A Preliminary Analysis of Lecturers' Empathy in Mitigating Challenges of Developing English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) Assessment Materials

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Abstract

Running English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses at tertiary institutions is becoming more challenging due to a number of factors and it leaves impact on lecturers' emotions. Emotional dimension is among the aspects that significantly influences the way lecturers view assessments and their choice of assessment practices. This paper specifically looks at empathy as one emotional aspect present within lecturers as they undertake tasks of developing assessment materials and mitigate the challenges that they encounter. Six senior ESAP lecturers teaching engineering students at two engineering related universities reflected on this scenario via interviews and self-reflections. Their empathy in planning and developing assessment materials were elicited and scrutinised via qualitative approaches. All the lecturers exuded empathy based on professional grounds and directed towards essential learner factors and the intended ESAP course outcomes attainment. Empathy was found to be consistently demonstrated towards language learner factors and their language learning context that comprise aspects like background of students, language proficiency level, familiarity with language materials, current knowledge and skills required for test-taking. Such empathy for the best interest of the learners have induced careful and selective practices among the lecturers when preparing assessment materials. The presence of empathy in assessment practices appeared to be second nature to the lecturers and it helps to complement assessment best practices and upholds quality delivery of the ESAP courses. Empathy at a positive level has enabled the lecturers to embrace the spirit of assessment for learning where more time and efforts were devoted towards planning suitable assessments that promote understanding and mastery of the language, before going for the assessment of learning or summative assessments.

Keywords: *Assessment, Emotion, Empathy, English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP)*

Introduction

Empathy, a fundamental construct in educational leadership is an aspect under emotional dimension that embodies the ability to feel and make connection to other people's thoughts, emotions and experience (Goleman, 2006). A number of studies have shown that the ability to develop and show empathy is essential as it is required by educational leaders to show their subordinates and chargers that they are aware and care for their needs and achievements (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Empathy is also a crucial component of emotional intelligence that many scholars believe is essential for individuals in becoming good leaders (George, 2000). In addition, conveying empathetic emotion is perceived as having the capacity to comprehend while

passively experiencing the feelings of others and to actively share emotions (Kellett et al., 2006). As assessment is an essential component under education, handling assessment matters requires the presence of empathy as an essential emotion as it influences perception, decisions and actions towards other people namely students and other stakeholders. At the academia, assessment is significant to students' experience within the tertiary courses and assessment experiences regardless whether they are good or bad, affect students' learning engagement (Coates, 2005). Due to this, there is a strong connection between the manner educators gauge the learning attainment and how students approach the lessons and the learning process. It is therefore pertinent to utilize ways of assessing which are suitable to the aims, the objectives and the contexts in which the teaching-learning process occurs. To illustrate, Fulcher (2010) for instance outlines four inter-related broad purposes for language assessment namely gate-keeping, empowering, motivating, and guiding. Under guiding he further listed acts of decision-making such as placing, selecting, evaluating and diagnosing learners. All these in many ways relate to the range of tasks that involve the emotion of empathy as they directly deal with human interaction and communication processes. Moreover, Brown, Gebril, Michaelides and Remesal (2018) asserted that assessment and evaluation create many complex emotions such as anxiety, concern, and pride in teachers and high-stakes public assessments for instance result in a higher level negative emotions. Alongside all educators, language lecturers share the same pressures and emotions in maintaining positive and constructive responses and engagements in assessments.

Literature Review

Gkonou, Dewaele and King (2020) believe that language teaching presents educators with a unique set of challenges such as language specificity, inter-cultural elements, emotional character of foreign languages, emotional anxieties of learners and mix proficiency levels of learners within a classroom. It is therefore essential for educators to have and demonstrate empathy as it can develop positive student-teacher relationships (Mendes, 2003). The presence of empathy within educators will also yield at lot of benefits as it can generate positive results for the immediate classroom, as well as for the surrounding community outside of the school (Owen, 2015). Moreover, Sornson (2017) asserts that empathy is the essence of a positive classroom atmosphere as via empathy learners get to learn to comprehend each other, build friendships and develop positive relationships based on trust. In addition, school programs that deliberately instilling empathy into curriculum have also recorded improved test achievements (Townsend, 2012).

