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Original Article

Developing Speaking and Writing Skills through Continuous Assessments on English Literature among Tertiary Learners

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Abstract: The current study explores the role of continuous assessments in improving tertiary learners' language skills through literature-based courses in selected universities of Khulna, Bangladesh. The research deals with how assessment practices support the development of writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills, while highlighting challenges in current testing methods. A mixed method was applied combining quantitative data from two structured questionnaires with qualitative insights and interpretations from purposively selected students and teachers at three tertiary level institutions in Khulna, Bangladesh. In addition, two senior teachers were interviewed to provide deeper insights and to explore possible measures for improving learners' language skills based on the issues identified in the survey responses. Findings reveal that English literature courses serve as an effective medium to refine language proficiency. However, assessments often emphasize philosophical and thematic aspects over grammatical and linguistic skills. Continuous assessments were reported to develop writing, vocabulary, and, to a lesser extent, speaking and interpersonal skills. Limitations in feedback and practical task-based evaluation were also noted. The study concludes that multidimensional, practice-oriented assessment strategies, integrating interactive activities and timely constructive feedback, are fundamental for fostering English language development through literature-based courses.

Keywords: Continuous assessment, language skills, learning language through literature, creativity

Introduction

In tertiary level education, tests serve a vital role in determining the extent to which students meet the learning objectives set for them. They provide insights into students' academic achievements and areas for improvement. As Brown and Lee (2015) explain, a test is a systematic tool designed to measure a person's knowledge or ability in a specific domain, often through performance. In this regard, assessments not only measure learning outcomes but also highlight how well students have mastered the material and solved problems that may impede their academic progress. According to Nitko and Brookart (2007), assessment refers to the systematic collection of data used to make decisions about students, teaching practices, and curricula.

In Bangladesh, the syllabi of most tertiary-level English courses are literature-based, with a significant focus on literary texts at both the undergraduate and master's levels. The connection between language and literature is deeply intertwined, as literature uses language to convey intricate meanings and stimulate emotional responses. Lazar (1993) asserts that literature provides a rich source of material for prompting strong emotional feedbacks from students, engaging them holistically and offering opportunities for expressiveness.

Despite the potential benefits of using literature in language teaching, traditional assessment methods, such as paper-and-pencil tests, are often inadequate in capturing students' true language

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proficiency. These tests typically focus on memorization and recall rather than the practical application of language skills. As a result, they fail to provide an accurate reflection of students' abilities in speaking and writing, and limit opportunities for meaningful feedback that could support further language development.

On the other hand, continuous assessment offers a more comprehensive approach to evaluating language proficiency. Unlike traditional exams, continuous assessments such as role play, group discussion, creative writing, and presentations enable students to demonstrate their language skills in more dynamic and real-world contexts. By incorporating literature into these assessments, students can engage with language in a way that mirrors its use in daily communication, thus enhancing their proficiency in both academic and practical settings.

American linguist Dell Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence in 1967 that provides a theoretical framework for understanding language proficiency (Hymes, 1967). He emphasized that true language competence involves more than just knowledge of grammar; it requires the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts. Bachman's (1990) model of Communicative Language Ability further refines this idea by combining components such as organizational competence (knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and discourse) and pragmatic competence that is the ability to use language efficiently in diverse contexts. These models of communicative competence align with the goals of continuous assessment, which aims to assess not only linguistic knowledge but also the practical application of language skills in real-world situations. By examining both the advantages and challenges of continuous assessment methods, this study evaluates the effectiveness of the literature courses in improving speaking and writing skills of English and identify the barriers to their implementation in Bangladesh's current educational system.

Literature Review

Language testing is concerned with the extent to which a test can produce scores that accurately reflect a candidate's ability in a particular area of language use. Weir (2005) emphasizes that testing should reflect learners' actual ability in areas such as reading to extract main ideas, writing an argumentative essay, breadth of vocabulary knowledge, and spoken interaction with peers. Through testing procedures, learners' ability to understand a particular domain of knowledge can be evaluated along with their cognitive capability. In any learning system, cognitive ability plays a pivotal role. Therefore, testing should not merely measure memorized knowledge; rather, it should assess learners' performance and their ability to apply knowledge meaningfully.

