Effects of Alternative Assessment on Students' Perception, Attitude, Engagement and Achievement in a Communicative English Skills Course at Ambo University

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Abstract: This study investigated the effects of alternative assessment on student engagement and achievement in communicative English Skills course II (FLEn1012) at Ambo University. This study used an experimental research design. The data were collected from 173 students through test, questionnaire, and classroom observation protocol. The students were selected from Social Science (96) and Natural Science (77) bands based on maximum variation sampling techniques. Students were stratified into four sections based on their results in the pre-test, field of study and sex category, who were later assigned to two control and two experimental groups using lottery system. Then, course-based alternative assessment was implemented for ten weeks for the experimental group of students while control group students were taught and assessed using conventional assessment methods in their regular classrooms. Students in the experimental group were continuously guided on the utilization of alternative assessment. After post-intervention test, the data sets were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics methods. The qualitative data were also thematically analyzed to supplement the results of the quantitative data. The results of the study indicated that alternative assessment resulted in a significant improvement in student engagement ($t = 3.74$) and in their achievement ($t = 2.48$), wherein there is no significant difference between social and natural science bands students ($t = 0.95$) as a result of alternative assessment. The implementation of alternative assessment requires teachers' commitment and integrated assessment skills, students' language proficiency and willingness, and sufficient resources and standardized class size, as set by Ministry of Education.

Keywords: Achievement; Alternative; Assessment; Engagement; English language skills

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1. Introduction

Alternative assessment (AA) and traditional language assessment (TA) are the two contrasting approaches influencing language assessment in higher institutions since 1970s (Abbas, 2012; Davies, 2013 and Mekonnen, 2014). Recently, there has been an increasing need for an AA over TA. As a result, a paradigm shift was prompted by the benefits of AA forms in many countries around the world (Davies, 2013). In this 21st century, AA is considered as post method pedagogy, and as an alternative way of improving students' academic engagement and achievement (Ginting, 2021; Worley, 2018). According to Dixon (2010) and Worley (2018), AA is an alternative to standardized test that is used to systematically improve students' learning. Agustina (2011) and Tran (2012) contend that AA entails more informal and formal procedures and techniques to comprehensively, progressively and continuously assess students' language ability at higher education where learners are asked to carry out real-life activities that demonstrate authentic application of what they have learned. Theoretically, AA can be classified into *assessment of learning*, *assessment as learning* and *assessment for learning* (Worley, 2018). The latter two forms of AA in particular give a message to students about what and how they should do while the former focuses on the measurement of students' performance. In this sense, students are expected to actively engage in a variety of assessment activities to enhance their learning. This implies that AA is easily applicable in communicative language learning activities

Despite these advantages, AA has been linked to a numerous disadvantages. For instance, Christiana (2019) and Minda and Chaka (2023a) state that AA strategies and tools are criticized for its being difficult and time-consuming to develop and successfully grade learners' performance since it demands rigours activities. Students also usually feel insecure when their teachers use AA strategies and tools to grade their performance because they think that their results can involve subjectivity for using AA (Ginting, 2021; Minda and Chaka (2023a). This subjectivity might be rooted in the prior academic achievements, occupation ambitions and wrong expectation, and lack of skills on how to handle AA strategies and tools. Christiana (2019) claims that subjectivity in AA is likely to creep into assessment process because teachers are humans who are influenced by what they read in an essay written by their students, as an assessment source. The issue of subjectivity is also exhibited with instructors in Ethiopian universities, as acquired by Mekonnen (2014), Hirpassa (2021) and Hirpassa (2022). As a result, the teachers seem to miss the multifaceted advantages of using AA to assess students' multifaceted learning in Communicative English Skills Course (CESC). Thus, teachers as assessors require appropriate training that enables them to properly implement AA, and thereby accurately evaluate every student's progress. Therefore, the problem of subjectivity in AA might in fact be minimized by appropriately designing and using the marking matrix in AAs.

Student engagement was another crucial topic that was highlighted in this study. Several authors, including Dixon (2010), Ginting (2021), Gray and Diloreto (2016), Hoskins (2012), and Keller (2010), have made contributions to the development of a theory of student engagement in the context of language learning. Dixon (2010), Ginting (2021) and Hoskins (2012) describe student engagement as the ability and commitment of the students to actively participate in a variety of academic activities to achieve their intended objectives in CESC-II. In other words, students who are committed, attentive, curious, enthused, constructive and reflective in any activity are more likely to devote more time and effort to achieve their learning goals. Hence, student engagement is viewed as a motivator by which students are actively involving in AA, regulating their own learning processes in attaining their academic objective. In doing so, students use their fresh experience in AA strategies (peer-and self-assessment, teachers' and guests' assessment) and tools (conversation, presentations, group and individual assignments and projects (Hoskins, 2012).

Three different engagement models have been recognized to help teachers align assessment strategies with students' learning experiences, and thereby enhance students' language learning. The models are behavioral engagement, emotion/affective engagement, and cognitive (Gray and Diloreto, 2016). According to Ginting (2021) and Price and Baker (2012), the main goal of behavioural

engagement is to improve students' academic engagement, and in so doing, enhance learning outcomes, which can then foster emotional and cognitive engagement. Emotional engagement also pays attention to students' affective responses (sense of belonging) to their learning and assessment activities (Gray and Diloreto, 2016). Emotional engagement minimizes students' boredom, grief and anxiety, and enhances students' interest and happiness with the assessment tools and assessors. Similarly, cognitive engagement also requires students' efforts to demonstrate their capacity to learn new language skills (Hoskins, 2012; Price and Baker, 2012). This implies that students who possess these models can interact and work enthusiastically with AAs in a dynamic way, demonstrating their cognitive engagement, such as self-regulation. They are committed to complete their learning or assessment works; they never give up easily when they are confronted by challenges because they are resilient to hunt for answers and positively perceive issues.

According to Dixon (2010), Price and Baker (2012) and Ur (2010), the aforementioned models are all linked together to positively influence students' behavioural engagement adhering to classroom rule, demonstrating interest for AA and for learning language domains in CESC. This linkage is realised through students' perseverance, concentration, attention, active participation in classroom discussions, and in asking and answering questions (Keller, 2010; Ur, 2010). This implies that the more students are intrinsically motivated, the more they take initiative and deeply engage in learning and assessment activities. Similarly, students who are cognitively engaged in AA can enthusiastically use metacognitive methods in planning and monitoring their cognitive activities (Christiana, 2019). In other words, they are ready to summarize, analyse and elaborate tasks and exercises to learning new materials in CESC.

