

EXPLORING UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN UNIVERSITIES OF CENTRAL PUNJAB

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is the exploration of undergraduate English language learners' perceptions about different aspects of formative assessments and practices being conducted in English language classrooms in universities of Central Punjab. English language learners from different departments of different universities shared their perceptions and served as research participants for this study. This research used quantitative research method to gauge effectiveness of formative assessment in second language acquisition as perceived by English language learners. Data was collected from language learners through a survey questionnaire. The data was then analyzed using SPSS. Different statistical analyses were conducted along with one way ANOVA to answer research questions and test hypotheses. Different scales of survey questionnaire related to formative assessment practices were overall perceived well by language learners. English language teachers' Communication with students was the most positively perceived scale. Feedback was perceived as a scale which needed improvement whereas peer and self-assessment comparatively received little recommendation from language learners. The study implied that students' voice needs to be heard. The study would be helpful for English language teachers and authorities devising classroom assessment policies. The study recommended to enhance the effectiveness of scales perceived well by language learners. Efforts should also be made by all involved in the process of second language acquisition to improve formative assessment scales perceived low in outcome by language learners.

Key words: Undergraduate English language learners, Second language acquisition, Language assessment, Formative assessment, Central Punjab

Introduction:

Second language learning has been an everyday concern for people throughout history. In present times, sixty percent of the world population approximately, is bilingual or multilingual (Richards & Rodgers: 2001). English is used in many parts of the world where multilingual communities reside. It, therefore, enjoys the status of 'an international means of communication' (Salih:2022). English language in recent times has developed into a 'geo-political' and a professional influence that sets the dimensions of foreign language teaching (Freeman & Freeman: 2008). Crystal (1997) estimated that English language had 427 million native speakers whereas considering speakers using English as a second or foreign language, the total estimate reached up to 750 million speakers. As reported by Einar H. Dyvik (2024), the number of people who used English language either as a native language or as a second language rose up to 1.5 billion people in 2023. This figure indeed places English language and the drive for English language acquisition in an unprecedented position among world languages. Larsen-Freeman (2000) alludes that just like applied linguistics, one of its sub-fields; Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has also become an emerging and independent field of study and research. Second language acquisition has acquired this status as it deals with real-world language issues and problems. SLA utilizes multidisciplinary theoretical and pragmatic viewpoints to account

for: how a second/foreign language (English here) is learnt and why do some people learn it better and quickly than others. She perceived the phenomenon of language acquisition as dynamic, non-linear and complex offering scope for 'diverse perspectives'. Chomsky's LAD and concepts like 'Interlanguage' lead to understanding that second language (L_2) performance of a language learner is not dependent upon his first language (L_1). Instructions provided by language teachers are the input which can only be processed by receptive mind; willing to accommodate a new language. This is why language learners display different language learning capabilities and despite being in the same environment, they learn second language at different rates and maintain diverse levels of language performance. Lantolf and Pavlenko (1994) concluded from their research that 'peer relationship' and classroom language teaching and assessment practices differently influence the process and outcomes of language learning of different individuals.

Nolen (2008) talked about the role of assessment in making learners gauge their own abilities by becoming aware of what they have learnt and what still needs to be learnt. Scriven (1967) earlier categorized these two modes of assessment as 'assessment for learning' and 'assessment of learning' later on branded as 'formative assessment' and 'summative assessment' respectively by Stiggins (2002). Formative assessment emerged at a time when stimulus-response learning theories of behaviorism were still in vogue (Crossouard & Pryor, 2012). The real affinity of formative assessment, however, lies with the socio-cultural theory of learning. This theory provides theoretical foundations to explore and explain how formative assessment helps to increase students' learning (Shepard, 2009). Socio-cultural theory implied that formative assessment must set as a goal to enhance the abilities of learners to advanced levels of understanding (Heritage, 2010). The learner is at the center guided by a master craftsman but the learner learns things only after doing them and getting involved with the society around (Fulcher, 2007). This organized learning results in mental development. Vygotsky (1978) propounded the idea of actual development and potential development. As Frey and Fisher (2011) opine that formative assessment aims to "reduce discrepancies between current understandings and a desired goal" (p. 9) so that learners are able to ultimately master capabilities initially beyond their reach, an idea explained by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Shepard, 2009). Since students are directly affected by assessment practices so they become an important stake holder in the process of assessment. It has been reported that the efforts are made to develop harmony between what students need to know in university and what they are expected to know outside the university walls in their practical and professional lives (Gulikers et al., 2006). It leads to the concern whether students are being taught in such a way that they learn what makes them excel in their professional field. Though teachers and institution administrators choose assessment practices typically, yet the different stake holders have different purposes in mind (Cavangah, Waldrip, Romanoski, and Dorman 2005). It calls for considering the voice of language learners too.

