

The Relationship between Assessment and 'Affect' in the Teaching and Learning of English Language Learners in Nigeria

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RUNNING HEAD: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSESSMENT & AFFECT OF ELLS

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ABSTRACT In classroom situations teachers speak of learners' motivation or lack thereof and its relationship with achievement. This study explores the influence of *affect* (attitudes, motivation and emotions) on the assessment and performance of English language learners who lack proficiency in the language of teaching and learning in mainstream classrooms in Nigeria. The methods used include observation of test taking behaviours, post-test debriefing and mediation. The findings revealed how learners' perceptions of the language of learning and assessment practices shaped their attitudes towards learning and in extreme cases

schooling as whole. Some of the participants lacked motivation; appeared apathetic and there was suspicion of an emotional block against academic learning. The study is revealing in terms of how these English language learners react to the challenges posed by lack of proficiency in the language of teaching, learning and assessment and the practices of their teachers in the classroom. There is need for intervention to prevent *affect* from further compounding the challenges of learning in an additional language.

I. INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that lack of proficiency in the language of learning, teaching and assessment influences achievement (Howie & Hughes 1998; Barry 2002; Howie 2002; Howie 2004; Prinsloo 2011). The population of English language learners is growing worldwide and finding a solution to the issues surrounding language in education has become an important part of the functions of departments of education in many countries (Estrin 2000; Kozulin 2002; Vandeyar & Killen 2003). Assessing learners in a language that they lack academic proficiency impacts negatively on achievement ((Barry 2002; Prinsloo 2011).

The study was to investigate the effect of assessment on the attitude of the learners. Assessment refers to the conventional methods of establishing the extent of learning that has taken place over a given period of time or of particular subject matter in a once-off, non-interventionist assessment context (Lidz 1987; Haywood and Brown 1990; Haywood & Tzuriel 2002; Tzuriel & Shamir 2002; Bouwer 2011). It is the traditional form of assessment that does not permit the intervention of the examiner or interaction between any of the parties involved. Questions and tasks are presented once-off and the examinees have to solve the problems or do the tasks once-off. Static assessment usually takes the form of pencil and paper tests with a regulated procedure and a set time frame for completion. There are usually strict rules governing conduct during these tests (Lidz 1987; Haywood & Brown 1990; Haywood & Tzuriel 2002; Tzuriel & Shamir 2002). Assessment used in mainstream education, whether formative or summative, is usually static assessment in terms of form, design, process and use. Formative assessment is used to establish how much has been learned, i.e. to establish progress, to give feedback to learners/teachers about what may be required to modify teaching and learning activities and to identify individual strengths and weaknesses. Summative assessment, which predicts performance or acts as a tool for

selection, and is an evaluation of learning outcomes (Cotton 1995; Nitko 1998; Breen 2004; Rushton, 2005; Omidire et al. 2011),

Focusing on two school subjects; Integrated Science (IS) and Business Studies (BS), the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How does the use of forms of assessment influence the attitude of AL learners towards assessment and their own performance?

Literature overview

Affect has to do with people's emotional being and includes feelings, moods, attitudes and motivation that condition behaviour (Arnold & Douglas-Brown 1999; Koballa 2007). Stevick (1999) describes affect as the 'purposive and emotional sides of a person's reactions to what is going on'. The individual's affect towards an action, situation or even an experience is how the circumstances in question fit into the individual's needs or purposes and the effects it has emotions (Stevick 1999).

Research (Obe & Nna 2004; Koballa 2007; Spilt et.al. 2011) has shown that it is not only learners' cognitive capabilities that determine achievement but that attitude towards the subject, teachers, schooling among others, also impact performance either positively and negatively. Cognitive and affective behaviours complement each other and emotions are integral to the formation of perceptions and attitudes. According to Bolarin (1996), dislike of a subject or assessment can lead to tension, stress, confusion and loss of motivation, which in turn could even lead to truancy and dropping out of school. The presence of negative emotions which include anxiety, fear, stress, anger and depression tend to compromise the potential ability to learn effectively and may render innovative teaching strategies and materials useless or inadequate (Bernard & Walton 2011; Arnold & Douglas Brown 1999).

Motivation has been described as key for the development of language proficiency at the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) level (Nieman 2006; Opara 2004) and by implication for achievement generally. Positive affect could lead to a greater desire to learn and could thus translate to putting in more effort. Stimulating positive emotional factors can facilitate the language learning process as they tend to broaden an individual's perspectives (Arnold & Douglas-Brown 1999; MacIntyre & Gregersen 2011). Affect played a role in the study, as demonstrated by the results and findings.