The presence of such emotion is also pertinent in the context of assessment as each purpose of assessment requires varying degree of empathy to be present within lecturers' course of actions and decisions. Moreover, designing assessment materials or tests is an important on-going process that is close to educa-

tors' heart. Frey (2005) for instance found that most classroom assessments involve tests developed by teachers themselves and they have the preference to use their own tests in assessing and grading students' progress as compared to tests from other sources. This is due to the fact that a lot of useful information for decision making purposes can be drawn from test-takers' performance if careful attention is given to planning good assessments. Likewise, Kubiszyn and Borich (2000) see assessment as a means of decision-making for educational purposes namely grading, electing, doing placement, counseling and guidance, planning program or curriculum and deciding upon administrative policy. It is inevitable that empathy for students as language learners and test-takers will come into play in such assessment matters and tasks. However, the manner in which educators undertake and appreciate assessments is dependent upon their roles in assessment as well as the teachers' knowledge that is based on their previous experiences, beliefs, and attitudes towards assessment (Looney et al., 2017).

Studies have shown that teachers who displayed evidence of empathy in their teaching are more keen to engage in effective class interactions that cultivate positive academic and behavioral outcomes in students when undergoing learning and assessments activities (Warren, 2013). In relation to that, Brown, Pishghadam and Sadafian (2014) based on their study on Iranian university students' conceptions of assessment found that students displayed equally positive and negative perceptions of assessment and they feel that it could both improve learning or hinder learner development. Benesch (2017) in her study on post-secondary language classrooms found a relationship between English language teaching and emotions where teachers' feelings relate to institutional expectations of their performance and affect their responses and decisions about challenging educational matters. Such pressure is described as emotion labour where they need to negotiate between feelings and professional actions based on training and experience. In addition, authentic teaching requires empathy within educators as it involves criteria like being genuine, becoming self-aware, being defined by one's self, willing to interact with students and reflecting on self and others (Kreber, 2010). Furthermore, according to Dolby (2012) empathy is perceived to be very pertinent for educators teaching across differences such as race, socioeconomic class-status, and gender. In the context of language teaching and learning, all these listed differences could influence learners' command and level of language mastery based on their mother-tongue interference, language exposure, opportunity for use, rate of acquisition and a host of other aspects. For instance, Ahmad and Mohd Mufaradzi (2011) in their qualitative study on five senior ESP lecturers found that they demonstrate empathy by making considerations on student related factors in planning language test items.

Problem Statement

As an essential aspect of the teaching and learning process, assessments could assist learners and teachers ensure that learning is actually taking place. Despite this, there is limited knowledge on the role of emotions in education and how educators' emotional experiences relate to their teaching practices. Martinez and Azarro (2018) for instance believe that teaching is an emotionally intense practice and this notion is echoed by Golombek and Doran (2014) who notice that emotions in the education experience are sometimes neglected by teacher trainers and relevant authorities. To illustrate, Brown, Gebril, Michaelides, and Remesal (2018) via their case studies on second language teachers found that they displayed a range of emotions in describing the challenging tasks they must carry out in order to remain professional and effective.

Benesch (2020) propounded that top-down delegated high-stakes literacy assessment may impact English language teachers' emotions and their pedagogical practices and preferences. For instance, the teachers need to train students to acquire language mastery within a limited time which further compounded the emotional pressure that they routinely experience. In a similar vein, Nimehchisalem and Mat Hussin (2018) highlighted that in an educational system of lesser standards, assessment seldom receive the required treatment, respect and attention due to lack of awareness and empathy in educators. For many learners in such a system, assessment typically represents solely tests and grades while some reflected on anxiety, apprehension, punishment, pain and competition when thinking of assessment. This has been cautioned by Koh, Burke, Luke, Gong, and Tan (2018) that the pressure of examination might restrict the potential to rely on assessment knowledge in practice. Unfortunately, teachers in such a system are most probably indoctrinated to gauge their students only at the end of courses and will engage in formative assessment for learning only when they have to.