Objective of the Study:

The study was conducted with an objective to:

- (i) Explore which aspects and practices of formative assessment were perceived positively by English language undergraduate learners in universities of Central Punjab.
- (ii) Investigate how congruent or disparate are the perceptions of undergraduate language learners in universities of Central Punjab.

Research Questions:

Q.1. What are the perceptions of undergraduate English language learners about formative assessment and practices in universities of Central Punjab?

Q.2. How well do the formative assessment perceptions of undergraduate language learners from different faculties correspond to each other?

Hypotheses:

Null Hypothesis: There is essentially no significant difference among perceptions of undergraduate English language learners from different faculties on Formative assessment practices.

Alternate Hypothesis: There is a significant difference among perceptions of undergraduate English language learners from different faculties on Formative assessment practices.

Literature Review:

Language Assessment is regarded as one of the most basic components of second language teaching and learning process (Areekkuzhiyil 2019). It can be conceived as a set of most common activities employed by English language teachers to assess their students through the continuous process of learning. Owing to the purpose it serves, it nonetheless emerges as ‘the most difficult activity to carry out satisfactorily’ (Bacquet 2020). Huba and Freed (2000) argued that assessment is a practice of gathering and reflecting over evidence of students learning and academic achievement. This evidence emerges from varied and numerous sources and serves to understand the outcome of the whole educational process. The assessment results must provide firmly grounded information about students’ knowledge, understanding and implication of their knowledge.” Assessment is a continuous and ongoing process which distinguishes it from testing. It is a more inclusive concept as outlined by Brown and Abeywickrama (2019). They believe that assessment refers to a huge variety of techniques, methods and strategies that are continuously being used in the pedagogical context. Green (2014:6) puts forward a very important distinction when he refutes the traditional approach by arguing that assessment is an integral part of teaching and not limited to its previously perceived role of being synonymous to testing only. Teachers can assess their students by residing to a much broader cycle of activities. He furthers the all-inclusive nature of assessment by elucidating many activities, such as, self-assessment, done by students themselves, peer assessment where learners’ performance is assessed by fellow learners as well as portfolio assessment, which provides a complete record of student-teacher progression towards the pedagogical goals and objectives. Taken in this respect, assessment can be considered as an umbrella term "which includes both our daily classroom practices and large-scale testing, which is extremely designed and administered to our students". Taking lead from this view, it can be expected that second language acquisition can achieve most of its learning objectives if diverse and numerous assessment techniques are used in language class rooms (Cheng & Fox :2017).

Classroom assessment is unique as it is embedded in learning environment. This learning environment is created on the basis of teaching and learning practices which are fashioned to facilitate the process of language acquisition and communication. This context i.e. classroom is directly related to the assessment of the learners. The learning of students cannot be assessed in isolation. It involves other agents too; present in that context, with whom the learners interact in the process of learning. The teacher knows every student, and can adopt multiple ways of assessing learners’ knowledge and

abilities (Fulcher & Davidson: 2007). Due to the benefits, it yields, classroom assessment is an integral part of the language learning process which demands greater insight from assessors (Hill: 2017). Depending upon the nature and purpose of assessment, many types are known and are being used in the field. The division on the basis of nature can be seen as informal and formal assessment whereas the purpose-based division is more extensive. Dr. Cheryl Jones (2005) maintains that teachers continuously make professional judgments about learning of students consciously or unconsciously. Using these professional and unbiased judgments as feedback to improve the quality of learning is termed as assessment for learning. He believes that: "Assessment for Learning is all about informing learners of their progress to empower them to take the necessary action to improve their performance. Teachers need to create learning opportunities where learners can progress at their own pace and undertake consolidation activities where necessary." (Jones: 2005, pg.5) Daisy Christodoulou (2014) urged teachers to take up the role of regulators and not checkers by using the analogy of thermostats and thermometers. A "noticeable change" was pointed out by Hüseyin Öz (2014) that took place in the field of educational assessment. As a result of this change, assessment and student learning are considered inseparable and assessment becomes a tool which supports student learning. This change is not haphazard rather an outcome of scholars' efforts to improve assessment planning and practices. It can also be conveniently remarked that, there is a shift in assessment paradigm from traditional testing culture to an all-inclusive assessment culture. This new culture uses both formal and informal assessment techniques to boost student learning. Thus, in the current scenario it has emerged as an interactive and learner-centered approach being used in English language teaching (Chow & Leung, 2011; Chen et al., 2013). Quoting directly from the Assessment Reform Group, Swaffield (2011) refers to Assessment for Learning as an ongoing practice of eliciting and interpreting evidence of students' learning for the benefit and future use of teachers, students and the administration to decide the current progression status of learners' learning and the level they are supposed to achieve. It also helps to map out ways to acquire the desired level of understanding.