The role of affect is corroborated by Lidz (2002), who reports the successful application of an alternative form of assessment with a 13-year old girl referred for poor academic performance and high anxiety within the teaching situation. Nieman and Pienaar (2006), state that “anxiety leads to ineffective communication and ineffective communication leads to anxiety” and that research has shown customary examinations to top the list of sources of anxiety among adolescents in Britain. Affective data are said to be stored along with other kinds of information such as visual, verbal and auditory data and play an important role in learning (Stevick 1999).

For English language learners, the relationship between the language of teaching/learning, assessment practices and their attitudes needs to be further researched particularly in contexts such as Nigeria where English has been accepted as the main official language and the language of teaching/learning from the fourth year of primary school. The difficulties faced by learners being assessed in a language in which they lack proficiency are much more than under-achievement in specific subjects. They have reaching effects that could lead to attitudinal changes that then constitute further challenges that compound the existing problems such as failure, retention and drop-out rates. Understanding the learners’ attitudes and emotions from their perspective could give meaningful insights into ways of addressing their language and assessment dilemma.

II. METHODOLOGY

Based on the assumption that solutions to problems cannot be arrived at without consultation and collaboration with those affected by the problem, the study was designed as a qualitative study within the interpretivist paradigm (Cohen et al. 2000; Mouton 2001; Creswell 2007). The challenges in assessment faced by AL learners and their attitude toward different forms of assessment cannot be adequately investigated without interaction with the learners involved. Their subjective experiences and perceived solutions to their peculiar challenges (no matter how trivial they might seem) should be taken into serious consideration. (Cohen et al. 2000; Mouton 2001; Snape & Spencer 2003; Creswell 2007)

The eight participants in the study were purposively selected from two schools in Lagos, Nigeria that catered for learners from different socio-economic backgrounds, the lower income bracket (LIB) school and the middle-income bracket (MIB) school. There was an

equal number of male and female participants. These participants were selected from two classrooms per school and two participants per class (one male and one female), totalling eight participants. The number of participants was determined by nature of the study, being a qualitative study the desire was to explore an in-depth understanding of the participants, their contexts, their affect towards assessment and the role the language of teaching/learning played and learning from their perspectives. A larger sample would have rendered the main objective unachievable.

In the LIB School the classes involved were coded A and B, and in the MIB School C and D. In the A-class of the LIB School the two participants were coded AF (the female participant) and AM (the male participant), and in the B-class BF (the female participant) and BM (the male participant). The same method of coding applied to the MIB School. In the C-class the participants were coded CF and CM, and in the D-class DF and DM. The subjects involved for all participants were Business Studies (BS) and Integrated Science (IS). The study lasted one school term. Table 1 summarises the participants' profiles.

INSERT Table 1 Participant Description

Table 1 reveals that the LIB School had learners who were older, the youngest (No.3 – 13 years old) being the same age as the oldest participant (No.5) in the MIB School. The LIB School participants were also from larger families (5-7 siblings). Though it was not by design, none of the participants was the first child in their families. The fact that they all had older siblings created the possibility of sibling support.

Data collection

The data collection included:

- Classroom observation;
- Observation of participants' test taking behaviours;
- and
- Post assessment debriefing and mediation.

Classroom observation

Classroom observation was deemed important to note classroom practices, especially as these impacted language-related issues: the modes and linguistic quality of interaction within the classroom, and the level of participation of the learners. Teacher/learner interaction and relationship was also observed as well as the language use and the perceived attitudes of the learners towards their class work and teachers. Furthermore, to note the measure of ease with which they communicated and mood of the classroom generally.

Observation of participants' test taking behaviours

The participants were involved in three continuous assessment tasks (CA1, CA2, CA3) and an end of term examination. Observation of the participants during assessment included noting the participants' behaviour and body language, indications of possible emotional reaction or attitude towards assessment tasks. Detailed observation of language-related test-taking behaviour included following words with a finger while reading, pausing longer at certain words or phrases, underlining words, time spent on reading questions, tendency to re-read questions, practising responses or the spelling of words on rough paper, and writing smoothly and purposefully or with hesitation. Detailed observation indications of possible emotional behaviour included noting whether the participant seemed, for example, focused or seemingly absent-minded, calm and at ease or anxious and fidgety.