In this regard, literature can function as an effective source for language learning. Lazar (1993) states that literature is particularly useful for developing students' abilities to infer meaning and make interpretations because literary texts are rich in multiple levels of meaning and require active involvement from the reader in identifying tacit insinuations and assumptions. Looking into literary pieces from different angles and practising different tasks while elucidating them can allow learners to develop a strong base of knowledge. Literary pieces in language learning also provide syntactical and lexical items in a more interesting way. Learners can learn syntactical features from literature with much enthusiasm. Literature can also enlarge learners' writing skill, as it contains various features of writing style such as variety in the formation and function of sentences, structural diversification, cohesiveness, and cohesion.

The relation between language and literature has also been strongly emphasized by Mehrotra (2017), who considers language and literature as two sides of the same coin in the teaching and learning process of any language. Thus, literature can be considered one of the most efficacious means to ennoble learners' language proficiency. Literature does not instate any particular kind of language; rather, it involves diverse patterns of language. Hence, it can give ample scope to explore language skills and help learners gain impressive command over those skills. In tertiary

level learning, where literature-based courses occupy an important part of the syllabus, this relationship becomes especially relevant.

The skills-based approach can also be marked as a significant measure in learning. It can provide a comparatively stress-free environment to learners and test givers. This approach aims to flourish the dexterity of learners to use strategies to solve complicated real-life situations and overcome difficulties. It can stimulate students' creative faculty, moderate their cognitive ability, and develop their psychomotor skill, as it allows them to improve interpersonal skills and explore their own ability more fully. El-Koumy (2002) points out several features and practices of the skills-based approach and indicates the roles of both test takers and learners in applying the skill-based learning process. He explains that this approach drew its theoretical roots from behavioural psychology and structural linguistics and views language as a collection of separate skills, each divided into subskills. In this framework, subskills may be taught through discrete-point testing.

The skills-based teaching approach is also identified as a competency-based or outcome-based approach that focuses on developing specific skills and abilities for the improvement of learners. Hence, it does not solely emphasize content knowledge; rather, it gives priority to the acquisition and application of practical skills relevant to real-world contexts. It emphasizes active learning through problem-solving activities, group discussions, oral presentations, case studies, debates, and real-world applications.

Hughes (1989) illustrates the significance of integrating testing with teaching. He recommends that testing should be made an integral part of assessment, and assessment an integral part of the teaching program. He also emphasizes that feedback from tests should be immediate and positive so that learners can understand their own performances and improve continuously. In addition, self-assessment should be made part of the teaching program so that learners can monitor their own progress. Hughes further notes that overall ability can be measured through several components, such as reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary.

The significance of continuous assessment has also been highlighted by later scholars. Zhan (2020) explains that continuous assessment does not only include checking students' progress; it also works on the check and balance of teaching strategies, teaching techniques, and the reflection of knowledge upon students' behavior. Abera et al. (2017) also indicates that continuous assessment helps teachers measure learners' level of progression throughout a course and assess their understanding before moving to the next concept. Therefore, literary texts can be used more effectively in assessment design at the tertiary level. However, while representing literary pieces in language learning, the development of stylistic, cognitive and linguistic skills should be prioritized rather than focusing only on a single aspect. Hence, the implementation of continuous assessments at the tertiary level can become an essential medium for improving learners' language efficiency.

Methodology

The researchers involved students and teachers from three selected universities in Khulna, Bangladesh to conduct the study. Students were selected from the undergraduate and graduate levels to ensure sufficient exposure to literature courses. A total of 125 students and 20 teachers were purposively selected to collect the necessary data. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that allows researchers to choose experienced participants relevant to the study objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data on perceptions and experiences regarding continuous assessment in literature courses were collected using two structured questionnaires with 5-point Likert scale items (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). The Likert-scale items measured agreement with statements related to language skill development, assessment methods, and classroom engagement. The questionnaire responses were summarized using descriptive analysis and interpreted to identify patterns and trends in participants' perceptions. Moreover, two senior teachers (coded as T1 and

T2) from the respondents were interviewed to explore what measures can be taken to improve tertiary learners' language skills in light of the issues reported by both teachers and students in the questionnaires. The interviews were conducted to provide deeper insights and to support the interpretation of the questionnaire findings. Thus, the study used both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) data, where the qualitative findings helped to explain and enrich the patterns observed in the survey responses. The following two tables depict the responses of the teachers and students on the development of speaking and writing skills of the English language through continuous assessment in English literature courses.