Brown, Pishgadam and Sadafian (2014) highlighted the fact that assessment has the potential to promote progressive learning behaviors when learners believe in its invaluable data on their learning needs. On the other hand, it may cause misbehaviours when learners are unable to see its benefits to their learning and growth. The absence of empathy in delivering lessons and administering language assessment have sometimes resulted in prevalence of exam and grade-oriented mentality that drove some students to depression, pressure and malpractice just for the sake of obtaining certain grades. Azis (2015) has reported that assessment grades were solely viewed as the measure of students' achievement, and have sadly turned some students into becoming overly competitive that they indulged in all possible efforts just to get higher grades instead of channeling energy to their overall learning improvement and mastery of the subject matter. Furthermore, Sultana (2019) found that some teachers who lack empathy felt that their students did not require any alternative formative assessments as they did not relate to preparation for English public examina-

tion. This was also due to their lack of awareness on the potential of alternative assessments to gauge students' attainment and the prevalence of exam-oriented backwash mentality.

Many educational leaders and language educators who are probably uninformed and fossilized in their views on language would conveniently subscribe to simplistic, traditional and exam-oriented approaches without realizing that language is dynamic and the approaches to teaching and assessing language have changed. Moreover, Owen (2015) believes that empathy builds positive classroom culture that is extremely needed presently as students joining language classes nowadays come from diverse backgrounds due to socio-economic conditions, mobility and globalisation. With such new challenge, it is more necessary than ever for lecturers to demonstrate empathy and actively construct a positive classroom culture. Undoubtedly, empathy is an essential emotion that lie at the heart of educators' decisions and actions and must be studied and emphasized. Due to such state of affairs in language and assessment, the present study aims to explore the emotional dimension of lecturers in the context of their assessment practices, specifically the empathy they display while engaging in language assessment tasks.

Research Questions

Due to the issues highlighted in the previous section, this study aims to seek answers to the following questions;

i. Is empathy demonstrated by the lecturers when developing assessment materials?

ii. What are the reasons for the lecturers' empathy in the context of their assessment practices ?

iii. What are the assessment challenges that evoke the empathy among the lecturers?

Methodology

This qualitative study was carried out via basic Delphi approach on six selected senior English language lecturers holding key designations from two engineering related universities in Peninsular Malaysia. The ESAP lecturers who teach English to engineering students were interviewed to explore their emotions when handling assessment matters. The elicited assessment development data were then scrutinized via a qualitative research design to identify and understand the emotional dimension. The lecturers were also asked to do reflections and interpretations of their own emotional responses and experiences via self-reflection notes. Several steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness of data elicitation and result verification (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The interviews were verbatimly transcribed and coded where emerging themes from the codes were listed down and synthesized. This is done to construct an understanding of the contexts and multi-dimensionality of lecturers' empathy in assessment practices. All the transcribed interviews and

self-reflection notes were also given to the respondents for verification via member-check procedure. These interview and self-reflection data provided opportunity to assess the nature of the emotional dimension. During data and result disclosure stage, respondents were invited to review and provide feedback on the emerging themes derived from the data. Two senior academicians were invited to be expert reviewers for the data analysis and result confirmation processes. Overarching themes of empathy emerged from the confluence of interviews, follow-up interviews and self-reflection notes. The combination of these data sets helped to crystallize descriptions of lecturers' empathy during assessment material development tasks.

Table 1: Research Design and Sampling

Research Design	Respondents	Designation	Data Elicitation
Qualitative Phenomenology Case Study Basic Delphi	6 ESAP Lecturers 4 males (M) & 2 females (F) LAC1 (F), LBC1(M) & LCC1 (M) LAS1(M), LBS1(F) & LCS1 (M)	Head of Departments, Head of Units, Programme Coordinators	1.Semi-structured interview 2.Follow-up interview 3.Self-reflection
Selection	**Case Site**	**Categories**	**Data Analysis**
Web search and analysis on university and lecturers' profiles	Universities in Peninsular Malaysia	1.Research University (C1) 2.Technical University (S1)	1.Transcribing 2.Coding 3.Document Analysis 4.Theme Identification 5. Member-Check 6.Expert-reviewer feedback

Findings

The findings from this study show that empathy displayed by all the senior and experienced English language lecturers were based on professional grounds. In exuding empathy towards the reality of learners and their context of learning, they   have made extra efforts to align the ESAP curriculum, the lesson input and the assessment process to the intended outcomes. Considerations on student factors as language learners and test-takers become second nature to these lecturers as they engage in ESAP course delivery and undertake mitigating decisions and actions within their educational practices for the best interest of the learners. All these display of empathy complements the best practices in language assessment and help to uphold the quality of the ESAP courses. For instance, they will take special care to make the rubrics and rating scales clear to learners and in the outset of ESAP lessons they will show samples of expected output and the intended quality to them.

