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Research Paper

Classroom Participation Scoring in Iranian Private Language Schools: Teachers' Perceptions of Holistic and Analytic Scoring

Vida Javanshir¹, Javad Gholami^{2*}, Zhila Mohammadnia³

¹Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Language, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran
v.javanshir@urmia.ac.ir

²Associate Professor, Department of English Language, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran
j.gholami@urmia.ac.ir

³Assistant Professor, Department of English Language, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran
z.mohammadnia@urmia.ac.ir

Abstract

Many L2 teachers baffle when it comes to classroom participation scoring(CPS) of their students. Through a researcher-made questionnaire, this study explored EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom participation scoring(CPS) in Iranian private language schools. Moreover, it investigated the participants' views on a newly-developed objective and analytic rubric as part of this study for CPS. To this end, 120 EFL teachers completed the questionnaire on the typical CPS framework they used in English classrooms. Detailed analysis of teachers' perceptions of CPS indicated that most Iranian EFL teachers used holistic and subjective CPS approach and had little knowledge of the objective methods of CPS. After having been introduced to the proposed analytic CPS rubric, the participating teachers showed a positive attitude to the rubric and reported the rubric's applicability and flexibility in assessing EFL learners' classroom participation. The findings suggest adopting more objective assessment rubrics for CPS.

Keywords: *Classroom Participation, Objective Assessment Rubric, Private English Language Schools*

Introduction

According to Andrade and Heritage (2017), the concept of Classroom Participation (CP) and its assessment has not been adequately dealt with. Teachers have been forced to regularly report students' grades to the school staff without being informed on an objective CP rubric. Without a doubt, such practices engender student anxiety and superficial learning. The CP score is assigned to students in the middle and end of the semester by considering the various criteria like



dynamism, progress, and assignment. In other words, the level of students' participation in group activities, their level of progress, and the quality of homework are the leading measures in the CP score (Panadero and Alqassab, 2019).

Panadero and Jonsson (2013) believe that a series of illustrative scoring mechanisms developed by instructors, learners, or other assessors is called a rubric. They add that rubrics can enhance inter-rater and intra-rater reliability and even an improved sense of clarity that can enable users better understand, schedule, and execute their tasks with reduced anxiety via positive washback. Rubrics are also used to assess learning activities and also to teach students to analyze, represent what learners know and how much improvement they have shown, and, most significantly, direct them to use the guidance of the instructor (Andrade, Du, and Mycek, 2010; Arter and McTighe, 2001; Rezaei and Lovorn, 2010). They, therefore, act as formative evaluations that foster assessment for learning (Carless, 2005). When students and teachers think of assessment, they may only focus on the final exams because there is no room for classroom participation in their minds.

Classroom participation (CP) and its assessment are integrated, and it plays an essential role in the educational system to find the effectiveness of instruction (Mackenzie and Wood-Bradley, 2014). Despite the many beliefs about being fearful of classroom participation for a variety of reasons such as teachers and students' personality, cultural, gender issues, and fear of professors or peer criticisms (Mackenzie and Wood-Bradley, 2014; Vandrick, 2000; Weaver and Qi, 2006), there have been several studies that have found it a useful educational tool benefiting learning, speaking, listening, reading, writing skills, and critical thinking (Shepard and Wieman, 2020). Writing rubrics designed by various researchers (e.g., Allen and Knight, 2009) seem to standardize essays and paragraphs.

There are concerns that rubrics may also restrict the evaluation of a rater and the approach of a learner by hyper-focusing learners on certain aspects of a task, expressly validated by the evaluation method (Wilson, 2006). Using rubrics has pros and cons. Some have indicated that rubrics can encourage an emphasis on error (Balester, 2012). Others figure out that rubrics are unable to catch or promote voice production. (Matsuda and Jeffery, 2012).

The idea of CPS, which has a significant share of final exam score, is subjective in Iranian language schools. In leading language schools in Urmia, between 40-60 percent of final scores come from CPS, based on the researcher's personal teaching experience. Still, there have not been enough studies to explore the method and objective rubric for scoring participation. Although these final scores have high importance in making decisions about whether students will fail or go to a higher level, there is a lack of research concerning this topic. Hence, the current study was an attempt to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of how classroom participation is scored in private Iranian language schools.