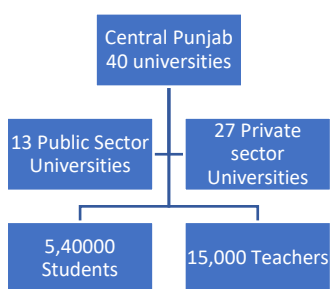
Formative assessment is in accordance with principles of assessment for learning, which makes assessment more of a shared activity between students and teachers. The decisions based on the evidence of assessment set the trajectory to be followed by both teachers and students for the attainment of learning objectives (Cheng & Fox: 2017). Formative assessment can be comprehensively referred to as "the collaborative processes engaged in by educators and students for the purpose of understanding the students' learning and conceptual organization, identification of strengths, diagnosis of weaknesses, areas for improvement, and as a source of information that teachers can use in instructional planning and students can use in deepening their understandings and improving their achievement". (Cizek: 2010: 06). Formative assessment, therefore, has become an essential part of educational processes to involve both teachers and students so that they consider and ponder over their teaching and learning strategies in order to bridge gaps in future practices. Another important development is considering formative assessment as 'core of teaching and learning processes'. Formative assessment is more than testing knowledge for the sake of promotion to next classes (Begum & Ambreen: 2021).

Methodology:

The researcher used Quantitative research method to conduct this study. Undergraduate English language learners enrolled in the universities of Central Punjab participated in a survey to share their perceptions of formative assessment practices being used in English language classrooms.

Research Participants

Central Punjab is divided into four administrative divisions: Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Sargodha. The research was conducted in public and private sector universities located in these units of Central Punjab. The English language teachers and undergraduate English language learners of these universities served as the population of the study. As per the Bureau of Statistics report (2021-2022), approximate enrollment in thirteen public and twenty-seven private universities of Central Punjab amounted to five hundred and forty thousand students whereas approximately fifteen thousand teachers served in these universities.



Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table was used to determine sample size for undergraduate English language learners. Simple Random sampling was used to collect data. Student sample comprised of English language learners enrolled in the faculties of Natural Science, Business studies, Social Science, and Arts and Humanities. Fourteen hundred questionnaires in total were administered to English language learners from different faculties in seven randomly selected universities one public and one private from each division except for Sargodha where there is no higher education commission recognized private sector university.

Data Collection:

The quantitative data for this study was collected through survey which has become very common tool in non-experimental research (Edmonds & Kennedy: 2017). Questionnaire was used as a survey instrument for this study. Applied linguists have a penchant for using questionnaires to collect data as this “quick data collection methodology enables time-efficient data collection from large numbers of people, even at a distance” (Heath Rose et al: 2020). To get empirical data about students’ perceptions on formative assessment, The Student Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ), developed by Fisher, Waldrip and Dorman (2005) was adapted for this study. The questionnaire studied the responses under five dimensions namely:

1. Congruence with Planned Learning
2. Authenticity of Assessment
3. Students’ Consultation about Assessment
4. Transparency of Assessment
5. Students’ Capabilities

The five-scale instrument Students’ Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) was used by Koul Fisher, and Earnest in 2005 to a large group of students in science classes. SPAQ was also

administered by Dhindsa, Omar, and Waldrup in 2007 to upper secondary Science students. Sayed Ahmad Javid Mussawy too used it in 2009 and Kwok in 2011. A part of this questionnaire was used by Harriet Lowe in 2022 to know about the association between the intended purpose of assessment and students' perceptions of assessment. Here in this study, this questionnaire was administered to undergraduate English language learners enrolled in the universities of Central Punjab. The statements were divided into four categories. Since the main focus of this study is formative assessment so these categories were set as per the focus of this study. These four categories are:

1. Assessment Objectives
2. Communication with students
3. Feedback
4. Self and Peer Assessment

The scale was also modified from the following five-point scale:

5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3= neutral, 2= disagree, 1= strongly disagree

to a four-point scale:

1= Never, 2= Sometimes, 3= Often, 4= Always.

Keeping in mind the level of students, the option 'neutral' was omitted to avoid confusion.

Data Analysis:

All the responses were first entered into excel sheets and coded. Besides descriptive statistics of English language university teachers and undergraduate language learners enrolled in universities of Central Punjab, different analyses were run for each data set using the SPSS software. Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire was distributed to undergraduate language learners across four faculties: Arts and humanities, Business and management, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences. In order to compare and contrast the perceptions of students from these faculties, one-way ANOVA was performed in addition to descriptive and statistical analysis for hypotheses testing. The results highlighted the points of agreement and disagreement between students of different faculties on assessment practices in English language classrooms.