Apart from preparing and grading for assessments, the empathy within the lecturers drives them to make extra effort to personalize explicit feedback to each learner. A few of them even demonstrate empathy in administrative planning of ensuring class size is maintained at a manageable level and conducive for language learning. This is a hallmark of world class higher learning institution practices that refrain from assigning large number of students per classroom due to the awareness on learners' need for sufficient interaction time with their lecturers and space for class activities. Instances of empathy within lecturers' emotional dimension could be seen from some of the sample responses within the assorted transcripts presented below.

Ensures familiarity and readiness for tasks relating to learners' needs

...each skill may be approached according to different levels… as far as the originality of the test is concerned ok I would try to retain it … because <u>this is what they normally face in the outside world</u>, it's the reality then how authentic the text is … so this is the kind of argumentation that <u>they would face in the real world</u>…and then the skill… I make sure that first of all <u>they should be able to understand what is being discussed, argued</u>… expected skills are of the required level. (LBC1)

This transcript describes the effort of Lecturer BC1 to relate to future workplace realities that his learners will encounter. This is in the context of planning writing assessment based on argumentative reading test to assess argumentative skills. Displaying empathy towards the future scenario of the students, he deliberated on essential aspects in preparing higher order questions as illustrated. Among the aspects are originality of the text, authenticity of test, the difficulty level of the test, expected skills and realities in the outside world.

Considers background of students and their proficiency level

I would also consider the background of the students, some classes can answer others can't. So when I set the questions, it should be not too difficult and not too easy, it should be in between. Maybe you need to give a box of answers to choose from..(LAC1)

In the transcript above, Lecturer AC1 indicates that the background of the students and their proficiency level are the essential factors considered by her so that they can attempt the real test. Having such empathy towards learner factor drove her towards balancing the difficulty level of the assessment materials.

Considers students' familiarity with the language materials

Familiarity with the text is very important. Let's say if I go to some websites or books produced by native speakers, the text would be centered around the familiarity of the students, where they come from. Like our students, we are localized in the sense that if you include idioms and jokes which are very foreign to them, then you would not get the test result (LCC1)

In the transcript, Lecturer CC1 emphasized an important factor which she considers during the process of assessment development namely students' familiarity with the language material chosen. Such empathy towards learners has enabled the assessment to formatively gauge their progress before they move on to more less familiar genre and subject matter in reading assessments.

Considers learners ability to apply principle (grammar)

Ok at the end of the day you want them to utilize the theory that they have learnt, but at Level 1 for me it's better to make them be able to identify. For example, in relation to the test set recently, they were given a text, they were to identify different parts of speech from a text, for example adjectives. So the objective is to make them be able to use phrases not just single words (LAS1)

In this transcript, Lecturer AS1 displayed empathy to his students as test-takers where he disclosed the practice, he adopted was to ensure that the assessment developed meet certain test purposes. For instance, the one illustrated here is to assess students' ability in knowing parts of speech and to apply this grammar knowledge in actual written or speaking situations.

Considers lessons and formats taught in class

Ok normally what I choose to include in test papers would be based on what have been taught it class, meaning the format would be based on format done in class. (LBS1)

From the above account, Lecturer BS1 displayed empathy by emphasizing the validity aspect of the test due to her concerns for her students' ability to attempt the test. She prefers to as much as possible reproduce the

lessons taught in class, to make them appear in the test particularly the format or test method. To her, a test that is not developed based on format that students are familiar with will not likely be a valid or reliable test. She justifies her empathy based on his experience teaching the students.

Considers syllabus and topic requirements stressed in class

…refer to the syllabus…weekly so what is based on that so.. I will think of the questions… then after that I would look into <u>the specific types of questions that I will ask based on the weekly syllabus</u>....basically the information from the note itself ...the <u>main points of the one that I stress in the class</u>... points… some of the topics that have the spec of something...(LCS1)

The transcript above shows that Lecturer CS1 also refers to the syllabus, specifically the topics and important points that have been stressed during lessons. The important points referred to by the lecturer are also the ones provided to the students in the course notes. He displayed empathy to his students as test-takers by simultaneously referring to these documents when formulating questions to be included in tests.