Post assessment debriefing and mediation

Debriefing after completion of the assessment involved asking the participants questions about their observed behaviour. Further enquiries were made about the participant's experience of the assessment. Finally, the debriefing sought broadly to identify the language-related challenges and engage the participant in a solution finding exercise with questions such as:

- Which of the questions made sense to you and which didn't and why?
- What made it take so long for you to read the question(s) and/or to respond?
- What could be done to help you process the questions faster and more clearly in the future?
- Would changing the language or rephrasing the question make it clearer for you to understand what you are expected to do? What should be changed and how?

Data analysis

Analysis of observation

The observation notes were analysed per participant for behaviours that could be indicative of problematic thoughts and emotions regarding the assessment. This analysis served as a frame to give some direction to the discussions with each participant during debriefing and mediation. The observation notes were also analysed per school using a tabulation method to indicate the behaviours and mannerisms that were more prevalent during the assessment of each subject and could point to factors possibly responsible for some of the test-taking phenomena. Appendix A is sample of the completed observation schedule.

Analysis of debriefing of learners and mediation

The transcripts of the debriefings and mediations in the original mix of English and Yoruba language were analysed per participant, using an explanation-building technique, but with some member checking, with reference to the linguistic challenges experienced. Appendix B highlights the guidelines for the debriefing and mediation. Collective analysis of the debriefing and mediational data per continuous assessment cycle was used to arrive at emergent themes for the adaptation of the assessment items in the subsequent examination.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Tables 2 (LIB School) and 3 (MIB School) below show the participants' scores in the assessment tasks per subject. The subsequent section on findings and discussion also refer to these tables.

INSERT Table 2: Combined table of LIB-scores: CA1, CA2, CA3 and Examination (%)

Table 2 displays the scores of the participants from LIB School.

INSERT Table 3: Combined table of MIB-scores: CA1, CA2, CA3 and Examination (%)

Table 3 displays the scores of the participants from MIB School

Participants' affect

Participant 1 – AF

AF seriously lacked motivation and was frustrated by her inability to succeed in her schoolwork. She had no idea how to reduce the challenges of schooling and appeared apathetic and showing signs of low self-esteem. She also appeared to have she developed an

emotional block against academic learning? AF experienced severe stress about her teachers' possible comments and actions about her work and feared embarrassment before her peers. She was reticent at first, but her attitude later changed and she made visible efforts to answer questions during mediation. It was not clear whether she was stressed as a result of her assessment scores or due to her inability to comprehend what she had been taught.

Participant 2 - AM

AM presented a confident and enthusiastic front about his studies, striving to conceal and deny his difficulties. He expressed the desire to excel and demonstrated willingness to work harder at home if only he were provided with the tools of spelling and vocabulary. AM's profile as detailed in Table 1 provides a probable insight into his attitudes and also gives some indication of his socio-economic background. Being a middle child in a large family, and at an age (15years) considered "old" for Basic 8 (by Nigerian standards), it could be suggested that his other siblings might have contributed to his level of motivation. For instance, having older siblings who were high performers in school could mean AM desired to emulate them. Conversely, older siblings that were bad role models in terms of academic achievement could also be motivating factors for him. In this case the desire not to be like them and to dissociate himself from their lack of achievement might also be a motivating factor for AM. In the same vein he had younger ones that probably looked up to him as well. AM showed visible signs of effort and also tension during assessments, reflecting conflicting emotions in trying for the best possible product and avoiding the threats of error. The level of difficulty of IS caused him (in other respects a learner with positive disposition) to dislike the subject to the extent of wanting to drop it. Denial and avoidance behaviour seemed to be his (ineffectual) coping strategies. The immediate effect of the intervention, shown in AM's dramatic improvement in both subjects during CA2, is a sure indication of the strong emotional effect exercised on AM by the linguistic barriers to his learning as well as by his experience of 'support'. This also strengthens the possibility of a Hawthorne effect on his performance profile.

Participant 3 - BF

BF was very interesting to work with, but seriously lacked self-confidence when speaking English. She appeared to be enjoying our interactions and was always willing to participate and contribute to the discussion. Transferring the language dilemma to the field of relationships, she seemed to harbour resentment against her teachers, believing that they

intentionally made the learners' work difficult. BF displayed an external locus of control in blaming her lack of achievement on teachers, the complexity of textbooks and the noise of peers but she might not have been all that wrong in her perceptions. She was almost always certain she would fail and this translated directly into a dislike of being tested and she showed visible signs of tension during tests. Situations such as these, ultimately lead learners to lose motivation and end up in a state of confusion often resulting in truancy and dropping out of school (Bolarin 1996).