The engagement models accommodate a variety of learning styles in different exposures and interpretations to similar activities. In connection to this, Hirpassa (2018: 43) posed the following eight questions:

> …do the students understand the purpose(s) of the assessment and the intended use (s) of the results? Do students think that assessment strategies and tools provide a clear, informative, and timely result? Are the results perceived as believable and fair by the students? Does the assessment measure what the program intends to teach? Is the assessment based on clear goals and objectives? Is the assessment based on sound theoretical principles which have current credibility in the field? Does the assessment utilise authentic texts and authentic tasks? Are the students devoted to accomplish the assessment activity?

The entire concerns about student engagement in AA, as in the quotation, are directly related to the ideal principles of assessment (Rojas, 2017 and Ur, 2010). If students need to engage in AA, it must be understandable, valid, reliable, authentic, practical, purposive, relevant, believable, fair and clear to the respective students, and only then can AA be aligned with the intended learning outcomes in CESC. As an on-going and formative assessment, AA is the springboard for discussion for student–student and student–teacher interactions to increase students' engagement in language learning (Forutan, 2014; Minda and Chaka, 2023b; Rojas, 2017). It also creates a comparison between teacher and student peer-and self-assessed marks to reveal agreement or disagreement and thereby, provide space for dialogue and further student improvement. Supporting this idea, Hirpassa (2018: 46) symbolically expresses that "students are the fertile land on which a farmer sows the seeds and harvest the products later". Figuratively speaking, students should be players rather than being spectators in AAs to actively engage and make great contribution for the effective learning in CESC. In other words, the more students are intrinsically and socially involved in AA activities, the more they are likely to succeed in language learning (Dixon, 2010, Ginting, 2021 and Worley, 2018). This is because AA empowers students to practically play their roles and to contribute for their language learning. In short, the aforementioned argument highlights that student engagement in AA is the most dependable predictor of students' success in language learning.

Considering relevance of AA, CESC II must be assessed using AAs. Currently, CESC II is the second course given to first year university students following CESC I in Ethiopian. CESC II focuses on productive (speaking and writing) skills while the main goal of CESC I is to help students improve

their receptive (Listening and reading) skills (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2018). The communicativeness of AA and CESC is compatible with CLT approach and constructivist theory (Agustina, 2011; Davies, 2013; Tran, 2012; Abbas, 2012). Besides, the sociocultural theory of language learning underlines that multi-assessor strategies and multiple assessment tools, which are the pillars of AA, are imperative to enhance students' productive skills (Price and Baker, 2012; Worley, 2018). Multi-assessor strategies refer to the use of instructors, invited guests, self-and peer-students as assessors for the students' performance, whereas multiple assessment tools encompass any authentic and relevant instrument used to comprehensively and progressively collect and analyse students' learning performance in CESC. According to Herdiawan (2018), Ur (2010) and Wood (2011), the tools consist of question-and-answer exercises, reflective and hands-on activities, assignments, games, role plays, theatrical exercises, quizzes, tests, examinations, interviews, journals, observations, projects, individual, pair and group discussions, portfolios and so forth.

Although the issue of AA is a fascinating worldwide research area, it is an emerging study area in Ethiopian context. In other words, although very few descriptive studies were conducted on the practices and challenges of AA implementation in Ethiopia (Mekonnen, 2014; Hirpassa, 2022), the impact of the assessment shift from TA to AA and the effects AA in CESC have not yet been examined. Theoretically, Ethiopian education and training policy (ETP) which was in effect since 1994 (MoE, 1994) and the current education roadmap (MoE, 2018) have not explicitly stated the concept of AA. Practically, teachers in Ethiopian universities have also been criticized for their standardised assessment practice that can only measure the students' knowledge on the linguistic forms of CESCs (Mekonnen, 2014; MoE, 2018; Hirpassa, 2022). Moreover, students are commonly accepted by universities for further education, be hired, receive grants, travel abroad, and be awarded prize by universities based on their standardized test results.

In summary, AA provides trustworthy information for both instructors and students. It enables instructors to gather data on students' learning progress. It helps teachers learn more about the mind-set, challenges, engagement and achievement of students. Hence, they should train and guide their students so that they can understand the fundamental purpose of AA strategies. It also highlights students' diverse skills and multiple competencies in the multifaceted objectives of CESC. Consequently, they are no longer defenceless vessels waiting to be filled with facts. Instead, they try to apply challenging, problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills, mastering their own learning and making their own choices in language learning.

Theoretical Framework

Keller (2010) elaborates the three aforementioned categories of student engagement presented by different scholars, and established a complete theoretical framework known as ARCS Model: attention (emotional engagement), relevance (behavioural engagement), confidence and satisfaction (cognitive engagement) in the early 1980s. As to this model, students are more inclined to engage in learning and assessment activities if they feel satisfied after meeting learning goals (Dixon, 2010; Keller, 2010; Price and Baker, 2012). This engagement model requires students' social presence, cognitive presence and instructional presence. The Keller's four factors of student engagement are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Keller's ARCS Model (2010)

S/N	The components	Definition	Process of assessment questions
1	Attention (*Emotional engagement*)	Capture student interest and stimulate curiosity to use the assessment strategy and tool.	How can I make the assessment strategies and tools both stimulating and engaging?
2	Relevance (*Behavioral engagement*	Meet the student's personal needs and goals to influence a positive attitude.	In what ways will the assessment experience be valuable to the students?
3	Confidence (*Cognitive engagement*)	Help students believe/feel that they succeed and control their success.	How can I follow instructions that help students succeed and allow them to take control of their success?
4	Satisfaction (*Cognitive engagement*)	Reinforce achievements with rewards (internal and external).	What can I do to help students feel good about their experience and desire to continue learning?

Source: Adapted from Dixon (2010), Ginting (2021), Hoskins (2012) and Keller (2010)

Table 1 presents the theoretical framework whose elements are complementary for the successful students' engagement and learning. To be engaged, students must pay full attention and develop the ability to manage their learning schedule, take initiative to learn more and new topics, cooperate with other students and finish projects on time. They must make every effort to study, organise themselves so that they can take advantages of self-assessment, feedback from friends and teachers, motivate themselves, and have a tremendous amount of trust in them. To this end, they must know what they need to do, and how they should be assessed in relation to the nature of CESC II. In general, ACRS views AA activities as an integral part of teaching to make the instruction authentic, meaningful and engaging.