Literature Review

Rubrics are assessment criteria for the evaluation of complicated learning tasks (Andrade, 2000; Andrade et al., 2009; Becker, 2016; East, 2009; Mertler, 2001). For the scoring systems, the correct use of rubrics will direct educators and make the grading process clearer, equitable, and more structured (Stergar, 2005). Scoring rubrics are becoming a more popular evaluation practice for assessing students' performance in educational settings and higher education (Ene and Kosobucki, 2016; Panadero and Jonsson, 2013; Rezaei and Lovorn, 2010). When the requirements for rubrics are expressed during the teaching, and when changes are permitted, rubrics may also act as formative evaluation aids. Although the reliability and validity of the use

of rubrics have been discussed and researched (East, 2009; Rezaei and Lovorn, 2010), rubrics have been observed to test elaborate multi-dimensional performances in general validly and to some degree reliably (East, 2009; Panadero and Jonsson, 2013). Both subjective and objective rubrics are critical evaluation methods within the educational program for integrating summative and formative evaluation activities. Holistic rubrics set clear standards for educators to determine the finished product as a whole, and they are more product-oriented (East, 2009). In contrast, analytical rubrics include individually assessing each sub-skill of the product and setting various standards of work quality with the corresponding ranking, thereby enabling the potential for self-assessment and process-oriented practices. (Mertler, 2001; Rezaei and Lovorn, 2010).

Andrade (2000) and Andrade et al. (2010) state that to help students enhance their results, rubrics produce comprehensive insightful and instructive feedback, helping them to reflect on their deficiencies. Andrade et al. (2010) studied the link between the scores of middle school students for a writing project and a process involving students in creating requirements and rubric self-assessment. The intervention included the process of creating a list of parameters for convincing paragraph writing, checking a written rubric, and using the rubric to self-assess the first version using a template essay to guide the procedure. Research results include the major impact on overall paragraph scores of treatment, gender, grade level, writing time, and prior accomplishment, as well as significant effect on scores for each parameter on the scoring rubric. The findings indicated that reading a model, creating requirements, and using a self-assessment rubric could assist middle school students to generate more productive writing.

Becker (2016) tried to explore the relationship between the participation of students in the production of the scoring rubric and their writing success on ESL students who study intensive English in the US. It reported that learners participating in the production of the scoring rubric to measure their writing output demonstrated more significant progress and change than those who were either exposed to the rubric or contributed to the control group. The discussions created during the co-construction process allowed the participants to clarify the various levels of their results better, resulting in an improved overall quality of writing. The interactions created during the co-construction process allow participants to explain the various levels of their results better, resulting in a better total quality of writing. Ghaffar, Khairallah, and Salloum (2020) lately examined the influence of co-constructed rubrics on the writing skills of L2 learners and their views of co-constructed rubrics as a method for learning and evaluation that helps generate input beneficial to writing learning and ability growth. Writing pre and post-tests for treatment and control groups, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the teacher and L2 students before and after the treatment, and a questionnaire were the data-gathering tools. The findings indicated that the mean score of the treatment class increased substantially in the post-test of writing, whereas the mean score of the control class decreased. Class observations observed positive improvements in the nature of the classroom and an increased degree of interaction and involvement between participants.

Despite many studies that have been done on classroom participation assessment, its significance in teaching and learning (Ketabi and Ketabi, 2014; Morningstar et al.; 2015; Sheppard and Wieman, 2020; Weaver and Qi, 2005), and the awareness of teachers and students of the positive outcomes of classroom participation and its impact on students' grades, there is little student participation in our language schools classrooms. Unfortunately, despite students' low participation, teachers give them inflated scores that are not correlated with their real abilities or final scores. Investigation in this area indicates that there are no clear criteria for assessing students' class participation, while it is an essential evaluation tool in all language schools. Thus, there was a need for some modifying in pedagogy and classroom assessment to encourage

students to participate and be more active and establish a practical framework for assessing CP to make it fair. The solution for this problem could be finding a clear framework and finally producing a systematic rubric that could be practical in the Iranian EFL context. Based on the objective, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom participation scoring?

RQ2: How do Iranian EFL teachers perceive the implementation of an objective framework for scoring classroom participation?