Table 1. Statistical data of teacher's responses

SL	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Course teachers apply different measures through continuous assessments on the courses of literature (such as, role playing, group discussion, pair discussion, debate, presentation, recitation, stage performance and creative writing).	50%	35%	10%	0%	5%
2	The questions of continuous assessments on literature mainly focus on philosophical and thematic aspects.	30%	45%	10%	15%	0%
3	Focusing on grammatical and linguistic aspects is scarcely found in case of testing on literature.	25%	40%	10%	15%	10%
4	Continuous assessments on English literary pieces help students develop writing skill, introduce with wide range of grammatical structures and variety of sentence patterns.	50%	35%	0%	10%	5%
5	Continuous assessments on literature enrich students' lexical resource and help them enhance their efficiency in speaking fluently.	25%	55%	20%	0%	0%
6	Tests on literature enable students to exhilarate critical thought faculty.	55%	30%	5%	5%	5%
7	Testing methods and techniques on literary pieces are satisfactory.	15%	20%	35%	25%	5%

Table 2. Statistical data of student's responses

SL	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	There is close relationship between language and literature.	41.60%	53.60%	4.80%	0%	0%
2	Through the continuous assessments, different measures are applied by course teacher (such as, role playing, group discussion, pair discussion, debate, presentation, recitation, stage performance, creative writing etc.).	11.20%	24%	13.60%	51.20%	0%
3	The questions of continuous assessments on literature mainly focus on philosophical and thematic aspects.	14.40%	51.20%	9.60%	24.80%	0%
4	Focusing on grammatical and linguistic aspects are scarcely found in case of testing on literature.	12%	54.40%	16%	17.60%	0%
5	Continuous assessments on English literary pieces help students develop writing skill; introduce with wide range of grammatical structures and variety of sentence patterns.	22.40%	40.80%	10.40%	26.40%	0%
6	Continuous assessments on literature enrich students' stock of words and help them develop the speaking skill.	30.40%	14.40%	0%	40.80%	0%
7	In classroom, literature helps students become active learners and develop interpersonal skills (such as, group discussion, leadership, pair work)	29.60%	35.20%	8.80%	26.40%	0%
8	Testing methods and techniques on literary pieces are satisfactory.	0%	18.40%	34.40%	47.20%	0%

Findings and Discussion

Teachers' Perceptions of Continuous Assessment on Literature Courses

Literature and language learning

In table 1, teachers reported that literature is a significant medium for enhancing students' language proficiency. In *statement 1*, a majority of teachers (50% strongly agree, 35% agree) reported that course teachers apply diverse measures, including role-playing, group and pair discussions, debates, presentations, recitations, stage performances, and creative writing, to enhance learning through literary texts. Only a small fraction (5% strongly disagree) indicated otherwise. Respondents emphasized that such practices enrich students' vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures and expose them to a wide range of linguistic and cultural elements. This aligns with Lazar (1993), who emphasized that literary texts engage learners in multiple levels of meaning, enhancing comprehension, vocabulary, and syntactic skills.

Pedagogical practices

Statement 2 shows that 75% of respondents (30% strongly agree, 45% agree) indicated that continuous assessment questions mainly focus on philosophical and thematic aspects of literature, while 15% disagreed. Teachers positively responded that grammatical and linguistic aspects are often underrepresented in assessments, as reflected in *statement 3*, where 65% (25% strongly agree, 40% agree) of teachers agreed that these aspects are scarcely addressed. This corresponds with Zhan (2020), who found that continuous assessment not only measures learners' progress but also reflects teaching effectiveness and focus areas in language classrooms. Students with diverse learning needs may require accommodations or modifications to effectively participate in continuous assessments. During interviews, T1 noted, "students have different learning needs, so assessment should be flexible to support all learners." Similarly, T2 mentioned that "teachers should provide additional time or alternative formats to ensure fair participation." They also highlighted the importance of creating an inclusive assessment environment through the use of assistive technologies and supportive resources. Furthermore, both teachers pointed out that active class participation should be considered as part of continuous assessment, including engaging in discussions, group activities, and presenting ideas.