Conceptual Framework

The application of AA is a more student-cantered and authentic assessment procedure in which all students engage as assessors of their own performance (self-assessor) and peers' performance (peer-assessor) using various assessment tools (Forutan, 2014). Student engagement provides them with valuable evidence that might create the base for further learning purposes for their personal learning (Letina, 2015). In this sense, communicative nature of AA and CESC is believed to inverse the students' passive paradigm of learning as it demands students to set their own goals based on their self-initiative, self-direction and choice. This is the way of increasing student engagement in their assessment and learning purposes, as illustrated in Figure 1.

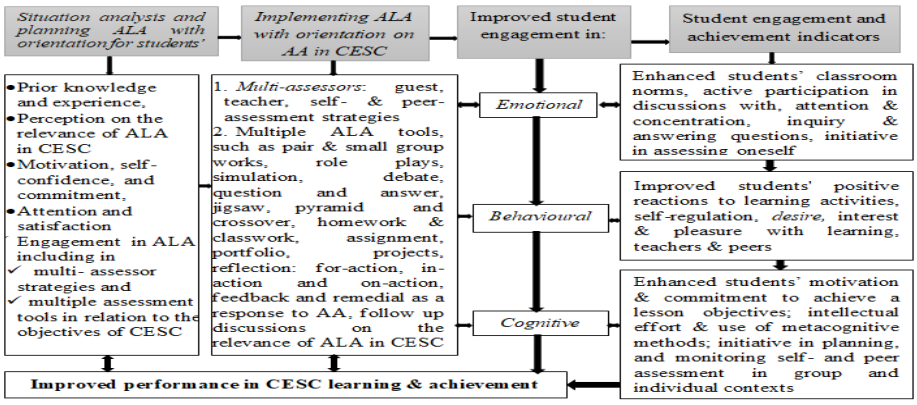

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Adapted from Benzehaf (2017) and Kibbe (2017)

The variables illustrated in the framework are related to each other to influence students' achievement in CESC II. All the characteristics of AA are supposed to alter students' attitudes, desire, interest, perception, self-confidence, motivation, attention, intellectual efforts and satisfaction (Benzehaf, 2017; Kibbe, 2017) which, in turn, enhances their engagement, learning and achievement (Gray and Diloreto, 2016; Hirpassa, 2022).

The problem identified in this study was about the quality of assessment in CESCs at Ethiopian universities (Hirpassa, 2022). The researcher's observation reveals that teachers and students consider standardised teacher-based test as the sole assessment method to accurately measure students' language learning. They perceive teaching and assessment as separate and independent activities. Teachers have been criticized for their excessive dependence on instructor-based tests giving little attention to AA (Hirpassa, 2022). With the use of TA, both the students and the instructors appear to endlessly count points, the side effect often being an absurd, detrimental preoccupation with grades and scores, rather than learning progress. Students' prior assessment experiences, perceptions and attitudes have also been rooted in the standardised test that is considered as the crucial obstacle for students' engagement in AA in CESCs.

In order to respond to this problem, Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoE, 2018) put forward new reform (roadmap) related to students' participation in the teaching-learning processes. However, the need for the students' engagement has been overlooked in the reform, too. Some teachers expressed that they have become frustrated with TA in CESCs. Therefore, this study aims at testing the effects of AA strategies and tools in altering students' perception and attitude and in enhancing their engagement and achievement in CESC at Ambo University. Thus, in order to attain the main aim of the study, the following four basic guiding questions have been formulated:

1. How does the implementation of AA in CESC influence the perception and attitude of students to their learning at university?
2. To what extent does the implementation of AA components enhance students' engagement and achievement in learning CESC at university?
3. Is there any difference between NSB and SSB students in utilising AA in CESC in university?
4. What are the challenges confronted by students in participating in AA activities in CESC in the university?

2. Research Methods

The study employed an experimental research design to test the effects of AA on students' perception, attitude, engagement and achievement in CESC II at Ambo University. To this end, four sections (two from social science band- NSB) and two from natural science band- SSB) undergraduate first year students were selected based on a maximum variation sampling technique because the researcher had been assigned to teach CESC II to these groups of students. Totally, 173 (77 from NSB and 96 from SSB) students participated in the study.

Table 2. Sample size and homogeneity of the students

Groups	NSB			SSB			Homogeneity of the groups			
	M	F	T	M	F	T	Mean	SD	T-test	P value
Experimental	23	15	38	25	23	48	44.87	2.97	0.3455	2.132
Control	23	16	39	26	22	48	45.97	3.01		
Total	46	31	77	51	45	96				

As exhibited in Table 2, students' field of study (NSB and SSB) and sex category, along with students' pre-intervention test results, were considered to stratify them into two groups. Thus, the t-test (t = 0.0588) shows the two groups of students were homogeneous in their communicative English

skills ability. Eventually, the groups were randomly assigned to experimental, 86 (48 male and 38 female) and to the control group, 87(49 male and 38 female). There were two experimental and two control group sections (one from NSB and the other is from SSB in each group) with, on average, 43 students in each section.

Data were collected using test, questionnaires and classroom observation. A set of questionnaire, consisting of 75 (70 close-ended and five open-ended) items, was adapted from Christiana (2019), Rojas (2017) and Hirpassa (2022) and administered to all students before and after intervention to gather data. The questionnaire was used to collect the opinions of the students on their perception, attitude, challenges and engagement in AA and in CESC. Each of the questions was composed of a five-Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Undecided; 4 = Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree). The respondents responded to the items by placing a tick (✓) mark where they were asked to do so. For the open-ended items, they wrote short answers in the questionnaire.

A pattern of 3D-LOP (three-dimensional lesson observation protocol) was also adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Matz (2014) because it is adaptive classroom observation model that allowed the researcher to develop his own formal and informal observation checklist and protocol. The 3D-LOP served to validate the foregoing data and to collect additional data on the students' enjoyment in AA, effects of AA on students' engagement activities and on their achievement in CESC before, while and after the intervention, as recommended by Matz (2014).

Students' activities and attempts to work with peers, to assess their own and peers' performances, to make their assessment result visible to others, and to ask and answer questions imply their active participation in learning the course. Besides, students' relevant and reasonable answer to teachers' AA tools and their attempts to align assessment to teaching and to use locally available technologies portray the students' engagement in their learning. Moreover, their efforts to analyse, synthesise and evaluate lessons are the indicators for the students' engagement and learning in CESC. Students' faces whether they are bright attentive, interested, committed and enthusiastic or dull, bored, or letting the learning wash over them were also used as the easiest and the simplest indicators for the student engagement, as prescribed by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Each of the four sections was observed equally for two weeks before intervention, for eight weeks during intervention and for three weeks after intervention, in 2021 on similar indicators, purposely included different language domains in CESC II. Some classroom observations, in each section, were recorded using a video camera to see if, in case, new students' behaviors might emerge as a result of the recording. In order to understand more about the experimental group students' learning preferences and the difficulties behind the students' activities, pre- and post-observation interviews with the instructors and the students were held for each of the classroom observation.

