	2.89	.79
Communication	0(0)	19(6.4)	79(26.6)	126(42.4)	73(24.6)	3.69	.65
Revision	72(24.2)	102(34.2)	83(27.9)	38(12.8)	2(.7)	2.34	.77
Overall practices	0(0)	67(22.6)	190(64.0)	40(13.5)	0(0)	3.04	.38

As stated in Table 2, a relatively large number of the teachers (47.2%) rated their classroom assessment planning practices as very weak or weak. About 23.9% of teachers reported their practices in classroom assessment planning as moderate. On the other hand, the remaining 28.9% of teachers estimated their classroom assessment practices as strong. On average (M = 2.85, SD =.70), the mean obtained shows that teachers' classroom assessment planning was about moderate practice.

The traditional assessment types and development practices like true-false, matching, multiple-choice, and short-answer responses were reversely recorded; their higher values represent an alternative type (those measures critical thinking), and their low values show a weak alternative or traditional (those measures rote memorization) method of assessment development. Over 41% of teachers suggested they had very weak or weak practices for developing alternative methods of assessment. While about 23.6% of teachers suggested they had moderate practices of developing alternative assessment types, 35.0% argued they had strong or very strong experience in developing alternative methods of assessment types. As a result, teachers used traditional assessment methods more than alternative methods, as indicated by the average of the responses (M = 3.01, SD =.79), implying moderate practice.

Regarding the teachers' degree in classroom assessment administration practice, about half of the respondents (51.2%) rated their administration of classroom assessment practices as strong or very strong. About 21% reported having moderate practices in classroom assessment administration, and about 27% rated themselves as having weak or very weak practices. The average of the responses (M = 3.18, SD =.97) shows that the classroom assessment administration practice of teachers was found to be moderate.

The practice of grading or marking is presented to examine whether teachers have

experience assessing purely academic achievement or are including other non-achievements in the grades of students. In this context, items that show non-academic achievements like effort, behaviour, and attendance were reversed. A high scale value or percentage shows the practice of more incorporating achievement than non-achievement factors. The respondents claimed they had very weak or weak practices (40.4%) of including achievements in the grades of students. Contrarily, 35.0% of teachers suggested they had a strong or very strong practice of marking students' grades solely based on academic achievement. About 25% of teachers asserted that they had moderate practices of marking students' grades merely based on academic achievement. The average number of responses (M = 2.89, SD =.79) that lie in moderate rage reveals that the teachers' practices of marking or grading include both achievement and non-achievement factors in students' grades, suggesting a deviation from its principle.

As can be seen from Table 2, a large number of the teachers (67%) rated their practice of communicating classroom assessments to students as strong or very strong. About 26% of the teachers reported that their classroom assessment communication practice was moderate. While 6.4% rated that their classroom assessment communication practices with students were at a weak level, nobody dared say they were very weak. Generally, the average of the responses (M = 3.69, SD =.65) depicts that teachers' practice of classroom assessment communication with students was strong.

Concerning assessment revision practices, a large number of respondents (58.5%) claimed that their practice of classroom assessment revision was in the weak category. While 27.9% of the teachers rated their assessment revision as moderate, 13.5% guessed it as almost strong. Similarly, the average of the responses (M = 2.34, SD =.77) confirms that teachers' practice of classroom assessment revision was below average (weak).

Differences in Classroom Assessment Practices

Differences in classroom assessment practices were conducted on a total scale that included sub-scales of planning, development, administration, marking, communication, and revision of classroom assessment. The total scale was preferred for the analysis of differences because it was reported as the most accurate index of classroom assessment practices (Gonsales & Callueng, 2014). The differences were tested for several demographic variables (years of experience in teaching, teaching subjects, sex, and teaching load per week) with a factorial ANOVA.

As observed in Table 2, the rating mean (M = 3.04) and standard deviation (SD =.38) revealed that teachers' practices of classroom assessment were found to be moderate. Correspondingly, 64% of the respondents suggested their classroom assessment practices were about average. Interestingly, a greater number of teachers (22.6%) were depicted as having weak practices compared with those who claimed that they were strong (13.5%). For the differences observed, a factorial ANOVA test was used, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Factorial ANOVA for Teachers' Practices of Classroom Assessment

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P - value
Experience (E)	1.987	2	.993	10.998	.000
Gender(G)	2.408	1	2.408	26.656	.000
Teaching load(T)	1.124	2	.562	6.224	.002
Prior training(P)	1.235	1	1.235	13.678	.000
E * G	.867	2	.433	4.798	.009
E * T	.645	4	.161	1.785	.132
E * P	.280	2	.140	1.551	.214
G * T	.044	2	.022	.245	.783
G* P	.084	1	.084	.925	.337
T * P	.161	2	.080	.891	.412
Error	23.575	261	.090		

As shown in Table 3, there were significant differences in practices of classroom assessment among teachers regarding their teaching experience ($F(2, 261) = 11.00$, $p < .01$) to which more years of service in teaching significantly related to strong practices, gender ($F(1, 161) = 26.66$, $p < .01$) in favour of female teachers, teaching load per week ($F(2, 261) = 6.22$, $p < .01$) to which higher load found to significantly reduce teachers' practices, and prior training ($F(1, 161) = 13.68$, $p < .01$) in favour of better practice for those who had prior training background in assessment than not.