Creativity and critical thinking through literary engagement

Respondents emphasized that literature fosters imagination and creativity, allowing learners to engage with metaphorical, symbolic, and allegorical meanings. For *statement 6*, 85% of respondents (55% strongly agree, 30% agree) agreed that literary assessments stimulate students' critical thinking, with 10% expressing disagreement. Therefore, it is evident from the responses of the participants that literary engagement promotes critical thinking skills, encourages students to interpret diverse writing styles, and enhances comprehension and fluency. These findings are supported by El-Koumy (2002), who emphasized the role of structured subskills practice in skill-based teaching. T1 states, "students can develop critical thought faculty and the ability to extract meaning from complex texts intensively by getting involved with literature". T2 adds that literary works enable students to observe the ways in which language is used in authentic and natural contexts. It is clear that learners can explore various writing styles, narrative techniques and conversational ways through the continuous assessment on literature courses.

Skill development

Continuous assessments were reported to significantly develop writing skills and introduce students to a variety of grammatical structures and sentence patterns, as indicated in *statement 4*, with 85% of respondents (50% strongly agree, 35% agree) supporting this. In *statement 5*, 80% (25% strongly agree, 55% agree) agreed that such assessments enrich students' lexical resources and improve speaking fluency. T1 recommends some activities in this regard that includes role-playing, group discussions, presentations, recitations, and creative writing. T2 mentions that

tutorial classes are also suggested as flexible support mechanisms to reinforce learning in a low-stress environment.

Students' Perspectives on Continuous Assessment in Literature Courses

Language and literature relationship

In table 2, students recognized the close relationship between language and literature. For *statement 1*, 95.2% of students (41.6% strongly agree, 53.6% agree) agreed that literary texts are a significant source for improving English language skills. They emphasized that literary texts support the development of basic English skills, including grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, reflecting the idea emphasized by Lazar (1993) that literature engages learners in multiple levels of meaning and promotes comprehensive language learning. However, during the interview session, T2 stated that "continuous assessment in literature-based courses mainly helps students develop their writing skills, as most of the assessment tasks are based on written question patterns. This is largely due to practical constraints such as limited time."

Implementation of continuous assessment measures

Regarding *statement 2*, only 35.2% of students (11.2% strongly agree, 24% agree) felt that their teachers consistently applied diverse assessment measures such as role-playing, group discussions, pair discussions, debates, presentations, recitations, stage performances, and creative writing. A majority (51.2%) disagreed, suggesting a gap between intended and actual practices. Students highlighted that while continuous assessments aim to enhance skill acquisition, time limitations and inconsistent application of interactive techniques often hinder full engagement. El-Koumy (2002) supports this view, emphasizing that structured, skills-based assessment practices are critical for developing cognitive, linguistic, and psychomotor abilities.

Students noted that continuous assessment questions often focus primarily on thematic and philosophical aspects (*statement 3*, 65.6% strongly agree or agree) and less on grammatical and linguistic features (*statement 4*, 66.4% strongly agree or agree). They reported that written tasks dominate assessment methods, with limited opportunities for oral or practical application. As a result, while writing skills are improved, opportunities for developing speaking proficiency, real-life language use, and interpersonal communication remain limited. Mehrotra (2017) also highlights literature's role in improving expressive skills but also notes the importance of diverse modalities for complete language development.

Development of writing, speaking, and interpersonal skills

Continuous assessments were reported to positively impact writing skills, with *statement 5* showing that 63.2% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they developed a wider range of grammatical structures and sentence patterns. For *statement 6*, 44.8% agreed that continuous assessments enriched their lexical resource and supported speaking proficiency, although 40.8% disagreed, indicating variability in oral skill development. *Statement 7* revealed that 64.8% of students agreed or strongly agreed that classroom activities fostered active learning and interpersonal skills through group work and collaborative tasks.