Two comparable tests were modified from Hersey (2012) and Wood (2011) because the tests have already been found to be validated and endorsed by other researchers for the appropriateness of its scoring guide or criteria. The tests were described by Hersey (2012) and Wood (2011) as 'the best-known scoring procedure' for communicative language skills. Moreover, three EFL instructors evaluated the validity, reliability and alignment of the tests' items and adjusted the tests in order to make the contents and components of the items more consistent with the nature of CESC II. The instructors also modified and/or prepared specific scoring criteria and answer keys for all the subjective and objective items in both tests. Then, the two tests were randomly assigned to pre- and post-intervention. Finally, the instructors administered and marked the tests.

The pretest was administered to all the students to generate baseline information, and the post-intervention test was also administered to the same students to evaluate the effects of AA in CESC, as underlined in (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Both tests were designed in such a way that all the six domains of CESC II (the four macro skills, grammar, and vocabulary) were addressed. The tests were also restructured into two parts based on the nature of the course, with a total of 100 points. Both the pre- and posttests consisted of 100 questions with a value of one point each, and the total weight for each test was 100 points. As the objectives of CESC II focused on productive skills, 40 questions

were set from writing and speaking skills; 32 questions were set from reading and listening skills, and 28 questions were set from grammar and vocabulary sections of CESC II. In the evaluative viewpoint, the individual scales and the overall summed scale are further broken down into numerical ranges that correspond to five mastery levels, as noted in Creswell and Creswell (2018):

- Excellent = 85-100%
- Very good = 75-84.99%
- Average = 65-74.99%
- Satisfactory =50-64.99 %
- Poor =35-49.99% points

Regarding data gathering procedure, a pre-intervention questionnaire was initially administered to all the students to elicit their opinions. Next, the pretest was administered to determine students' communicative English skills before the provision of the intervention. To closely analyze the existing classroom reality, four successive, 120-mintus each, pre-intervention observations were carried out to validate the information obtained through the questionnaire and the test. With the understanding of pre-intervention information, a three-hour CESC lesson with AA per a week was planned and administered for the experimental group of students for ten weeks while the control group students were taught and assessed through the conventional methods, as designed in CESC II. Then, the second part of the questionnaire was administered to all the students to elicit their opinions on the effects of AA in CESC. Eventually, a post-intervention test was administered to the students in both groups. In the meanwhile, a close lesson observation was conducted throughout the lessons weeks to determine the students' improvements in CESC.

To analyze the data, data sets were categorized into four themes: effects of students' perception and attitude, engagement in AA and achievement in CESC, difference between NSB and SSB students and challenges confronted by the students. The data obtained through tests and questionnaires were analyzed using percentage, mean, weighted mean, standard deviations, rank orders and t-test. The t-test was carried out between the pretest and the posttest to determine the effects of AA in CESC and the difference between the result of NSB and SSB students that might be created as a result of AA in CESC. The major challenges faced by the students in engaging in AA were also determined. For all statistical tests, alpha is pre-set at $\alpha = 0.05$. The qualitative data were also amalgamated in the quantitative results using the same themes.

3. Results

This section presents the results of the study on the effects of AA on students' engagement and achievement in learning CESC II at Ambo University. This involves the comparisons of the data obtained through the data gathering instruments before and after the intervention.

3.1. Effect of AA on Students' Perception of the Principles of AA

This section describes the students' perceptions on the AA principles and its effects. Table 3 presents the results of pre-intervention questionnaire (*Pre-IQ)* and post-intervention questionnaire (*Post-IQ).*

Table 3. Students' perceptions on the principles of AA

S/N	I feel happy with the following principles of AA	Control group					Experimental group				
		Pre-IQ		Post-IQ		T-test	Pre-IQ		Post-IQ		T-test
		SD	Mean	SD	Mean		SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
1	Practicality/relevance	1.24	1.21	1.13	2.03	0.73	1.32	1.09	1.41	3.93	2.02
2	Validity/credibility	1.09	1.42	1.24	1.97	0.44	1.41	1.11	1.04	3.70	2.49
3	Suitability/appropriateness	0.86	2.13	0.13	2.41	0.04	1.34	1.43	0.93	4.37	2.73
4	Objectivity	1.21	1.44	1.34	2.03	0.44	1.43	1.13	1.51	4.20	2.03
5	Measurability	2.36	1.46	2.46	2.17	0.29	2.06	1.36	1.11	4.26	2.56
6	Discriminating power	2.11	2.31	1.31	2.09	-0.17	1.31	1.41	1.01	4.25	2.80
Weighted Mean		1.48	1.70	1.27	2.13	0.34	1.48	1.26	1.17	4.12	2.44

Table 3 portrays that almost all the students initially held improper perception about the principles of AA in relation to the nature of CESC II. However, the perception of the students in the experimental group was altered after the intervention. Unlike the results of the students in the control group, the results of t-test imply that the students in the experimental group were happy with the practicality (2.02), credibility (2.49), suitability (2.73), objectivity (2.03), measurability (2.56) and the discriminating power of (2.80) of the implementation of AA forms in CESC after the implementation of the intervention.

In relation to the students' perception on the principles of AA, a student stated a sound opinion during a pre-observation conference:

> Except tests, examinations and some assignments, most of the tools you have listed here bear subjectivity and provoke grievance among us for their indiscriminating power to differentiate the outstanding performance from inadequate performances as a result of which most students are similarly graded particularly in such a complex CESC.

Taking everything into account, the students' poor perceptions about principles of AA affected student engagement in achieving the intended language objectives in CESC.