Method

Design of the Study

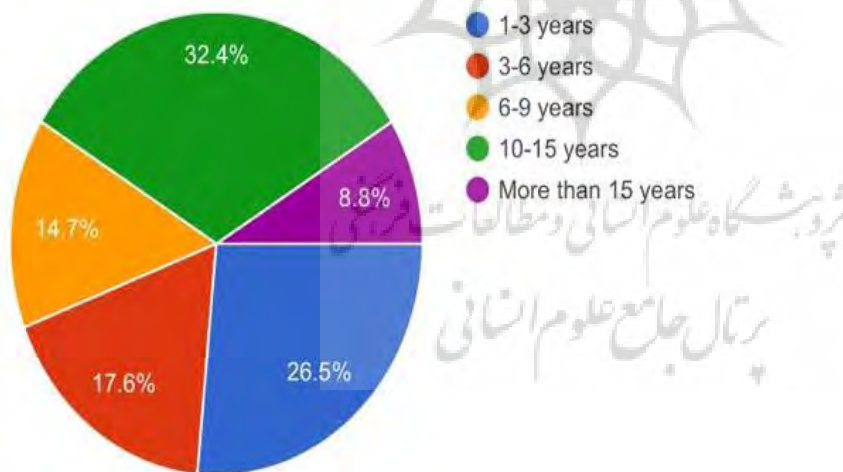
The current study was aimed to investigate classroom participation scoring and provide an objective and systematic rubric. Therefore, an exploratory and descriptive design was adopted to meet this aim.

Participants

The sample of this study comprised 120 EFL teachers in different private language centers of Urmia, Iran. Figure 1 below shows the demographic information of the participants in terms of age, years of teaching experience, etc. As it is seen, more than half of the participants had teaching experience of fewer than ten years, and 41 percent had experienced teaching more than ten years.

Figure 1

Participants' Demographic Information



Instrument

The main instrument used in the current study was a 38-item researcher-made questionnaire with close-ended and open-ended questions. The authors designed the questionnaire to review the literature about CPS. In designing the questionnaire different sources and articles related to the CP scoring were studied. Then, the key constructs in the categories under study were collected. When developed, the questionnaire was emailed it to three university professors to get feedback

and obtain its validity as a scale. The questionnaire was revised after getting feedback from experts and was piloted with 20 of the participant teachers. During piloting, some of the items were discarded and replaced with some others to be understandable for the teachers.

Another instrument was an analytic or objective scoring rubric with open-ended questions used in semi-structured interviews. The analytic or objective rubric was designed and developed based on the following five essential categories related to students' participation:

1. Punctuality/Discipline (Score: 5)
2. Active Participation and Engagement (Score: 10)
3. Voluntary Participation and Initiation (Score: 10)
4. Attentiveness (Score: 5)
5. Assignment Completion (Score: 10)

Each category included some sub-categories which had to be observed by the instructors while scoring. For instance, the category of Voluntary Participation and Initiation was divided into various sub-classifications such as answering teachers' questions and elicitations, initiating discussions/new ideas, and assisting teachers in teaching better, and mini-presentation.

After developing the objective CP rubric, it was piloted with 20 EFL teachers of two major language institutes, one in Tabriz and the other in Urmia to check its validity.

Procedure

In order to conduct the study, first the above-mentioned questionnaire was developed and then it was distributed among 120 teachers to elicit their attitudes regarding CPS. The completed questionnaires were then collected and scored by the authors. From the initial 150 administered questionnaires, 30 were excluded from analysis due to incompleteness. So, the data obtained from 120 teachers were analyzed using frequency and percentage values. Finally, 100 EFL teachers were required to review the objective CP rubric and answer the semi-structured interview questions. The reason for using semi-structured interview questions was to increase the validity of the research and also to "give a new insight into a social phenomenon as they allow the respondents to reflect and reason on a variety of subjects in a different way" (Folkestad, 2008, p.1). The method of analysis chosen for the interview section was a qualitative approach of thematic analysis, and it was reported in the form of extracts. The interview results were extracted and analyzed manually, and for the aim of reliability, 30% of the data was rechecked and reanalyzed independently by a second researcher (a PhD graduate of TEFL) who was informed about the purpose of the study. The second rater coded 30% of the data, taken randomly from the corpus, and finally, the inter-rater reliability was reported to be 0.95.

Results

Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of CPS

As already stated, a researcher-made questionnaire was designed to elicit EFL teachers' perceptions of the current status of CPS in Iranian language institutes. The first question of the scale after the demographic information was about teachers' level of knowledge of CPS criteria. Surprisingly, 23.5% of teachers had no familiarity with CPS criteria, and 50% had insufficient knowledge, whereas 26.5% knew about them. More than 80% of the teachers allocated less than 50 percent of the total score to CPS in the language school wherein they worked, and 20% of the teachers regarded 50% or more to CPS. The teachers' agreements on the weight of CP score in the final score were 58.8%, and the rest that is 41.2%, did not accept the weight. It means that

41.2% of EFL teachers negatively viewed the currently used CPS rubrics in the language institutes.