T1 also admitted that continuous assessment in English literature courses can also improve students' speaking skills, especially when they are guided to participate in oral tests and presentations. It also helps develop their interpersonal and communication skills when they are asked to work in groups. These findings again support Zhan (2020), who underscored that continuous assessment not only measures progress but can encourage meaningful student engagement and collaboration. T2 further added,

> Many students start at the tertiary level with only an elementary level of language proficiency, but continuous assessment helps them gradually improve their language skills. Activities such as group discussion or pair work can support both communication and overall language development.

Satisfaction with Assessment Methods among the Teachers and the Students

The researchers placed the same statement "*Testing methods and techniques on literary pieces are satisfactory.*" in both the questionnaires to know the perspectives of both teachers and students about their satisfaction on the existing continuous assessments.

In *statement 7* of the teacher-questionnaire, teachers expressed mixed satisfaction with assessment methods (Fig. 1): only 35% (15% strongly agree, 20% agree) found them satisfactory, 35% were neutral, and 30% disagreed. This indicates that, although literature-based assessments are valued, there is room for improvement in testing design, clarity, and alignment with learning outcomes. Satisfaction with assessment methods was low among the students, as *statement 8* of the student-questionnaire revealed that only 18.4% agreed that testing techniques were satisfactory, while 47.2% disagreed and 34.4% were neutral (Fig. 2).

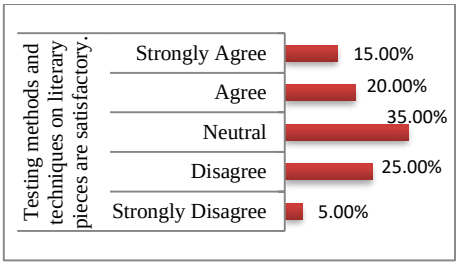


Figure 1. Teachers' satisfaction

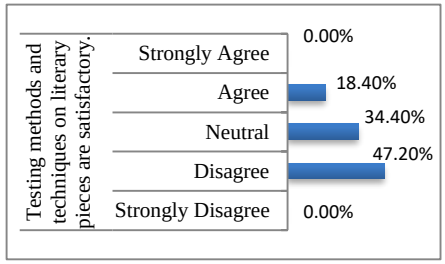


Figure 2. Students' satisfaction

On this aspect, T1 noted that assessments often lack practice-based, real-world contexts, focusing instead on single skills or tasks. T2 emphasized the need for more interactive, participatory techniques such as question-answer sessions, group evaluations, and constructive feedback, reflecting recommendations from Hughes (1989) concerning timely feedback and the integration of assessment with teaching objectives.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were drawn from the analyses of the findings that can be considered very effective in case of the designing, structuring and implementation of continuous assessments on the subjects of literature:

a) Continuous assessments should include a variety of question patterns and testing methods to develop students' speaking, writing, cognitive, psychomotor, and linguistic skills.
b) Literature courses should be designed in a practice-oriented way, and the regular implementation of Communicative Language Teaching should be encouraged to increase practical language use and engagement with literary texts.
c) Instant, constructive, and effective feedback should be provided so that teachers can identify students' strengths and weaknesses and help them improve more efficiently.
d) Collaborative learning, blended learning, and the incorporation of technological devices should be introduced to bring flexibility, diversity, and authentic language exposure into the assessment process.
e) Assessment tasks should avoid overly common or predictable question patterns, consider differences in students' cognitive abilities, and be designed creatively and analytically to meet learners' specific needs and measure their actual language proficiency.

Conclusion

This research evaluates the criteria of continuous assessments on the subjects of literature in shaping learners' level of language. The appropriate connection between teaching and testing can affirm a sort of partnership which can allow learners to obtain information in any learning sector

properly. However, the researcher explores the inherent issues regarding the testing measures on the subjects of literature by conducting a survey. The collected data were presented and analyzed only by regarding the opinions, remarks and recommendations of the respondents as prime concern. The respondents informed that literature can be assured as a very effective way to increase the language proficiency level of students who are studying at the tertiary level. Additional studies may investigate the effectiveness of integrating technology-enhanced and collaborative assessment strategies to further enhance student engagement and skill acquisition in literature courses.

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