Scheffe's pair-wise statistical test showed that teachers' practices of classroom assessment were found to be in better condition with increments in the teaching year of services. Those teachers who served for more than 10 years were significantly superior in practising classroom assessment than those who served for less than or equal to 10 years. On the other hand, more teaching loads were found to relate to poor practices in classroom assessment. That is, those teachers who had a teaching load per week greater than 25 years were not sufficiently practising classroom assessment.

Regarding interactions and main effects, female teachers throughout their teaching services were found to be in a better position to practice classroom assessments than male teachers. In addition, teachers' practices of classroom assessment showed significantly improved changes with increased service over the years. Nevertheless, the interactions of all the remaining main effects couldn't reveal significant differences. The graph of the interactions of the main effects is shown in Figure 2.

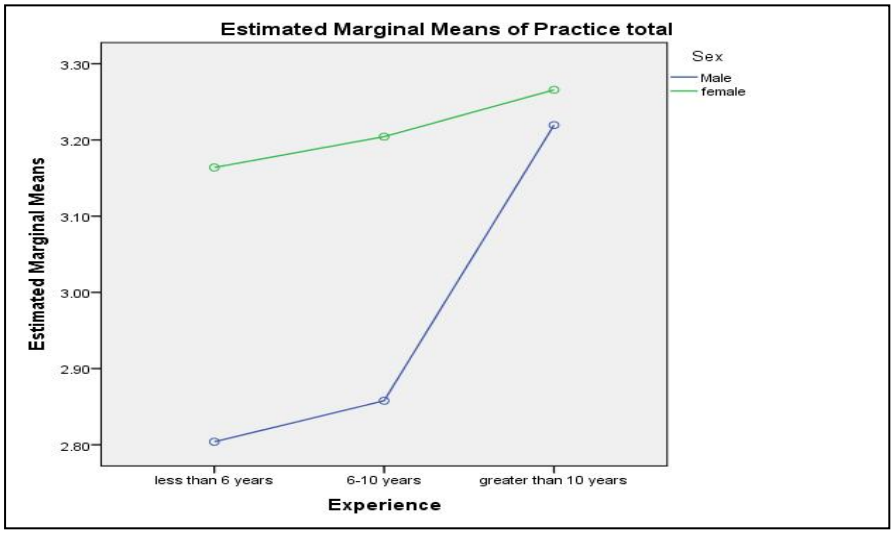

Figure 2. *Interaction between Teaching Experience and Sex*

Discussion

The study was conducted to examine teachers' practices of classroom assessment. In this course of action, endeavours were made to determine differences in classroom assessment practices about some demographic variables of teachers. The discussion of the results of the study is presented in the subsequent section.

The teacher's classroom assessment planning where this study was conducted was not strong. Cizek et al. (2010) reported that many teachers seemed to have individual assessment policies that reflected their individualistic values and beliefs about teaching. Similarly, previous studies indicated teachers were more likely to develop a traditional method than an alternative method (Yao, 2015). Alkharusi et al. (2012) depicted that only about one-third of the teachers involved in the study were using alternative assessments most of the time. In addition, Zhang and Burry-Stock (2003) reported that teachers rely more on objective tests in classroom assessment. More recently, Vlachou (2018) noted that regardless of the purpose of the assessment, whether formative or summative, teachers reported being more focused on summative uses without using the assessment evidence to complete the learning loop.

In this study, the classroom assessment and administration practices of teachers were reported to be moderate. A failure to control poor practices like cheating on examinations can negatively influence the quality of education. The periods before, during, and after tests should be effectively handled to realize a highly efficient testing period (Rukundo & Magambo, 2010).

According to the study findings of Sun and Cheng (2014), the classroom assessment marking practices of teachers included both judgment of students' work in terms of effort, fulfilling the requirement, quality

(achievement), and judgment of students' learning in terms of academic enablers (i.e., non-achievement factors). Similarly, Randall and Engelhard (2010) showed that though teachers demonstrated assigning grades based primarily on achievement under most circumstances, in some borderline cases, teachers were considering non-achievement factors. Participants in the current study also reported that they were considering achievement and non-achievement factors when they graded or marked students' classroom assessments.

The present study revealed that teachers had significant practices for communicating classroom assessment information to students. Related to this issue, Zhang and Burry-Stock (2003) informed students that teachers who had a former training background in classroom assessment demonstrated higher communication skills. As Ndalichako (2015) reports, by understanding the usefulness of feedback in enhancing students' performance, teachers are encouraged to give regular comments on classroom assessments to students. On the other hand, Alkharusi (2011) argued that there were significant gender differences between pre-service and in-service teachers in communicating assessment results to students. Currently, teachers at the study site in particular and in Ethiopian schools in general are tending to communicate classroom assessments to students. This may be because the policy requires them to inform classroom assessment results on time.