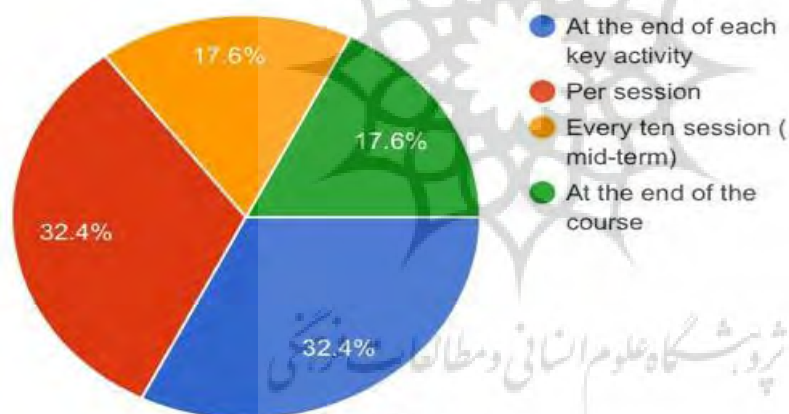
Another questionnaire item was about the percentages that EFL teachers suggested to be allocated to CP Score in their language school. Based on the detailed analysis of the scale, 20.6% of the participants gave the percentage of 60% or more to CP Score in their language school, 26.5% gave the percentage of 30 to CPS, 44.1% of the teachers allocated the percentage of 40, and 8.8% of the teachers gave the percentage of 50. In general, it can be concluded that just a minority of Iranian teachers (about 30%) allocated the percentage of 50 and more to CP Score in their language school, while majority of them (about 70%) suggested the percentages between 30 to 40.

In reaction to another item of the questionnaire, 58.8% of the teachers recorded CPS on the attendance sheet, 29.3% on their notebook, 11.9% on other documents. Surprisingly, no one selected CPS checklist, and some of them stated that there are no CPS checklists available to the teachers in institutes. Also, 66.7% of the teachers recorded CPS by scores, 13.5% in percentages, and 19.8% by letters (A, B, C, D).

Another focus of the questionnaire was on the information regarding the normal time of assigning CP scores in the school. Figure 2 below presents the results for this issue:

Figure 2

Time of assigning CP scores



As it is seen in the figure, the rates of semester such as ‘at the end of each key activity’ and ‘per session’ were the same (32/4%), and the rates of each midterm and final course were the same (17.6%).

Another item of the questionnaire was: What kind of CPS approach do you prefer?
Subjective (Holistic) Objective/analytic (based on some clear criteria)

**holistic scoring: holistic scoring gives the learners a single, overall assessment score for the performance as a whole*

**analytic scoring: Analytic scoring is based on certain predefined factors and provides the learners with at least a rating score for each criterion.*

The results indicated that 58.8% of teachers preferred objective scoring compared to the holistic one (41.2%).

To develop an objective rubric for CPS, some factors were considered vital according to the degree of their importance shown in Table 1 below. The participants were required to go through them and rate them based on their importance for inclusion in the analytic rubric for CPS.

Table 1

Factors affecting CP score assignment

Factors to consider for assigning CP scores	Important (%)	Slightly important (%)	Not important (%)
27. More use of L2 and less use of L1	73.5	0	26.5
28. Paying attention to assignments' deadlines and good time management by learners	82.4	14.7	2.9
29. High amount of motivation	79.4	20.6	0
30. Low amount of anxiety	61.8	26.5	11.8
31. High amount of autonomy	58.8	35.3	5.9
32. High amount of willingness to communicate	85.3	14.7	0
33. Volunteering	64.7	29.4	5.9
34. Asking questions	61.8	35.3	2.9
35. Asking for clarification	64.7	29.4	5.9
36. Guessing the meaning of unknown words	64.7	32.4	2.9
37. Attentiveness (listening attentively to others and listening materials; not distracting others; acknowledging teacher and peer feedback)	91.2	8.8	0
38. Offering constructive or creative suggestions for improving the class	58.8	35.3	5.9

According to Table 1, 73.5% of the participants reported that they gave importance to the first factor, that is, 'more use of L2 and less use of', while 26.5% reported that they did not see this factor as important. 82.4% of teachers selected 'important' for the second factor, 'paying attention to assignments' deadlines and good time management by learners'. 14.7% of teachers believed that the second factor is 'slightly important', whereas 2.9% of them reported the 'importance' of this factor. As the results in the rest of the table indicate, more than half of the teachers (50% to 90%) reported the importance of such factors as 'high amount of motivation', 'low amount of anxiety', 'volunteering', 'asking questions', and 'clarification and guessing the meaning'. Also, 90% of teachers reported that they give importance to 'attentiveness'. Consequently, the rates of 'slightly important' and 'not important' were very low compared to the sub-category of 'important'.