Data Presentation, Interpretation and Findings.

Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) was distributed to 1400 undergraduate English language learners in the universities of Central Punjab. These learners ranged across four faculties: Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Business and Management and Arts and Humanities. 1345 questionnaires were returned, out of which 1311 responses were found dependable and complete in every respect. These 1311 responses were first entered into excel sheets in direct response and coded form and then Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version: 23) was used for quantitative data analysis. Descriptive analysis and one way ANOVA were performed on this data to elicit results.

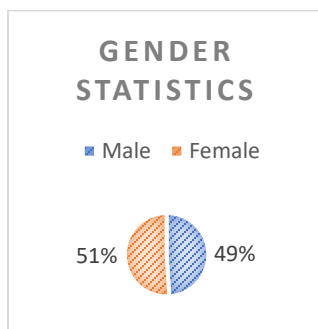
Reliability Statistics

Applying the internal consistency/reliability (Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient) to all variables, the reliability of the SPAQ was assessed. According to the data, the 24-item SPAQ showed a high reliability of 0.876

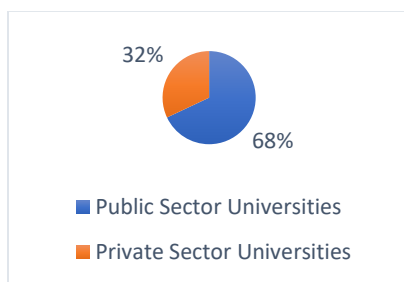
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.876	24

Descriptive Analysis

In the first step, data was analyzed to demonstrate English language learners' overall perception to Formative assessment in language classrooms. Descriptive analysis was performed on 24 items questionnaire divided into four categories/scales. The statistics showed that survey represented both genders almost equally. 49% of respondents were male while the rest of the sample i.e., 51% constituted of female participants.

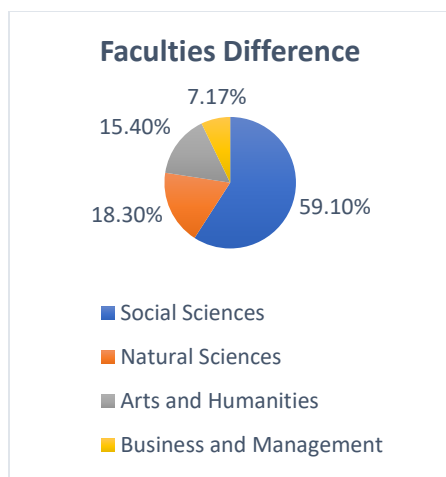


Descriptive analysis further revealed that 891 students belonged to public sector universities whereas, 420 respondents were enrolled in private sector universities. The statistics related to participants of public and private sector universities displayed the data as follows:



Central Punjab is a concentrated hub of higher education in terms of universities. Forty-two universities in total both from public and private sector are actively serving the nation. Out of 1311 respondents who participated in this survey 32% enrolled in private sector universities whereas, 68% of respondents were studying in public sector universities.

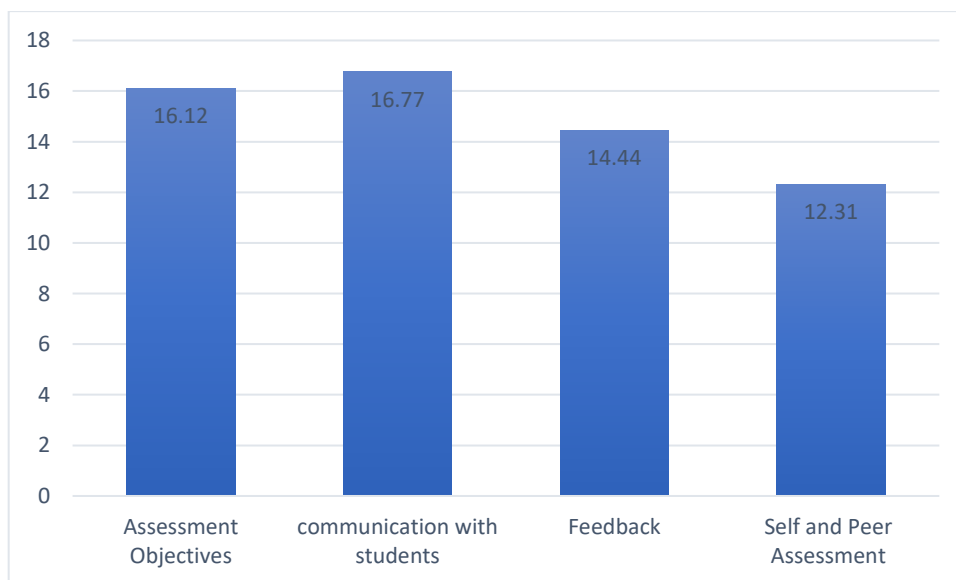
As discussed above, the SPAQ was distributed to English language learners enrolled in four different faculties: faculty of Arts and Humanity, Business and Management, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences. The statistics displayed details about the number of respondents who participated in this survey study from various faculties.