3.2. Effects of AA on Students' Attitudes towards AA and CESC

The students were also asked to express their opinions on AA forms in learning CESC. Their responses imply that they were frustrated, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' attitudes towards AA and CESC

S/N	I think I can:	Control group					Experimental group				
		Pre-IQ		Post-IQ		T-test	Pre-IQ		Post-IQ		T-test
		SD	Mean	SD	Mean		SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
1	handle the complex language domains in CESC	2.14	1.37	1.41	2.37	0.71	2.13	1.03	1.16	4.30	2.82
2	handle the multiple nature of AA in CESC	1.90	2.07	2.09	2.70	0.30	1.87	2.07	1.10	4.42	2.33
3	integrate the language skills in CESC	2.68	2.73	1.86	1.37	- 0.73	2.70	1.31	1.08	4.31	2.87
4	Perform language tasks in CESC	2.12	2.02	1.92	2.04	0.01	2.14	1.24	1.21	4. 59	2.77
5	assess other students' performance in CESC	2.63	2.62	1.93	2.46	-0.80	2.593	1.29	1.23	4.48	2.59
6	assess myself in CESC	2.14	2.52	1.84	2.45	-0.04	2.18	1.85	1.17	4.58	2.33
7	handle practical works of AA	2.14	2.89	1.99	2.98	0.05	2.11	1.89	1.24	4.47	2.08
Weighted Mean		2.25	2.32	1.86	2.34	0.01	2.25	1.532.14	1.17	4.45	2.50

Table 4 exhibits the mean values of the pre-intervention data that show all the students in control (2.32) and experimental (1.53) groups felt unpleased with the demanding and complex nature of AA to assess the multifaceted language domains in CESC. The t-test of the post-intervention data exhibits that, however, the intervention significantly changed the perceptions of the students in the experiment group (2.50), unlike that of students in the control group (0.01). The table also portrays that the students in the control group were upset with the complex nature of AA (2.82) and the multifaceted language objectives in CESC (2.33) to integrate a variety of language assessment activities in CESC (2.87). They were also distressed to perform the demanding tasks in CESC (2.77), to assess their own (2.33) and other students' performance (2.59), and to handle practical works of AA (2.08) in the context of CESC II.

3.3. Effect of AA on Students' Engagement in CESC

Forty-two plausible AA components were presented to the students and asked to identify the strategies and the tools they readily contribute in. They selected very few of the tools to show their contributions, as portrayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Effect of AA on students' engagement in CESC

S/N	I feel I engage more in:	Control group				T-test	Experimental group				T-test
		Pre-IQ		Post-IQ			Pre-IQ		Post-IQ		
		SD	Mean	SD	Mean		SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
1	Teacher assessment	1.05	4.60	1.15	4.61	0.01	1.03	4.69	1.11	3.27	-1.28*
2	Self-assessment	1.31	2.21	1.19	2.41	0.14	1.13	2.29	1.17	4.51	1.90*
3	Peer-assessment	0.81	1.51	0.70	2.01	0.71	0.74	1.81	1.13	4.81	2.66*
4	Guest-assessment	1.50	4.52	0.63	4.54	0.01	0.91	4.73	0..82	4.84	0.09
5	Group assessment	1.25	2.95	1.05	2.85	0.19	-0.10	3.99	1.04	4.19	0.19
6	Group discussions	0.84	2.48	0.71	2.64	0.11	0.82	2.44	0.44	4.84	1.06*
7	Tutorials	0.76	1.86	0.68	1.96	0.07	0.86	1.68	0.76	4.86	2.42*
8	Paired activities	0.88	2.08	0.98	2.28	0.20	0.81	2.18	0.09	4.58	0.70
9	Individual classwork	2.31	2.83	1.52	3.17	0.22	1.19	2.31	1.03	4.63	2.25*
10	Question-answer	2.01	2.14	1.09	2.28	0.13	2.19	2.21	1.07	4.87	2.49*
11	Individual	1. 12	2.89	0. 89	2.96	0.06	0.69	2.73	0.88	4.73	1.76*
12	Projects	1.21	3.08	0.98	3.16	0.08	0.96	2.53	0.58	4.83	1.33*
Weighted Mean		1.28	2.97	0.97	2.98	0.01	1.03	2.97	0.86	4.60	1.40*
T-test between the two groups				0.97	2.98				0.86	4.60	1.39

**Indicates the AAs in which students engage more in then others.*

The weighted mean of the responses to the post intervention questionnaire in Table 5 implies that more experimental group students (4.60) contributed in AA strategies than students in the control group (2.98). The result of the t-test (1.39) between the two groups reveals a significant attitudinal change with the students in the experimental group after intervention. The difference between the results of t-tests for the students in the control group (0.01) and in the experiment group (1.40) revealed the effects of AA in achieving the objectives in CESC. Unlike the students in the experimental group, most of the students in the control group preferred more open-ended items from the list of 39 plausible AA tools given to them. On top of others, 47% of the students in the control group confessed that they requested other persons whom they think are better than them to have some assignments and projects done and thereby, to get better results.

3.4. Effects of AA on Students' Achievement in CESC

The effect of AA on students' achievement in CESC was determined using the comparison of the results from the data obtained through pretest and posttest, as noted in Table 6.

Table 6. Effects of AA on students' achievement in CESC

Test type	Ranges of points in the test, out of 100 (N =173)							Total	SD	Mean	T-test
	<31	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	>81				
Pretest	19	37	56	41	20	-	-	7,858	1.1	45.42	
Posttest	-	-	9	29	62	46	27	11,775	1.7	68.06	13.21
Difference	-19	-37	-47	-12	42	46	27	3,917	0.6	22.64	

The results of the tests, as presented in Table 6, show that 112 (64.74%) of the 173 students scored, on average, below 50% points in the pretest, and there was no score above 71% in the test. On the other hand, 9 (5.2%) of the entire students scored below 50% in the posttest while, 73(42.2%) of the 173 students had results better than 71% in the test. The table indicates that the students generally improved their results, on average, by 22.64% after intervention in CESC II. The t-test (13.21) also

confirms that there is a significant improvement after intervention in all the domains of CESC II, though the results were not equally significant, as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7. Students' results in each language domains

S/N	CESC domains	Results of pretest		Results of posttest		T-test	P-value	RO
		SD	Mean	SD	Mean			
1	Listening	1.11	39.81	1.76	61.97	12.59	2.04	2
2	Speaking	1.74	41.21	1.53	67.24	17.01	1.99	4
3	Reading	0.72	43.87	1.57	78.74	22.21	2.07	1
4	Writing	0.43	46.13	2.13	79.02	15,44	2.05	3
5	Vocabulary	0.52	48.15	1.12	59.43	10.07	2.03	5
6	Grammar	2.18	53.35	2.18	61.98	3.96	2.07	6
Weighted Mean		1.12	45.42	1.715	68.06	13.21	2.04	

Table 7 demonstrates that the results of the students are better in reading (t =22.21), speaking (t =17.01), writing (15.44) and listening (t = 12.59) than vocabulary (10.07) and grammar (3.96) in the posttest, unlike the result of the pretest. Figure 2 also exhibits the difference between the results of students in the experimental and control groups.