As far as professional ethics is concerned, conducting item analysis is one of the responsibilities of teachers. It aims at improving teachers' skills and the learning of students. However, personal observations show that teachers at all levels have a very poor experience revising the tests they use in this country. Instead, they often write new items whenever they decide to give tests. To this end, previous findings show that teachers spent little time conducting statistical analyses of assessment results (Mertler, 1998). For that matter, the data obtained in the current study also confirms that teachers have a weak practice of classroom assessment revision.

The negligence of classroom assessment revision, as reported in this study, might emanate from the lenient experiences of the concerned bodies to give on-the-job training and/or from the weak supervision practices of principals on the matter under discussion.

Alemu (2013) and Dessie (2015) complained that the classroom assessment practices of teachers were inadequate and not meant for quality learning. More specifically, Dessie (2015) argued that science teachers used to administer assessment tools at the end of the lessons they taught only to assemble marks, not for the advantage of improving the learning of students. Similarly, the moderate level of classroom assessment practices observed in the findings of the present study also confirms the inadequacy of the assessment practices among many teachers. Teachers' practice of classroom assessment was found to be inadequate because they demonstrated a low level of knowledge, skill, and competency in educational assessment (Bedilu, 2014; Alkharusi et al., 2012), which often could be related to weak professional training.

Differences in Classroom Assessment Practices

The analysis of factorial ANOVA was conducted to test differences in classroom assessment practices among secondary school teachers. The test indicated that there was a significant difference in the practice of classroom assessment among teachers concerning their teaching experiences, gender, teaching load, and prior training background in student assessment. These findings are consistent with previous results. For example, Alkharusi et al. (2012) showed that teachers were practising classroom assessment for different purposes, with some variations by gender, grade level, and subject area. Frey and Schmitt (2010) found that female teachers chose performance-based assessments more often than male teachers. Similarly, a significant gender difference in classroom assessment practices was reported by Alkharusi (2009).

It was reported that teaching experience has a significant effect on the joint practices of classroom assessment and learning. That is, experience in teaching significantly influenced the collection of evidence of learning compared to other factors (Dessie, 2015). According to Mertler (1998), there were significant differences in classroom assessment practices among teachers concerning their experience, specifically in using traditional and alternative strategies.

Sewagegn (2013) suggested significant differences in including the general information of test construction guidelines, writing good multiple-choice questions, and short answer items about the teachers' training background and teaching experience. Though Gonzales and Callueng (2014) said that professional development enhanced teachers' classroom assessment practices, Dessie (2015) contradicted that pre-service and in-service training hadn't significantly contributed to the practice of assessment for learning. Dessie's findings were different from the current one, possibly because the focus was on the area of natural science, while the current study collected data from teachers teaching different subjects such as mathematics, language, natural sciences, and social sciences.

Dessie (2015) also defended the fact that the teaching load per week failed to reveal a significant difference in assessment practice among teachers. Again, this may maybe because of the nature of the participants in the study, as they were all from the natural sciences. However, Mohiuddin (2015) reported a contradictory report indicating that the teaching load created differences in classroom assessment practices among teachers where teaching subjects were not identified.

CONCLUSIONS

Classroom assessments are at the heart of the teaching and learning process. Assessment in the classroom plays a significant role in identifying readiness for learning, increasing learning, and making decisions on the extent to which students have learned. Classroom assessment provides important information for both teachers and students about what they are doing in the classroom. It ensures the quality of students' learning. Therefore, a significant

proportion of class time is dedicated to tasks related to student assessment. It is crucial to foster the quality of teachers' classroom assessment practices to improve student's learning and the quality of education in a country.

However, as indicated in this study, teachers' classroom assessment practices are not strong enough to achieve a high quality of education in secondary schools. Teachers do not adequately plan classroom assessments. They tend to focus on the development of traditional assessment methods, neglecting the use of alternative methods. Additionally, teachers give more importance to classroom assessment administration and communication practices, which have immediate accountability for them. Most secondary school teachers do not revise the tests they use and often include non-achievement factors in students' grades. These issues align with the findings of this study, which indicate that teachers have not received on-the-job training on assessing student learning. Thus, improving students' learning and the quality of education in Ethiopia requires launching extensive on-the-job professional training programs for secondary school teachers, with a special emphasis on assessing student learning.

Furthermore, since teaching experience influences teachers' assessment practices, it is important to assign mentors to novice teachers. Teachers need an optimal teaching load that allows them ample time for student assessment work. While close supervision is necessary for both male and female teachers, it is particularly important to pay attention to male teachers, as they were found to conduct classroom assessments better than females.

Recommendations

1. As teaching is difficult without assessment, it becomes mandatory to equip novice teachers with pedagogical knowledge and skills, with special emphasis on the assessment of student learning.
2. To refresh and update teachers' knowledge and skills in student assessment, schools and educational offices of different levels are advised to arrange periodical training for in-service teachers.
3. It becomes important to continuously conduct discussions and create experience-sharing programs among teachers on their practices of classroom assessment at the school level to foster their awareness and perception of the learning assessment of students.

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DECLARATION

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data will be made available on request.

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