The figure shows that the maximum number of respondents (59.10%) was enrolled in the faculty of social sciences which offers a variety of programs at undergraduate level. 18.30% respondents belonged to the faculty of Natural sciences. 15.40% and 7.17% language learners belonged to Arts and Humanity and Business Management respectively.

Findings Research Question 1

The SPAQ was divided into four categories/scales for this study. These four scales are: Assessment objectives, Communication with students, feedback and self and peer assessment. The marking scale set to know about the frequency of formative assessment practices in Undergraduate English language classrooms included: never, sometimes, often and always. The following Figure shows the mean of language learners' responses from different faculties into relation to these scales.



Concluding from the data displayed through above figure, it can be stated that undergraduate English language learners in universities of central Punjab perceived English language teachers'

communication with students higher than other scales. It signifies that, teachers communicated well with students with regards to classroom assessment. The scale related to Assessment objectives was marked second by English language learners. Feedback ranked third, though the responses were most vibrant and dynamic in this scale whereas self and peer assessment were perceived the lowest amongst four scales by English language learners. Based on the statistical dynamics, individual items in each scale were analyzed separately to get a better insight into how students perceived various dimensions of formative assessment in English language classrooms.

Assessment Objectives	Never		sometime		Often		Always	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
My English language classroom assessment tests what I memorize	72	5.5	448	34.2	443	33.8	348	26.5
My English language classroom assessment tests what I understand	51	3.9	301	23.0	449	34.2	510	38.9
How I am assessed is similar to what I do in class	87	6.6	443	33.8	445	33.9	336	25.6
I am asked questions to test my factual knowledge about English language	130	9.9	454	34.6	399	30.4	328	25.0
I am asked questions to arouse critical thinking	148	11.3	457	34.9	388	29.6	318	24.3
I am assessed as per my language abilities	108	8.2	424	32.3	425	32.4	354	27.0

Six items constituted this scale. Each item related what could possibly be an objective of a language assessment. These assessment objectives ranged from assessing crammed factual knowledge of students to their being able to inscribe critical evaluation. Students responded positively to these items as the scores in ‘never’ option were consistently low. 38.9% students perceived that their language assessments were always targeted at assessing the comprehension of students. 34.9% of students perceived that assessment sometimes was based on such questions as brought out their ability to think and evaluate a material critically whereas 34.6% learners reported that sometimes the focus of an assessment was to check factual knowledge about English language; the definitions, rules of grammar etc. In the same vein 34.2% learners chose ‘sometimes’ option to state that objective of their English language classroom was to test how well they could memorize something. Class participation and assessing language ability were given higher credit as the objective of language assessments. 32.4% students perceived that often the objective of a language assessment was the self-proclaimed objective i.e. evaluating a language learners language ability that how well he can use English language in different scenarios. 33.9% perceived that their assessment constituted of all they did in classroom from class participation to classroom behavior thus adding a broader perspective to language classroom assessments.

Communication with students	Never		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%

I am told by my English language teacher about the assessment (quiz, assignment etc.) being used	122	9.3	304	23.2	328	25.0	557	42.5
I am aware how my English language assessment will be marked	122	9.3	308	23.5	361	27.5	520	39.7
My English language teacher considers students' opinion on how they should be assessed	100	7.6	338	25.8	376	28.7	497	37.9
I am told in advance when I am being assessed	145	11.1	390	29.7	428	32.6	348	26.5
My English language teacher gives clear directions about what is needed in the assessment tasks	67	5.1	269	20.5	349	26.6	626	47.7
I am informed about assessment results as soon as possible	91	6.9	318	24.3	369	28.1	533	40.7

This assessment scale was perceived highest by English language learners as compared to other scales of SPAQ. Students perceived that their teachers had good communication with students regarding classroom assessment. They were properly informed well before time about an assessment type which was to be used to assess English language learners' academic performance. They were also given instruction on what was expected of them in an assessment and how they should attempt a specific language assessment. It was also perceived by 37.9% students that their English language teachers sought their opinion about the way they should be assessed and which type of assessment they considered more fruitful to their learning. Thus, they were given an opportunity to co-design language assessments. 39.7% students reported that their teachers shared rubric before assessment making students aware of the criteria to be employed to assess English language assessments. With regards to communication of assessment results, 40.7% learners agreed that their teachers shared assessment results as soon as possible. This scale was perceived by English language learners in a highly positive manner as for five out of six items the highest number of responses was marked in the 'always' option. However, the only significant value in the 'never' option (11.1%) was observed regarding before-hand intimation of an assessment. This was the only item in this scale where students marked 'often' option in contrast to other items.