Considers level of difficulty of the materials

..consider two things…one is <u>level of proficiency of my students.</u> Another is <u>the level of difficulty of materials that I choose</u>. (LAC1)

In this transcript, Lecturer AC1 displayed empathy towards the learner factor by making careful consideration during assessment development such as by looking at students' current proficiency and the level of difficulty of the assessment materials.

Deliberates on test format for grammar test items

...it can be any type it <u>can be rearranged,</u> it can be <u>they have to rewrite,</u> it can be <u>they have to fill in the blanks</u> <u>it can be anything that.. I feel suitable for their level</u>. I cannot give the specific way…Last semester I did fill in the blanks there are two questions fill in the blanks, a paragraph where t<u>hey need to identify the words</u>. (LBC1)

In this transcript, Lecturer BC1 highlights his practices of creating assessment items in various forms and formats such as rearranging, rewriting, creating gap filling blanks and preparing text paragraph for word identification. The lecturer demonstrated empathy by making careful considerations on learner factors when developing assessment materials, to suit the learning progress of the learners.

Considers learners' future workplace needs-to suit current assessment

in my opinion all this while our <u>English text it does not reach the required level for the students</u> because the issue right now is most of the <u>undergraduates cannot secure a job because of their lack of communication skills</u> so what we are doing right now is <u>to come up with a text which is equivalent to certain standards</u> (LCC1)

Lecturer CC1 displayed empathy towards his students by looking at a future scenario that his students might encounter namely students' difficulty during job interviews and the need to ensure assessment materials like reading text stimulus and assessment questions are of certain quality.

Emphasizes objective of ESAP course and intended outcomes in students

....we focus more on <u>making the students ..more to analyse, focus on analytical skills</u> whereby the answers are not clearly stated but <u>they have to infer</u> as compared to English One. English Two we are training to have <u>those students to have analytical skills.</u> (LAS1)

Lecturer AS1 above relates her empathy on learners by emphasizing on critical thinking development for students to support their learning of engineering subjects and preparation for future engineering workplace needs.

Ensures assessment stimulus and questions relate to students' field of study-Engineering

...so far <u>our text is related to current issues and we try to relate it to Science and Technology</u>...<u>we try our best for the text to be as close to Science and Technology the field that the students study</u>...(LBS1)

In the transcript above Lecturer BS1 demonstrated empathy towards her students by trying her best to plan assessment materials like stimulus for reading texts and language questions to relate to the learners' field of study, namely science and technology. This is driven by the empathy towards learners who need to use the English language within their existing engineering courses.

Goes the extra mile in getting input from engineering lecturers & employers

..this is good because that <u>would identify the language needs</u> and from there we <u>can come up with syllabus, better exam papers</u> <u>when the students graduate they would find that what they are learning are relevant to the work force</u> (LCS1)

The element of empathy could be reflected from Lecturer CS1's initiative of going the extra mile in obtaining authentic language and task input from engineering colleagues working at the same university and from engineering employers taking in students as interns. This is to enable his students to be exposed to authentic language via the learning materials and assessments within the ESAP course.

In addition, all the lecturers demonstrated empathy by continuously planning and ensuring that their ESAP course delivery and assessment processes follow a balance content ratio between present academic needs and future workplace needs of the students. As the programme structure reaches towards the final semesters all six lecturers highlighted the need for their learners to be exposed to more authentic workplace language and communication, regardless via the formal level three ESAP course or via other less formal,

self-learning modes like MOOCs, short courses, talks, online webinars, finishing-school training sessions and so on.
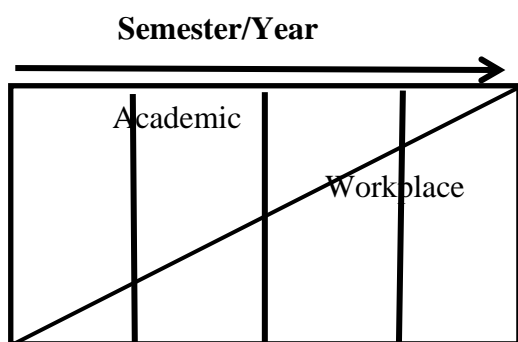
Semester/Year

Figure 1: Language Learning Needs Ratio- Current and Future

All the lecturers generally exude empathy towards language learners as test-takers by planning for all assessments materials to have balanced items based on Bloom's taxonomy of instructional objectives. The lecturers basically ensured that each of their assessment item is written based on considerations such as the following;

i. prescribed in the syllabus - the topics and the relevant language skills taught in class.