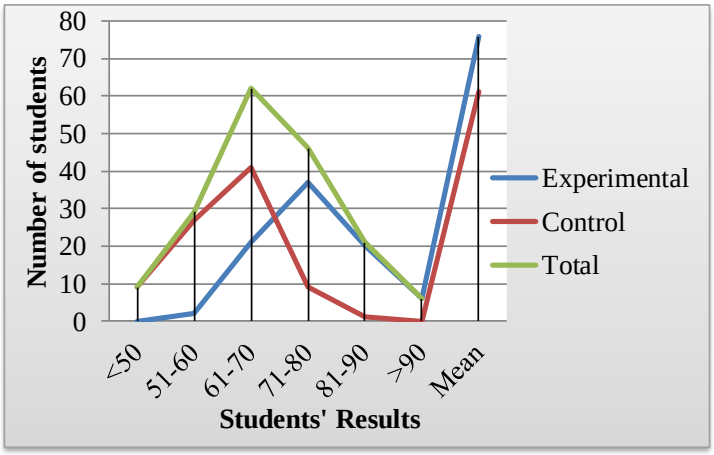

Figure 2: Comparison of the students' results in controlling and experimental groups

Figure 2 shows that there is no student, in the experimental group, who scored less than 50%, whereas 10.35% of the students in the control group scored below 50% in the posttest. On the other hand, only one of the control group students and 26(30.23) of the experimental group students scored more than 80% in the posttest. Importantly, 6 (6.98%) of the experimental group students scored more than 90% in the posttest. The differences of the means and t-tests between the results of the students in control and in experimental groups were summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Results of students in experimental and control groups

Groups	Pretest		Posttest		Mean difference	T-test	P-value
	SD	Mean	SD	Mean			
Control	3.01	45.97	2.02	61.09	15.12	7.49	2.03
Experimental	2.97	44.87	1.41	75.81	30.94	21.94	1.96
Difference	0.04	1.1	0.61	14.72	15.82	9.644	2.90
Average	2.99	45.42	1.715	68.45	23.03	13.42	2.71

The average result of t-test (13.42) reveals that students in both groups significantly improved their performance in the posttest. The mean difference between the results of the students in the experimental (30.94%) and in control group (15.12%) was 15.82. The t-test (9.644) indicates that the implementation of AA in CESC caused a significant learning difference in CESC. Table 9 also presents the comparison of the results of the experimental and control groups of students.

Table 9. Results of students in both groups in the domains of CESC

S/N	Language domains	Control group					Experimental group				
		Pre-test	Post-test	SD	T-test	R	Pre-test	Post-test	SD	T-test	R
1	Listening	41.14	51.07	2.11	4.71	6	40.81	67.72	1.56	17.25	5
2	Speaking	39.12	48.94	2.04	4.81	5	40.91	77.93	1.53	24.20	2
3	Reading	45.71	70.14	2.52	9.69	2	44.89	74.14	1.54	18.99	4
4	Writing	46.93	61.02	2.23	6.32	4	45.83	81.11	1.13	31.22	1
5	Vocabulary	51.95	66.13	1.11	12.78	1	50.91	69.71	1.12	21.06	3
6	Grammar	50.99	69.25	2.11	8.65	3	51.89	76.18	1.58	15.37	6
Weighted Mean		45.97	61.09	2.02	7.49		44.87	75.81	1.41	21.94	
Overall t-test			61.09	2.02				75.81	1.41	10.44	

The results of t-test in Table 9 indicate that the students in the experimental group (21.94) generally improved more than the students in the control group (7.49) by 14.45. Specifically, students in the experimental group improved and performed better in all language domains, with higher scores in writing (31.22), speaking (24.20) and vocabulary (21.06) than in reading (18.99) listening (17.25) and grammar (15.37) in the posttest, in opposite to the students in the control group. The overall result of t-test (10.44) underlines a significant effect of AA on students' achievement in CESC. Similar analysis was also made between the results of NSB and SSB students.

3.5. Effect of AA on NSB and SSB Students

The percentages of the means in Figure 3 imply that the implementation of AA in CESC similarly assisted the NSB and SSB students to improve their results. The intercept points of the line graphs in the figure show that the results of NSB and SSB students in posttest are the same whereas the difference between the results of the two groups of students is zero, which means the t-test result is also zero.

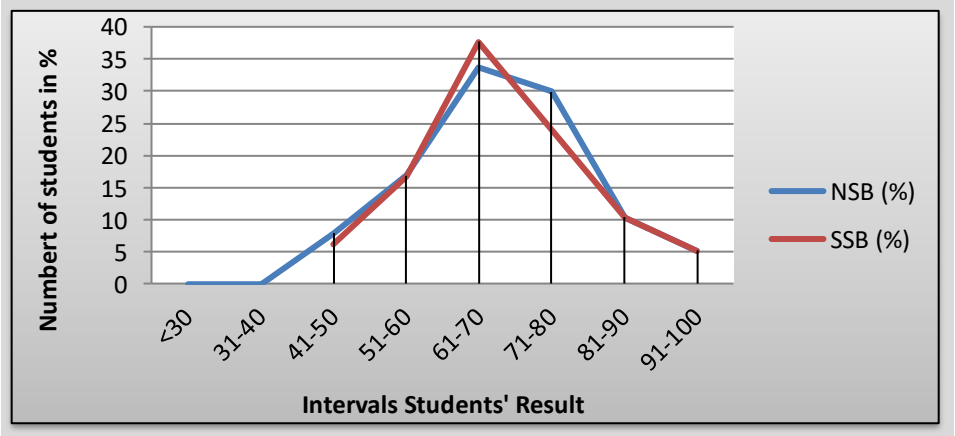

Figure 3: The comparison of the results of the NSB and SSB students in posttest

The mean results of NSB (69.02) and SSB (67. 81) students in the posttest show that the students in the experimental group similarly improved their results in the posttest. This asserts that AA has similar effects on the students' performances in both fields of study, as portrayed in Table 10.

Table 10. A comparison between the results of NSB and SSB

Bands	Pretest		Posttest		T-test	P-value
	SD	Mean	SD	Mean		
NSB	2. 89	45.71	2.94	69.02	8.02	2.25
SSB	3.00	45.11	2.48	67.81	9.15	2.46
Difference	0.11	0.06	0.46	1.21	0.56	2.38
Average	2.95	45.42	1.71	68.42	13.45	2.71

Using the figures in Table 10, the t-test (0.56, at p = 2.71) exhibits that there is no a significance difference between the results of the two groups of students as a result of the implementation of AA strategies and tools in CESC.

3.6. Challenges Confronted by Students

This section accentuates on the four major and 14 minor themes of challenges confronted by the students to engage in AAs in CESC. The main themes were student character, constraints of materials and poor classroom conditions, the demanding nature of AA and the complex nature of CESC, as summarized in Table 11.