Participant 4 - BM

BM took his work very seriously, so the barriers to good performance cast up by the language-situation upset him profoundly and he showed severe signs of stress when he found an assessment to be difficult, as it happened so clearly with CA3-IS, the apparently flawed assessment (mean performance score 10%). Not only was the apparent shock of CA3-IS visible at the time of the assessment, but it would seem to have affected him in the longer term in the examination as well (see Table 2 above).

BM had a negative attitude towards assessment, which seemed to spill over into viewing the challenges of schooling in general and assessment in particular as overwhelming and oppressive. He appeared to feel hunted by the fact that teachers marked even slight errors and in this respect a lack of self-confidence and negative expectations appeared to be mutually reinforcing, but there was also a sense of pain stemming from the conviction that he knew the answer, yet would be marked down for mistakes made in the process of writing it. His desire to escape into non-school activities could be taken as a reflection of his need for relief. He resented being subjected to assessment because the result became the evidence of his limited ability. The impact of language in assessment is clearly shown here.

Participant 5 - CF

CF was a quiet and reserved individual who was highly composed and focused, suggesting that she took her studies seriously. At 13 years of age, in the MIB School, CF was probably one of the oldest in her class (Table 1) and this may have contributed to the level of composure and maturity that she displayed. She disclosed that she had made a conscious effort not to display any test taking behaviours that she would later be asked about. Trying to mask her behaviour could be seen as a sign of self-consciousness or at least self-awareness concerning the level of difficulty experienced during the assessments and a lack of

expectation that others could do anything about it. Our interaction enabled CF to open up about her feelings concerning the subjects she did in school. She said she did not mind coming to school and undergoing some forms of assessment, in her opinion numerical subjects reduced the volume of writing she had to do and were more straightforward. CF's reiteration of this view suggests the measure of stress she could be under with reading and comprehension and the hopelessness of not knowing what to do about some of the assessment questions. However, she disclosed that she now realised that even with mathematics-based subjects it was still necessary to have fully developed language skills.

Participant 6 - CM

CM's desire to discuss different issues that had nothing at all to do with the project and having to be guided back to the study was an indication that he craved interaction with an adult or teacher. There seemed to be no avenues within the school and class for him to be heard, particularly because he was lively and opinionated. He seemed to have a desire to see improvement in his work and the work of the other members of his class, but there seemed to be a vacuum in terms of the guidance available. The large class sizes might be one explanation for seemingly limited interaction between some learners and teachers. How much interaction can be realistically expected between a teacher and over a hundred learners in the classroom for a lesson at the same time? CM's sensitivity to the comments and opinions of others was reflected in his comment that he took offence at being called "*olofo*¹" by his teacher and therefore preferred not to ask questions and seek clarification in class. Not having avenues to express such emotionally distressful experiences can have severe consequences on the learner's ability to function in the classroom and may lead to other problems (Bolarin 1996). He also probably found the teaching methods of MIB-BS (as recorded in the lesson observation) not to his liking. CM's disclosure that he was uninterested in BS and did not enjoy the lessons suggests that attitude towards the subject could also impact performance (Obe & Nna 2004). The comparison of his BS scores with the considerable progress made in IS during the period is a clear example.

Participant 7 - DF

DF was reserved and calm, but not in an unfriendly way. Her unwillingness to openly use Yoruba because she wanted her parents to be proud of her ability to use English properly and

¹ *Dense/brainless/dim-witted*

also feared the criticism of her teachers, suggests the possibility of a lack of self-confidence and a need for the approval of others. This might be a function of her age (11years – one of the youngest) or an indication of immaturity and a need for adult support. This, points to the effects of the promotion of subtractive bilingualism (Cummins & Swain 1986). On the other hand, her dedicated focus on English proficiency as well as her steadily improving performance profile during the period of the research could also be explained in terms of a high degree of motivation. Her positive attitude about assessment might not be unconnected with the relatively high level of her language proficiency, reflecting an awareness of the emotional strain that a lack of understanding of assessment questions placed on learners who were not proficient in the language of teaching learning and assessment. It was clear that she had empathy for the less able members of her class and desired that something be done to bridge the gap for all the affected learners. A cause for concern was the force in some of her responses that seemed to suggest some level of emotional stress caused by the ripple effect of the language factor.