ii. the proficiency level of the students. – items are challenging enough and not too easy or too difficult.

iii. the level of skills required to attempt the range of questions, cognitive processing, genre and subject matter

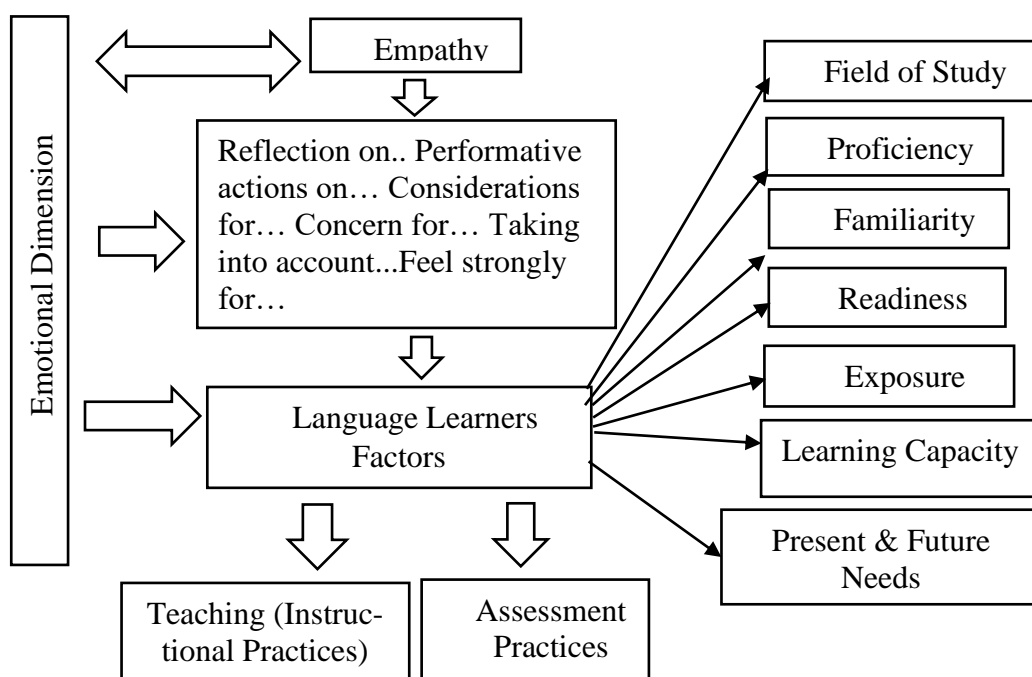iv. suitable time allocation - for the assessment based on number or items and items difficulty.

Figure 2: Emotional Dimension of Empathy in Context

All the lecturers also displayed empathy towards their students as learners and test-takers by collaborating with at least one colleague namely the one who teaches the same courses when developing their respective assessment materials. The nature of their collaboration covers the process to obtain feedback on students' rate of progress and current level of proficiency and to get second opinions on the choice of assessment materials, choice of assessment mode   and format and choice of language items selected. The lecturers also have their colleagues to jointly check and validate their assessment materials by checking for errors, unclear instructions and sentences and also ascertaining the difficulty level of the questions. Simple piloting for summative assessments materials were done on other lecturers who did not involve in any assessment development and not teaching the same ESAP course. All these practices are undertaken for the purpose of producing balanced and effective assessment materials to gauge their ESAP learners.

The findings from this study strongly indicate that students as test-takers become a primary factor that significantly influences the lecturers' empathy and consideration during the process of assessment materials development. The lecturers demonstrated empathy by carefully considering a host of aspects as previously highlighted and depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2 above.

Discussions

Despite being an under-researched area, the understanding of emotions could contribute towards planning for assessment for learning (Benesch, 2020). Similarly, empathy as an essential emotion appears to be one of the necessary yet not fully examined traits that determine good teaching (Neito, 2006). The analysed elicited data has provided answers to all the research questions for this study. Albeit being limited to six purposive samples from two case sites, the qualitative rich data generated provides useful insights into the role of empathy as an essential emotion for educational practices like language assessment. The qualitative findings have high element of transferability to other academicians and institutions that share common circumstances and contextualisations. The qualitative findings are by no means meant for generalizability purposes.