Table 11. Summary of challenges confronted by students

S/N	Main challenges	Sub-challenges: (N= 173 students)	Mean	Weighed. Mean	RO
1	Demanding nature of AA	1.1. Demanding activities of AA	3.85		
		1.2. Handling endless paper works in A	3.84	3.85	3
2	Constraints of materials and poor classroom conditions	2.1. Insufficient technological services	4.01		
		2.2. Shortage of stationeries materials	4.03		
		2.3. Large class size	3.95	4.00	2
		2.4. Time constraints			
3	Complex nature of CESC	3.1. Complexity of CESC	3.44		
		3.2. Poor language domains integrations	3.46	3.45	4
4	Student deficient Character	4.1. Perceptions and attitudes about AA	3.98		
		4.2. Disciplinary problems	3.91		
		4.3. Looking for their language speakers to work with	4.24	4.05	1
		4.4. Language deficiency	4.22		
		4.5. Motivation and interest	4.05		
		4.6. Learning culture and style	4.09		

The weighted mean results illustrated in Table 11 demonstrates that students' deficient character (4.05), constraints of materials and poor classroom conditions (4.00) and demanding nature of AA (3.85) were reported as the first three challenges for the students' engagement. Specifically, the mean results also designate that students' reluctance to work with other students whose mother tongue is different (4.24), students' poor language proficiency (4.22), and their prior learning culture and style (4.09), students' lack of motivation and interest to participate in AA and CESC (4.05), as well as shortage of stationeries materials (4.03), insufficient technological services (4.01) and students' wrong perception about and negative attitude towards AA (3.98) were identified in descending order

as the serious challenges of students' engagement in AA and in learning CESC. In this sense, a student pronounced the effect of time constraints and their deficient character as the challenges of using AA in CESC, as stated below.

> We learn many subjects in a semester including this course. All the instructors give us many assignments. We are given many assignments, projects and home works every day to work for the following day. Sometimes, we cannot respond to the assignments because the tasks are too demanding and rigorous to complete by ourselves within a given time. For this reason, we divided the group assignments among us according to our interest to do, yet, we give individual assignments to a person we think are better than us.

4. Discussions

This discussion was outlined into four themes. First, the effect of the implementation of AA in CESC was described. Then, the effect of AA on students' perception and attitudes were discussed followed by the effect of AA on students' engagement, the difference created between NSB and SSB students by AA. Finally, the challenges in implementing AA in CESC were indicated.

To begin with the students' perception and attitude towards AA in CESC II, the data acquired before the intervention implied that students pondered that standardised teacher-based test is the sole method to accurately measure their language learning performances. Most of the students expressed before the intervention that they felt insecure about the implementation of AA because they thought that AAs bear high subjectivity in their grading system. They could not understand that subjectivity is inevitable but preventable through teachers' systematic design and careful employment of relevant AA strategies with the nature of CESC II. Christiana (2019: 8) and Minda and Chaka (2023b) argue that subjectivity is likely to creep into assessment process as it natural and inevitable because 'teachers are humans; it is hard not to be influenced by what we read in an essay written by their student, as an assessment source, liking or disliking views expressed in relation to our own consideration. The students also perceived teaching and assessment as two separate and independent activities. This reality was also supported by Christiana (2019), Hirpassa (2022) and Teelken (2018) in which students were found to recognize teaching and assessment as two isolated segments.

This study discovered that the controversies which existed in 1970s concerning the need for AA and/or TA in higher institutions in other countries (Abbas, 2012; Davies, 2013) are currently common in Ethiopian universities in general and at Ambo University in particular. The results obtained in this study also substantiated the findings made by Mekonnen (2014), MoE (2018) and Hirpassa (2022) that most of Ethiopian students commonly prefer TA to AA because they think that TA avoids subjectivity in their scores. They have developed the instructor-based and piece-by-piece assessment culture that is not in line with the nature of CESC. However, the principles of AA encapsulate comprehensiveness, progressiveness, continuity, and relevance to assess the learning outcomes in CESC. This implies that students should be taught about the relevance and benefits of AA to help them actively engage in developmental feedback and/or in a variety of intervention or remedial actions. During the time of this study, students in the experimental group have begun to enthusiastically assess their peers and their own performances in CESC after a series of orientations.

The students in the control group, however, expressed similar opinions in both the pre-and post-intervention questionnaires that AAs often bear subjectivity and grievance in their grades. Evidently, about 87% of the students were pleased if they were assessed by instructor and invited-guest rather than using peer- and self-assessment strategies because they considered students assessments' results as less reliable and less practical for them. In other words, the students thought that students, as assessors, do not give genuine comments and marks for their peers and for their own performances. This is because students never want to be given less mark in any case. This implies that students' perceptions about AA affected their contribution in learning CESC at the university. These findings substantiated the results acquired by Benzehaf (2017), Davies (2013) and Kibbe (2017) wherein the students' inappropriate perceptions and attitudes towards AA were found to cripple the implementation of AAs.

The students were also asked to reflect on the extent to which they were passionate to participate in a list of 39 believable AA tools given to each student in the questionnaire. More than 91% of the students exclusively understood TA in CESC as the most relevant assessment tool. Consequently, the students were reluctant to participate in project works, individual assignments, pair and small group assignments. They were also hesitant to partake in the assessment *as* learning and assessment *for* learning in CESC II. This students' perception is unacceptable in the era of CLT to assess the learning outcomes of CESC at university level. However, these findings were not exceptional to the current study, as Al-Mamari, Al-Mekhlafi and Al-Barwani (2018) made similar results wherein students in non-English speaking countries trust tests and examinations rather than AA tools.

Furthermore, most of the students had no idea about portfolio of learning, questionnaire and any kind of rubrics, journals, diaries, conferences, observation, checklist, narrative/anecdotal assessment, rating scale, action research presentation, project, dialogue, and role play as learning and assessment tools. The results obtained by Davies (2013), Al-Mamari, Al-Mekhlafi and Al-Barwani (2018) reveal that these undesirable perceptions and attitudes of students are not peculiar to Ethiopian only. For this reason, Davies (2013), Al-Mamari, Al-Mekhlafi and Al-Barwani (2018) recommend that teachers should provide close and continuous training to their students on the relevance and benefits of AA. On the other hand, some students in the control group considered pair and group assignments as a good opportunity to score better results in CESC at the expenses of other students.