Participant 8 - DM

Motivation and support, among others, are key factors for English language learners to develop language proficiency at cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) level (; Opara 2004; Nieman 2006) and DM's utterances suggest that these were by and large absent from the learning environment of his school. Although he was cheerful and curious about things, his disposition could not mask an apparent lack of trust in the motives of the adults around him. This was demonstrated in his belief that people asking about his performance did not really care about him or the assessment, and so he was accustomed to just say it was "good", suggesting that he had a deeper level of feeling neglected and possibly unloved. DM's need for reassurance and admiration, as shown in his reasons for preferring IS to BS, suggested that there were emotional gaps that needed to be filled. This could also be a reflection of his age (11years – Table 1) and level of maturity. He displayed a tendency to hide his true feelings, as evidenced during CA3 and the debriefing when he tried to create an impression of control. One could sense some level of stress in the passion with which he discussed the issues of learners failing in subjects when they had not been adequately taught. DM appeared to have been motivated by the project. It really thrilled him that his opinion mattered and would be taken into consideration. The positive change in his attitude could also be a factor in his performance profile.

IV. DISCUSSION

This section highlights the role of affect in assessment and performance and attempts to answer the sub-questions: How does the use of static forms of assessment affect the attitude of English language learners towards assessment and their own performance? What then are the implications of these findings for teaching and learning in an additional language?

Attitudes of the participants to assessment

The participants appeared to have different attitudes toward assessment, but one underlining finding is that all, except perhaps DF, apparently experienced great discomfort being assessed. Some academics are of the opinion that the level of discomfort, anxiety and stress caused by conventional assessment led to the introduction of continuous assessment systems in schools but that learners still react with different levels of stress (Obe 1980; Okoli 2000 Israel 2006). Recognising the existence of individual considerations, the virtually overwhelming frustrations associated with the use of an English language in assessment were clearly in evidence as a contributor to their attitude. DF seemed to be the only participant who had a fairly positive attitude towards assessment. This might be explained from the fact that she was an able performer, the only participant whose baseline score was a pass mark in both subjects, and well above the mean performance scores of the group (+10.5% in BS and +12% in IS; see Table 3 above). She had sound communicative competence in English (even though she had a private tutor and covertly utilised the L1 as a resource for comprehension). The extra assistance she got from home and her parents' focus on her English language proficiency possibly also contributed to a strong sense of motivation and some confidence, leaving her better prepared for assessment than her classmates.

The findings suggest that most of the participants viewed assessment in its conventional (static) form as a source of severe stress, largely due to their sense of helplessness during assessment and the hopelessness of anticipated failure. AF, for instance, wanted to be liberated totally from assessment and initially seemed fatalistic about the perceived 'fact' that she was unable to make any progress within the school system, particularly in IS, in one instance saying, "*Mi o mo nkan ti mo ma ko mo. Mi o le se awon toku²*", with complete surrender to her situation. The prospect of continually failing in her assessments appeared to depress her, and she remained both clueless and apathetic as to any measures that could facilitate her improvement. BM, on the other hand, a strong performer and a highly motivated learner, actually resented being subjected to assessment because he viewed the result as

² *I didn't know what else to write. I couldn't do the others.*

becoming the evidence of his limited ability. The visible signs of effort and tension displayed by some of the other participants (e.g. AM, BF) appeared related to their difficulties in overcoming the challenges (including the ripple effects of the language factor) which faced them during assessments. According to Bolarin (1996), the effort and tension experienced in assessment could lead to desperation and antisocial behaviours such as displayed by AM and CF who displayed the (ineffectual) coping strategies of denial and avoidance behaviour and AF who appeared to consider dropping out of school.

The nature of the assessments as administered in the two schools (a severely static, problem-focused form of assessment) also appears to have contributed to a lack of self-confidence and negative expectations, which were frequently mutually reinforcing (AM, BF, BM, DF), downright fear of judgmental criticism by teachers and peers (AF), feeling hunted by the 'fact' that teachers marked negatively, reacting to even slight errors and a resentful perception that teachers deliberately made assessments difficult (BF, BM), conflicting emotions in trying for the best possible product and avoiding the threats of error (AM), and a sense of anguish stemming from the conviction that he knew the answer, yet would be marked down for mistakes made in the process of writing it (BM).