Feedback	Never		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
I get timely feedback on English language assessment tasks	134	10.2	339	25.9	380	29.0	458	34.9
Feedback is in the form of comments	179	13.7	409	31.2	351	26.8	372	28.4
Feedback is provided in the form of grades or marks	184	14.0	276	21.1	319	24.3	532	40.6
I am told about my strengths and weaknesses	255	19.5	398	30.4	328	25.0	330	25.2

My teacher keeps a record of how much I have improved compared to my earlier performance in language learning	219	16.7	350	26.7	297	22.7	445	33.9
My English language teachers guide me how I can learn from my mistakes	117	8.9	283	21.6	288	22.0	623	47.5

The third scale of SPAQ contains items related to feedback provided to English language learners on their performance in language assessments. This scale presented exciting responses from English language learners enrolled in different undergraduate programs in universities of Central Punjab. The ‘never’ response showed significant presence though still except for two items, all other items were perceived as an ‘always’ practice in language classrooms by language learners. The timely provision of corrective feedback was highest positively perceived practice. The learners (47.5%) that English language teachers guided them how to learn from their mistakes and do well in upcoming assessments while 8.9% learners perceived that their teachers never guided them about correction of mistakes. It was highly agreed upon by 40.6% students that feedback was provided in the form of marks and grades while 14% perceived that marks and grades awarded to them were never a form of feedback. Another item related to feedback in the form of comments was perceived by 31.2% students as a sometimes classroom assessment practice. 13.7% students, however perceived that they never received feedback in the form of comments from their English language teachers. 34.9% learners perceive that they always received timely feedback on language assessment tasks. They were always guided and corrected by their teachers. Probably this timely feedback made 33.9% learners perceive that their English language teachers maintain a record of their growth as a language learner. They perceived that their teachers were cognizant of how far the learning outcomes had been achieved and how much a learner had improved as compared to his previous performance in English language assessment. 16.7% language learners, however, did not agree with it and held that their teachers were never into comparing their current and previous academic growth. This item marked second highest value in the ‘never’ option. 30.4% language learners perceived that their language teachers sometimes informed them about their strengths and weaknesses but 19.5% language learners perceived that they were never informed the areas where they did well and the areas where they still needed to work hard. This item marked the highest ‘never’ option value for this scale built upon feedback in English language classrooms.

Self and Peer Assessment	Never		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
I get guidance to assess my own work	76	5.8	340	25.9	352	26.8	543	41.4
I get opportunity to assess my own learning	68	5.2	370	28.2	362	27.6	511	39.0

I am encouraged to interact with my classmates in group activities	84	6.4	307	28.2	325	24.8	595	45.4
I get guidance to assess my class fellows' work	96	7.3	402	30.7	369	28.1	444	33.9
I get opportunity to assess my class fellows' language learning	116	8.8	455	34.7	334	25.5	406	31.0
My teacher encourages students to provide feedback on one another' s performance in English language classrooms	145	11.1	381	29.1	279	21.3	506	38.6

This scale was adapted with a focus on English language learners' engagement with their language teachers and with co-learners too. The items pertaining to this scale were used to measure the frequency of such classroom assessment activities which made learners behave as a community. Out of six items in this scale, only one item was perceived as a 'sometimes' option by majority of English language learners, for all other items, 'always' was marked by majority of respondents. The 'never' option also did not show any significant values in this scale. It was interesting to note that 45.4% respondents perceived their teachers always quite encouraging towards students' interaction in English language classrooms. 41.4% undergraduate English language learners perceived that self-assessment conducted in English language classrooms was always a guided activity which means it was done under teachers' supervision. 39% students perceived that they were always provided with an opportunity to assess their own learning and mark their own improvement as a language learner. While providing response on item related to peer assessment, 33.9% students reported that they always received guidance from their teacher as how to assess their co-learners' English language assessment tasks. This item, however, marked the lowest values among items receiving high values in 'always' option. Almost similarly, 34.7% language learners perceived that they were sometimes provided with an opportunity to assess their class fellows' language learning. However, 38.6% respondents perceived that their teachers always encouraged them to provide feedback on their class fellows' performance in English language assessment tasks. The responses of learners to the items in this scale showed that they were always encouraged and guided to get engaged in such assessment practices that could enhance class participation and team work.