When educators have the ability to understand students' reactions towards learning and have sensitive awareness of the ways in which education and learning impact students, the likelihood of learning to be effective is significantly increased (Rogers & Jerome, 1994). In addition, Owen (2015) sees that empathy has the potential to strengthen community as it involves understanding of others' feelings where students can deepen relationships with their current classmates and people they know outside of school. In our increasingly globalized world, these people may be coming from different cultures and different socio-

economic backgrounds than before, thereby necessitating better-developed empathy skills among individuals like educators.

According to Goos, Gannaway and Hughes (2011) educators and students do not have similar perceptions on aspects which are essential in assessment and the manner to embrace them. There are disparity and visible conflict between what university students, academicians, and quality assurance staff expect from assessments and such differences in perceptions on the role of assessment held by each of these stakeholder groups require further study. Kim and Smith Hye (2020) found that negotiated emotions towards culturally different norms has led to the emergence of positive teacher identities of being more friend-like rather than authoritative. The improved classroom interactions and instructional practices led to positive emotional rewards like pride and confidence. In the context of this study, the presence of empathy within the ESAP lecturers has driven them to engage in compassionate and professional decisions and actions with regards to their assessment practices for the best interest of their language learners.

Ahmad and Mufaradzi (2011) discover from their study that language lecturers with more teaching experience and received adequate testing training were able to be more reflective on their test design practices and are more aware of the challenges including the ones relating to students as test-takers. Their level and range of test practices are also found to be more exhaustive as they include making considerations on learner factors. According to Dolby (2012) educators must listen to students, understand how they see the world and work with them to widen their range of empathy and knowledge about the world. Good educators who have connective capacity like empathy could connect themselves to their students and get their students to connect with each other and to the subject being studied as a platform for a convergence of intellect, emotion and spirit (Palmer, 2010). As such, colleges and universities need to encourage and assist students, faculty members and administrators to develop their own authentic ways to demonstrate empathy and compassion through cognitive, intellect or thinking processes as well as via oral communications and physical actions when engaging with others (Palmer, 2010). From the perspective of this study, being professional, well-trained and experienced has indeed added empathy to the ESAP lecturers' repertoire of good educator traits as they were able to make sound decisions for the learning benefits of their students while upholding the quality of the ESAP course delivery.

Ackerman (2020) posited that any positive emotional engagement by educators could assist learners to persevere in overcoming learning challenges and develop self-efficacy within them. One of the basic changes of trend in language education is the fact that assessments and tests are no more seen as an end, but rather as significant means that function as useful tools in gauging and supplying important information to improve language teaching and learning. This is aptly highlighted below;

"*Language teachers need to be equipped with new sets of competencies which contain new features; one of them being 'diagnostic competence' i.e. the ability to interpret student's growth in language learning and to skillfully deal with assessment materia*l" (Edelenbolos & Kubanek-German, 2004).

It is crystal clear that empathy is a useful emotion to have for various essential educational tasks such as assessment preparation. Key research suggests that empathy is a multi-dimensional construct comprising both cognitive and affective components (Batchelder, Brosnan, & Ashwin, 2017). In addition, empathy is a multi-dimensional emotion which cannot be seen only as a characteristic of individual constructions but a complex process that takes place in the interaction between people and it is constantly being renegotiated (Herlin & Visapaa, 2016). All the answers to the research questions for this study were sufficiently answered based on the analysed elicited data that was juxtaposed with findings from literature. The emotional dimension of empathy was exuded by all the ESAP lecturers based on professional consideration on the realities of their language learners and their context of learning as per aspects and circumstances highlighted by all the studies cited in this section.

Conclusion

This present study concludes that empathy as the essential emotional dimension identified in the ESAP lecturers' assessment practices are well guided by knowledge and experience accumulated over the years and its presence has enhanced further their professional qualities as language lecturers. Empathy drives their decision-making and actions in mitigating challenges in assessment development that arise from learner factors such as students' inadequate proficiency, lack of language awareness, insufficient language familiarity, inadequate readiness for ESAP matters and other realities and circumstances of language learning. The tasks of developing assessment materials were professionally undertaken by the language lecturers with empathy for the best interest of the language learners and the quality delivery of the ESAP courses. Adopting an appropriate attitude and emotion while handling assessment of students' learning is extremely essential as it has the potential to influence the way students engage in learning and such empathy displayed by all the lecturers are strong evidence of their understanding of the assessment for learning concept.

Acknowledgements

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