The outcome of the problematic experiences, perceptions and feelings noted above appeared to be an outright dislike of the assessment practices occurring in the two schools. A comment by BF was, "*Mi o mo nkan ti won fe ki a ko. Won mo o mo nje ki o le ni. Mi kin fe se awon test yen tori mi ni pass.*"³ Another comment made by BM was, "*Mo ma nsi awon nkan ti mo ba fe so ko nigba mi, ode ma nwa dun mi ti mo ba a si* because I know it."⁴ These reactions stand contrary to the whole aim of assessment as being for the purpose of learning which, as previously discussed, refers to assessment feeding back into teaching and learning in the classroom and thus being viewed as an intrinsic part of the learning process itself (Estrin 2000; Ellery & Sutherland 2004; Bouwer, 2011). By contrast, a subtle but devastating consequence of static assessment noted by participants concerns the lack of aftercare upon assessment, giving rise to a lack of trust and expectation in the school (CF, CM, and DM). They maintained that feedback and correction to assessment tasks were not properly conducted and amounted to inadequate guidance and possible set-up for future failure. Explaining how MIB-BS usually goes about doing correction in class, CF said "Uhhmm the people (learners) that know it they just say the right answer. But I don't know why is the right

³ *I didn't know what the teacher was asking. They (teachers) intentionally made it difficult. I don't like doing the tests because I know I won't pass.*

⁴ *I sometimes make mistakes while writing those things I want to say, and it hurts my feelings when I now get it wrong because I know the answer.*

answer. Then we have to write another notes and teacher say we should ask those that know the answer later”. A relationship between static assessment and teaching style would actually seem implied in the complaint. The problem escalated to the point that CF and CM appeared to need some guidance and possibly counselling regarding their negative attitude towards MIB-BS’ teaching practices and BS, and the effect this attitude might be having on their performance.

The participants of the LIB School especially appeared to have low self-esteem and demonstrated helpless frustration at the overwhelming assessment situation. An example is BM’s comment: “Excuse, Ma. *Gbogbo nkan ni won ma n mark wrong. Nkan kekere ti eyan ba ti si ko abi ti o spell da da won ma wrong e ni. Ko da at all*”⁵. Participants were afraid of the embarrassment that seemed to be a common consequence of incorrect responses to assessment questions. There seemed to be a sensitivity to negative comments (CM, DF) as demonstrated by the emotional distress experienced by being called names such as “*olofa*” (fool). All these seemed to translate into participants being fidgety, nervous, confused and sometimes angry during their assessments.

In summary, the participants demonstrated a negative attitude and outright dislike regarding their customary school assessments. This negativity and the contemplation of failure appeared to be a source of de-motivation, also causing intense anxiety and stress that were visible during assessment in the form of numerous behaviours. For participants such as AF who appeared to have resigned herself to careless indignation, it was only a matter of time, in my opinion, before she resorted to truancy and eventually dropped out of school completely, thereby corroborating Bolarin’s (1996) findings regarding the challenges in the Nigerian educational system. The negative attitudes of the participants regarding their experiences of assessment certainly appear to have adversely impacted their performance, substantiating the findings of Obe and Nna (2004) that attitudes can affect performance both positively and negatively. A solution would be for the participants (and English language learners generally) to see assessment as an avenue through which further learning could be actualised and not as a punitive venture tailored to ridicule and embarrass them. Assessment should be an encouraging and motivating factor in learning and learners ought to be able to rest assured that the outcomes of assessment would be a true reflection of their knowledge and ability and would effectively lead to support in addressing the particular challenges to their learning.

⁵ They (teachers) mark everything wrong. Every little error or small spelling mistake they’ll mark wrong. It isn’t nice at all.

Attitudes of the participants to debriefing and mediation

The debriefing and mediation created an avenue for the participants to express their feelings in respect of the subjects they were taking, the ways in which they were taught, the attitudes of the teachers and their perceptions of their challenges in assessment. With the opportunity for freedom of expression of thoughts came renewed self-confidence and enthusiasm for their work and the study. There was a display of genuine desire to improve their language and assessment situation. For instance, BF and CM wanted to open up discussions about every aspect of their school-life and had to be guided back to the project, creating the impression of a vacuum that needed to be filled. AM showed a desire to excel and a willingness to work harder even at home. This improved work ethic appeared to have been stimulated by the mediation. The immediate effect of the intervention, shown in AM's dramatic improvement in both subjects during CA2, is an indication of a bidirectional, mutually reinforcing influence: on the one hand, a reaction against the strong emotional impact of the linguistic barriers to his learning and on the other, a response to the experience of 'support'. AF on her part, as the mediation progressed, demonstrated visible effort to answer some of the questions and improve her reading. The participants seemed more confident to speak and take chances about their ideas. They seemed to feel they had no voice and were happy to find that their opinion was being sought on assessment issues concerning them and that mediational action was actually being taken to address their specific needs. This experience, together with their improved performance in subsequent assessments, ultimately appeared to boost their self-esteem.