Findings R. Q. 2

The second research question dealt with gauging the affinity among perceptions of language learners from different faculties on formative assessment. In order to get an answer to this question, the following numeri values were considered.

Average scale-item mean, average item standard deviation and standard error results for

department differences in SPAQ overall scale scores

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Arts and Humanity	202	2.54	1.234	.087	2.37	2.72
Business and Commerce	94	2.54	1.094	.113	2.32	2.77
Natural Sciences	240	2.75	1.221	.079	2.60	2.91
Social Sciences	775	2.84	1.160	.042	2.76	2.92
Total	1311	2.76	1.183	.033	2.69	2.82

A descriptive comparison of the standard error, standard deviation, and average item means of undergraduate English language learners' perceptions of assessments in English language classrooms based on four faculties is presented in the above table.

Comparison of Perceptions of Students

To look for variations in how students felt about classroom evaluations between the four faculties, a one-way ANOVA was employed. Within these faculties, there was a significant difference in the way that students perceived classroom evaluation ($F(3,316.279) = 4.422, p = .005$). Every comparison was examined at $p < .05$.

Robust Tests of Equality of Means

	Statistic*	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	4.422	3	316.279	.005

**Significant at $p = .05$*

Fisher LSD post-hoc comparison showed that the social science department ($M = 2.84, 95\% \text{ CI } [2.76, 2.92]$) had substantially higher perceptions ratings than the natural science department ($M = 2.75, 95\% \text{ CI } [2.60, 2.91], p = .392$). According to post-hoc comparisons of the four departments, the department of business ($M = 2.54, 95\% \text{ CI } [2.32, 2.77]$) and the department of arts and humanities ($M = 2.54, 95\% \text{ CI } [2.37, 2.72]$) did not show statistically significant differences at p

<.05. The Arts and Humanities were statistically significant when compared to Natural and Social Science at $p = .002$. At $p = .022$, the comparison between the Business and Social Science departments was statistically significant. At $p = .989$, $p = .140$, the comparison of the Business Department with the Arts & Humanities and Natural Science departments was not statistically significant.

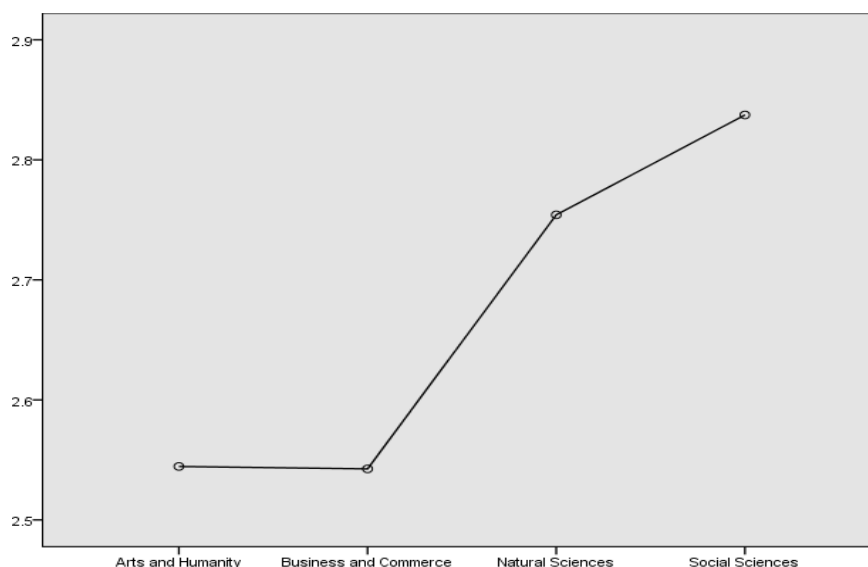
Departments	Mean Differences	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Arts and Humanity vs Business and Commerce	.002	.147	.989	-.29	.29
Arts and Humanity vs Social science	-.293*	.093	.002	-.48	-.11
Business and Commerce vs Natural Science	-.212	.143	.140	-.49	.07
Business and Commerce vs Social Science	-.295*	.129	.022	-.55	-.04
Natural Sciences vs Social Science	-.083	.087	.339	-.25	.09
Natural Science vs Arts and Humanity	.293*	.093	.002	.11	.48

Average scale item mean and difference

rences, Standard Error, ANOVA results for department differences in SPAQ overall scale score

sample consisted of 1311 students, 775 Social Science, 240 Natural Science, 202 Arts and Humanity and 94 from the Business and Commerce department. * Significant at $p = .05$

The faculty wise mean average score of students' perceptions is compared graphically in Figure 2. Means Plot



All things considered; the data reveals that there are variations amongst the overall perceptions of students from different faculties regarding English language classroom assessment. Nonetheless, the overall mean value (2.76) for all four faculties indicates that the perceptions of undergraduate English language learners about formative assessment practices in English language classrooms of universities of central Punjab are generally favorable and positive.