As it is obvious, EFL teachers had various experiences of ongoing and prevalent classroom participation scoring in Iran, and based on the results of questionnaire analysis, it can be claimed that most of the current CPS recording in a context like Iran is subjective, and there is no clear and established rubric for CPS scoring. In fact, the scores do not reflect participation; they rather show teachers' personal bias and misperception, which is unfair. In terms of future direction and to avoid teachers' using unreliable CPS rubrics, Mello (2010) argues that 'giving students some voice in how their involvement is assessed can go some way to explain CP scoring criteria and rubrics to students, and this cannot be gained except using an objective and standard CPS rubrics.

One reason for unfairness in CP scoring can be related to the lack of analytic and objective rubric. Another one can be the reluctance of EFL learners to participate in classroom activities.

Teachers' Views on the Objective Rubric for CP

The results of the interview indicated that most of the teachers (90%) had a positive attitude towards using an objective CP rubric; they believed that such a rubric can be used as a standard one, and teachers can free themselves from the limitations of using a subjective-based CPS rubric.

A small number of teachers (10%) provided the drawbacks that their reason for not favoring an objective rubric was that such a rubric could not lead to consistency among the language teachers and, at the same time, it can be subjective as well. Also, they believed that it might not be practical for big size classrooms. In response to the interview open-ended questions, the teachers said that objectivity, paying attention to students' engagement, punctuality, and voluntary participation are the merits of an analytic rubric. The demerits, they asserted, were being time-consuming, requiring a high degree of energy, demotivating lazy students, paying no attention to shy students, and giving high scores to the less important activities.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate language teachers' perceptions regarding the objective and analytic CPS rubric as a learning and assessment tool. As the results revealed, most of the teachers had a positive attitude towards the analytic or objective rubric, though they mentioned some negative points about it. Specifically, teachers in response to interview questions expressed higher satisfaction of the analytic rubric; they appreciated becoming better aware of the criteria for assessment and gaining insight into the criteria for CPS. Thus, based on the results, EFL teachers can use the rubric in their English classrooms and explain its details to their students to make them aware of the process of CPS assessment. This is the suggestion of some other past researchers (Heitink et al., 2016; Taras, 2006). Nonetheless, Lee (2007) indicated that most of the input and suggestion from educators examine summative rather than formative evaluation, that helps to evaluate learning instead of assessment for learning, while formative assessment or evaluation for learning offer many benefits, primarily helping students to understand the requirements, and allowing them to set learning goals and engage in self-evaluation. (Goto Butler and Lee, 2017; Lam, 2014; Xiao and Yang, 2019). These plus points enable students to know about their merits and demerits (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Xiao and Yang, 2019). Thus, for experiencing a practical formative assessment and using it as assessment for learning, learners should interact and engage in the process of feedback (Heitink et al., 2016; Sadler, 1989). The instructors too can draw upon formative assessment to improve their fairness and accountability in scoring CP and developing their voice with the newly- developed understanding of what each criterion represented.

Conclusion

Teachers in this study reported on their increased awareness and understanding of the assessment criteria in the objective rubric, and had considerable conceptions of the CPS rubric under the study. They liked to continue using the rubric and recommend other teachers to use it in their classrooms. The findings of this research unlocks the multifaceted problems of the relations of teachers' agency development when they become involved and comprehend the application of objectively scoring in their own assessment. Thus, teachers need to be more involved in

systematic and rigorous professional development in order to co-construct objective and analytical rubrics with students and use them as assessment and learning resources to make the most of their impact on CPS.

Finally, in connection with the procedures through which the present study was conducted, and though the study was done with 120 Iranian EFL teachers over a period of about eight months and the data collected over this interval with such sample size was rich enough to provide insights regarding the obtained results, the authors would like to recommend the replication of the study over a more extended period of time, with a larger size of teachers. The authors would also like to recommend the implementation of the proposed rubric in different university contexts where the medium of instruction is English and different grade levels, involving more participants. Such replications would help us know more about how the instructors' conceptions may change within diverse contexts.

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