The use of debriefing and mediation in this study certainly appeared to reduce anxiety during assessment (e.g. BF, AM). A major contributing factor in both schools was seemingly the mediation itself, which fulfilled the need for individual guidance. AM, BM, CM and DM gradually became more at ease and better able to participate during the debriefing and mediation and AF lost some of her reticence. The participants, particularly AM, BF, CM, DF and DM, appeared to really appreciate the opportunity to explore a different form of assessment. They seemed to value the time spent on the assessment and some (BF) became so enthused that they suggested that other members of their class should also be incorporated in the study. The interaction seemed to effectively provide feedback to the participants and improved their attitude towards assessment. AM, BF and BM displayed a desire to improve their scores and appeared to be putting in more effort.

Overall, the participants appeared better motivated by the use of the debriefing and mediation. This positive change in attitude could be associated with (or mutually reinforced

by) both a greater sense of security during assessment and the sense of achievement derived from improved performance (e.g. BF and DM). Another possible contributor to the positive change in attitude was that they could make suggestions about ways in which the language challenge could be mitigated. CF, however, just wanted to be assisted and treated properly. The participants' increased level of motivation was also reflected in their efforts to give lengthier responses and their steadily improving performance profiles (AM, BF, BM, CF, CM and DF). The improved performance could be explained partly in terms of a high degree of motivation during the preparation for assessment which, among others, also articulates with an increased sense of control during the actual assessment.

There appears to be some agreement among academics that affect (including motivation, anxiety, depression, stress, self-esteem) influences school work in terms of behaviour, learning and performance in assessment tasks (Deutsch and Reynolds 2000; Obe and Nna, 2004; Nieman & Pienaar 2006; Prinsloo 2011). The findings of this study have shown that the strategy used appears to reduce the stress levels associated with regular assessment within mainstream education because of the feedback that is tailored towards further learning and associated with the desire to establish without bias the true level of ability of the learner. Fraser (2006) opines that all educators should be mediators of learning within the classroom, suggesting that educators should motivate learners through mediation of learning and the creation of a conducive environment in which communication, high levels of interest and positive feedback (from assessments) are actively engaged.

V. CONCLUSION

The study sought to explore the attitude English language learners to assessment from the perspective of the eight participants and in effect their subjective realities and opinion mattered and were represented. In the process the study also uncovered the depth of the language challenges faced by these participants almost to the point of relegating everything else to a secondary position in order of importance. The study is revealing in terms of how English language learners react to the challenges posed by lack of proficiency in the language of teaching, learning and assessment. The study also shows the need for intervention to prevent affect from further compounding the challenges of learning in an additional language. The study contributed to the field of knowledge by revealing that the use of alternative assessments could contribute to unravelling the influence of affect regarding customary static assessment. Teacher training in terms affect and its influence on learners; deemphasizing

summative assessment for learners who still lack proficiency in the language of teaching and learning; promoting healthy classroom environment; training educators to be mediators of learning, and teaching language across the curriculum.

FOOTNOTES

¹ *Dense/brainless/dim-witted*

² *I didn't know what else to write. I couldn't do the others.*

³ *I didn't know what the teacher was asking. They (teachers) intentionally made it difficult. I don't like doing the tests because I know I won't pass.*

⁴ *I sometimes make mistakes while writing those things I want to say, and it hurts my feelings when I now get it wrong because I know the answer.*

⁵ *They (teachers) mark everything wrong. Every little error or small spelling mistake they'll mark wrong. It isn't nice at all.*

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Table 1 **Participant Description**

Participant	Age	Gender	No. of siblings + participant	Position in family	School	Class	Participant code
1	15	Female	5	5 th	LIB	A	AF
2	15	Male	7	4 th	LIB	A	AM
3	13	Female	6	2 nd	LIB	B	BF
4	14	Male	5	3 rd	LIB	B	BM
5	13	Female	4	3 rd	MIB	C	CF
6	12	Male	4	3 rd	MIB	C	CM
7	11	Female	3	2 nd	MIB	D	DF
8	11	Male	4	2 nd	MIB	D	DM