Scale-wise perceptions of English language learners were also compared for different faculties. To look for variations in students' perceptions about different scales of SPAQ between the four faculties, a one-way ANOVA was employed. Within these faculties, there was only one significant difference in the way that students perceived different scales of language classroom assessments. Every comparison was examined at $p < .05$.

ANOVA

Scales		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Assessment Objectives	Between Groups	143.150	4	35.787	1.997	.093
	Within Groups	23403.083	1306	17.920		
	Total	23546.233	1310			
Communication with students	Between Groups	838.744	4	209.686	7.524	.000
	Within Groups	36395.349	1306	27.868		
	Total	37234.093	1310			

Feedback	Between Groups	442.004	4	110.501	5.790	.000
	Within Groups	24923.398	1306	19.084		
	Total	25365.402	1310			
Self and Peer Assessment	Between Groups	399.957	4	99.989	5.206	.000
	Within Groups	25083.673	1306	19.206		
	Total	25483.631	1310			

* *Significant at $p = .05$*

The data showed that three scales: communication with students, feedback and self and peer assessment showed significant student perceptions across four faculties. It led to the impression that English language learners across the selected four faculties shared approximately same perceptions on how English language teachers communicated with their students, how feedback was provided and how assessment activities like self and peer assessment were conducted in undergraduate English language classrooms to create engagement and interaction. According to data, the four faculties showed congruence with reference to these three scales as all maintained the same p value (0.00). The first scale, assessment objectives, however, showed disparity among four faculties as its p value (0.93) was more than 0.05 and, thus, was not significant. It means that English language learners from different faculties had different perceptions about the target and objectives of language classroom assessment. Therefore, except for one scale as to ‘what the language assessment really tests’, there was congruence in classroom assessment perceptions of undergraduate English language learners from different universities of Central Punjab.

Hypotheses Testing:

This finding leads to the rejection of Null Hypothesis which proclaimed congruence among perceptions of undergraduate English language learners. Data endorsed a disparity signifying that English language learners perceived classroom assessment practices differently. It led to acceptance of alternate hypothesis.

**Discussion and Conclusion:**

The findings show that English language learners perceived communication with students as the most effective element of formative assessment. It was also underlined that clear communication regarding assessment design and design not only enhanced language learning but also improved academic outcome. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) endorsed that when language learners have a clear idea of what is expected of them, they put up a relatively good show. The study also aligns with Wiliam (2011) which emphasized that meaningful communication between language teacher and language learner results in productive classroom assessment providing room for timely feedback and guided learning. Timely feedback was perceived as a corner stone of effective formative assessment. Hattie and Timperley (2007) viewed feedback as ‘one of the most influential’ factors in language learning. The demand of this study’s participants for more individual specific feedback, aligns well with carless (2006) who favored ‘dialogic feedback’ which would be a two-way teacher-learner interaction which focused on learners’ engagement in classroom assessment with increased confidence. Price et al (2010), however, denounced the scope of extensive feedback as it might sometimes overwhelm learners and hamper their abilities to discover their own progress by relying too much on language teachers’ feedback. The study also highlighted language learners’ reservations regarding peer and self-assessment. The same was proposed by studies (Brown: 2017, Topping: 2009 & Shephard: 2000) that assessment strategies like these are not suitable for every educational environment. These might result in self-regulation of learners but could be biased and difficult to conduct most of the times. The observed variance in perceptions of language learners regarding classroom assessment practices calls for a more carefully crafted and tailored unified assessment plan. The reported disparity among departments can harm the effectiveness of formative assessment. The same was voiced by Black and Wiliam (1998) who supported the need for standardization of assessment activities across board. However, the scholars like Ecclestone (2007) seem to have contrasting views and consider that over-standardization leaves little scope for innovative assessment methods to cater indigenous needs of different departments.

Formative assessment has proven itself to be the way forward. Flexibility and adaptability are the key factors that make it full of scope for language instructors and language learners. However, standardization and adhering to certain protocols should not be ignored. Learners’ voice should also be given its due as they are the ones directly involved in the process of second language acquisition.

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