Regarding the effect of AA on students' engagement and achievements in CESC, the comparison of the results of the tests, questionnaires and classroom observations showed a significance difference between students' engagement in the control and in the experimental groups. Most of the students in the control group remained passive throughout the study time in responding to open-ended questions. When they were asked to respond to open-ended items, they either kept silent or shifted the medium of instruction to their local languages. They raised their hands to respond to the objective questions, such as yes or no, true or false, multiple-choice, matching and gap-filling items. On the other hand, students in the experimental group responded to all kinds of questions. This implies that the implementation of AA resulted in better students' English skills. In this vein, the present study has obtained similar results with Davies (2013), Herdiawan (2018), Forutan (2014), Letina (2015) and Nasab (2015) that generally recognize students, who were inculcated with the principles of TA, are incompetent and inexperienced to engage in constructive language learning activities.

The results of the test also highlighted that the achievement of the students in the experimental group is significantly better than the results of the students in the control group. In this sense, the overall result of the t-test (10.44) demonstrated that the students in the experimental group (21.94) improved their learning more than the students in the control group (7.49) by 14.45. The result of t-test underscores that the implementation of AA with applicable guidance and practical orientation made a significant improvement on students' achievement in CESC. Considering the specific language domain, the students in the experimental group significantly improved their achievements in all language domains of CESC II, with higher scores in writing, speaking and vocabulary than in reading, listening and grammar, unlike the students in the control group. In relation to the performance of the students in every item in the posttest, the students in the experimental group attempted the entire open-and close-ended items, whereas the students in the control group left most of the open-ended items undone. Most of the control group students were unenthusiastic to attained tutorials or remedial classes while the experimental group students were observed to readily partake in the tutorials. One can deduce from this discussion that students' active engagement in AA can bring about a significant improvement in the students' communicative ability. In a nutshell, the implementation of AA in CESC caused a significant learning difference in CESC.

The findings of this study were consistent with the results of Kibbe's (2017) and Teelken's (2018) studies, indicating that students are more motivated and engaged in mark-driven 'assessment of learning' activities than in 'assessment for learning' or 'assessment as learning' activities. Thus, teaching-learning methods, assessment strategies and feedbacks should closely be connected to the

multifaceted learning objectives of CESC to heighten students' intrinsic motivation, as noted by Kabouha and Elyas (2015). In this finding, the key point of departure in teaching process was the misalignment between the teaching and assessment with the nature of learning objectives in CESC (Hirpassa, 2022). It is when these three factors of the course are aligned that students can achieve the intended language learning objectives in CESC.

Concerning the effects of AAs on NSB and SSB students' learning in CESC II, the triangulated results of the present study imply that AA is similarly applicable to both groups of students in learning CESC II. Evidently, a result of t-test (0.56) computed between the NSB and SSB students' underlines that there is not a significance difference between the results of the two groups of students as a result of the implementation of AA in CESC. It is observed that the results of the present study have a similar finding as obtained by Davies (2013), Herdiawan (2018), Forutan (2014), Letina (2015), Nasab (2015) and Teelken (2018) at different sites.

The last but very important theme of this study was the challenges confronted by students to engage in AAs.The students were challenged by student-related defies and perceptions, constraints of material resources, demanding nature of AA and multiple domains of CESC. Specifically, students' improper perceptions, insufficient reference books, stationeries, technology devices and other materials, as well as poor classroom conditions, malfunctioned language labs, endless paper works of AA in the multifaceted language domains in CESC were identified as the most important challenge for the students' contribution to AA and in learning CESC at the university. The students' grievances seem to be reasonable because instructors required them to perform a variety of AA activities where there were no necessary instructional materials. Substantiating this result Kabouha and Elyas (2015) and Price and Baker (2012) argue that the students may suffer from the lack of learning materials and technological services to complete all the requirements of AA tools.

In summary, the entire findings of this study accentuated that AAs can positively influence student engagement in learning CESC at a university level if they are properly guided and oriented. Students both in the NSB and SSB can similarly apply AA strategies and tools in learning CESC. Students who are inculcated in AA can understand the language inputs and complete AA requirements by generating comprehensible outputs in relation to the nature of the language domains in CESC. Contrariwise, students who are reluctant to engage in AA strategies and tools in such a course necessarily contribute to their incompetence in language learning. Hence, there is no doubt that teachers' pedagogical skill and commitment is instrumental to create competent and enthusiastic students who can engage and contribute in the implementation of AA and in learning CESC.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Although assessment practice in the 21st century requires the use of multi-assessor strategies and multiple assessment tools, 87% of the students were enthusiastic to participate in TA activities before intervention. They considered the standardized tests and examinations as the most reliable measurement of their performances. They failed to consider the relevance and benefits of AA in CESC to enhance their performances.

After intervention, this study evidenced that the perceptions and attitudes of the students in the experimental group towards AA and in learning CESC were reversed by the proper implementation of AA, along with the guidance and orientation for students where it is necessary. They became active participants of the comprehensive, progressive and continuous nature of AA in CESC. Both NSB and SSB students in the experimental group enthusiastically engaged in AA components and thereby, significantly improved their learning in CESC, as compared with students in the control group. They also exhibited more confidence to engage in AA strategies and tools and in the complex language domains of CESC.

Nevertheless, students' success in AA to assess their communicative language ability and achievement in CESC require a dynamics of a tapestry. Tapestry is woven from many strands such as

the characteristics of the teacher (personality, teaching style, beliefs about language learning, commitment and prior experience), the learner (personality, perceptions, learning style, language learning beliefs, and prior experience), the setting (available resources, conducive classroom condition and values, and students' relational background), and the relevant languages (AA and CESC).

5.2. Recommendations

Student engagement in AAs in CESC is a function of a variety of teacher-related factors. It follows, then, that teachers are expected to reverse the assessment crisis that were threatening and distracting learners from real learning towards a healthy, a natural and a helpful assessment in CESC using AA models, as a whole in Ethiopia.

In order to wisely assess the multifaceted language domains in CESC, instructors should efficiently manage scarce classroom resources, time-set, workload and the diversified learners' social and cross-cultural interactions with tangible and intangible success criteria to expand their learning opportunities in CESC. The instructors should also guide and orient their students on how to use AA to alter their perception, attitude, and to enhance their motivation towards AA in CESC.

As the scarcity of instructional materials and technological services affected the implementation of AA, respective bodies should improve the availability of the instructional resources to enable instructors to play their respective roles in implementing AAs in CESC II.

Students should develop self-initiative and self-directive skills towards AA for learning and AA as learning the language domains in CESC in a variety of contexts and opportunities.

As a final note, it has been expressed that instructors were working for private institutions during their free time to supplement their meagre income. To motivate the instructors and help them do their best, they should be supported with professional training, incentives and salary.

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