BM	BF	AM	AF		Participant
40	25	15	20	Score	CA1-BS □=37.5
+2.5	-12.5	-22.5	-17.5	Deviation	
42	25	27	25	Score	CA2-BS □=35
+7	-10	-8	-10	Deviation	
45	45	55	25	Score	CA3-BS □=41.5
+3.5	+3.5	+13.5	-16.5	Deviation	
50	50	55	30	Score	EX-BS □=47
+3	+3	+8	-17	Deviation	
80	0	25	10	Score	CA1-IS □=18
+12	-18	+7	-8	Deviation	
40	14	44	14	Score	CA2-IS □=23
+17	-9	+21	-9	Deviation	
5	10	10	5	Score	CA3-IS □=10
-5	0	0	-5	Deviation	
28	30	33	20	Score	EX-IS □=22.5
+5.5	+7.5	+10.5	-2.5	Deviation	

Table 3 Combined table of MIB-scores: CA1, CA2, CA3 and Examination (%)

DM	DF	CM	CF		Participant
40	50	30	30	Score	CA1-BS □=39.5
+0.5	+10.5	-9.5	-9.5	Deviation	
64	65	40	50	Score	CA2-BS □=50
+14	+15	-10	0	Deviation	
60	69	27	22	Score	CA3-BS □=45
+15	+24	-18	-23	Deviation	
65	70	40	35	Score	EX-BS □=55
+10	+15	-15	-20	Deviation	
40	50	51	20	Score	CA1-IS □=38
+2	+12	+13	-18	Deviation	
60	58	70	25	Score	CA2-IS □=52
+8	+6	+18	-27	Deviation	
65	60	55	45	Score	CA3-IS □=45
+20	+15	+10	0	Deviation	
65	67	63	50	Score	EX-IS □=50
+15	+17	+13	0	Deviation	

□ = Average Score

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Participants' Observation Analysis - LIB School (BS)																
BEHAVIOUR	AF				AM				BF				BM			
	CA1	CA2	CA3	EXAM	CA1	CA2	CA3	EXAM	CA1	CA2	CA3	EXAM	CA1	CA2	CA3	EXAM
FOCUSED					√	√										
CALM					√							√				
ANXIOUS													√			
FIDGETY			√										√			
ALERT					√							√				√
IN CONTROL					√					√						
PAUSING/ HESITANT		√						√								
WRITING ON ROUGH SHEET				√		√	√							√		
RE-READING QUESTIONS											√				√	

LONG PAUSE BEFORE WRITING	√						√				√					
FOLLOWING WORDS WITH FINGERS				√												
LOOKING ABOUT				√		√			√							
MUTTERING									√			√			√	
PENSIVE/ REFLECTIVE	√						√									√
TAPPING TABLE										√						
READING OUT					√	√							√			
CHEWING BIRO					√						√					
STARING	√										√					
FROWNING	√								√					√		
WRITING ON												√				

PALM																
COPYING QUESTION	√															
SCRIBBLING			√										√			
MAKING FACES						√						√				
PLAYING WITH WRITING MATERIALS											√			√		
LYING ON TABLE		√														
RESTING HEAD IN PALM																

APPENDIX B
DEBRIEFING AND MEDIATION GUIDELINES

Debriefing Guideline:

- A. Preliminaries i.e. settling down/introduction of the process/reiteration of the ethical guidelines
- B. Ensure clarity about the objectives of the sessions
- C. Performance evaluation
- D. Corroboration of evaluation
- E. Task Analysis (Perceived extent of difficulty)
- F. Future task difficulty alleviation suggestions
- G. Link observed behaviour during the assessment to task

Questioning Guideline:

- 1. How did you find the assessment?
- 2. What language factors (if any) contributed to the difficulty of the assessment?
- 3. Which of the questions made sense and which didn't?
- 4. What made it take so long for you to read the question(s) and/or to respond?
- 5. Why were you (muttering, staring, sighing, fidgeting, frowning etc.)
- 6. Was there enough time for you to put down your thoughts and ideas?
- 7. What could be done to help you process the questions faster and more clearly in the future?
- 8. Would changing the language or rephrasing the question make it clearer what you are expected to do? What should be changed and how?

Progression Guideline:

- Follow through any comment by the participants not covered in the guideline.
- Add questions as required by actual process.
- Focus on language-related issues.
- Reassure the participants without giving false hope.