MALIAN EFL TEACHERS' PERCEIVED DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Although recent studies have investigated the implementation of the performance-based teaching method in the Malian EFL context, they have not addressed the assessment technique associated with it. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this empirical gap by exploring the factors that affect the successful implementation of performance-based assessment in the Malian EFL context. To reach this aim, qualitative method of research, specifically teacher reflective journals were utilized to collect data from four teachers of English as a Foreign Language. A thematic analysis of the participants' written accounts revealed that a lack of training, low practicality of performance-based assessment activities, learners' low proficiency levels, and a lack of adequate facilities were factors that mainly prevented these EFL teachers from implementing performance-based assessment regardless of their awareness of it. From the analyses, it was suggested that training them to design communicative tasks that integrate their teaching and assessment goals can reduce their reluctance. It is worth mentioning that the obstacles mentioned previously should not hinder the genuine use of the target language during an assessment period.

Keywords: Difficulties, implementation, performance-based approach, performance-based assessment, selected-response tests

RESUME

Bien que des études récentes aient mis l'acccent sur la mise en œuvre de la méthode d'enseignement basée sur la performance au Mali, elles n'ont pas abordé la technique d'évaluation qui y est associée. Par conséquent, cette étude va combler cette lacune empirique en explorant les difficultés qui bloquent la mise en œuvre réussie de l'évaluation basée sur la performance. Pour atteindre cet objectif, des méthodes de recherche qualitative, en particulier des journaux de réflexion des enseignants, ont été utilisées pour collecter des données auprès de quatre professeurs d'anglais en tant que langue étrangère. Une analyse thématique des comptes rendus écrits des participants a révélé que le manque de formation, le faible caractère pratique des activités d'évaluation basées sur les performances, les faibles niveaux de compétence des apprenants et le manque d'installations adéquates étaient des facteurs qui empêchaient principalement ces enseignants d'appliquer l'évaluation des performances dans leurs classes même s'ils sont au courant de l'évaluation basée sur la performance. D'après les analyses, il a été suggéré que former ces enseignants à la conception d'activités de communication qui intègrent leurs objectifs d'enseignement et d'évaluation peut réduire leur réticence. Il est à noter que les obstacles mentionnés précédemment ne doivent pas bloquer l'utilisation réelle de la langue cible pendant une période d'évaluation.

Mots-clés : Approache basée sur la performance, difficultés, mise en œuvre, évaluation basée sur les performances, tests à réponses selectionnées

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of performance assessment following Canale and Swain's (1980) publication, along with researchers and language teachers' own desire to make an assessment more interactive and contextualized generated the notion of performance-based assessment (PBA). According to these scholars, language teaching and learning should reflect real-life situations. Based on this assumption, an assessment should also be authentic and interactive. PBA aims to measure a test taker's competence or performance while they are performing the competence that the assessor would like to assess (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2008; Yu, 2014). In other words, a PBA involves the communicative skills such as speaking and writing activities, oral interactive tasks, role plays, laboratory experiments, field work, and projects (Brown, 2007; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Based on Koné (2015), alternative assessment or alternatives in assessment (such as self-and peer-assessment, portfolios, and journals) are considered as inclusive elements of PBA.

However, most of the Malian teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) do not follow this major twentieth century revolution in matter of teaching, learning, and assessing language skills. They continue using the grammar translation method to teach English to their students. Therefore, most of the assessment materials that they use include selected response tests such as multiple-choice questions, true or false questions, and matching. Nevertheless, the Malian Ministry for Education launched a major change in the 2010s. As a result, a teaching method called 'Performance-Based Approach' was introduced in order to adapt the processes of teaching and learning to real-life situations. For example, the process of teaching involves activities that allow teachers and learners to achieve the learning and teaching objectives. In other words, performance-based approach can be described as task-based language teaching (TBLT) due to their salient similarities. TBLT aims to organize the teaching and learning processes around various tasks and each of them embed one or some of the teaching and learning goals (Shehadeh, 2012). Additionally, the designed tasks must reflect real-life situations (Shehadeh, 2012). It is also inferred that the performance-based approach may be similar to the competency-based approach in the sense that they both emphasize real-life situations and skills that are observable (Fastré, van der Klink, & van Merriënboer). Moreover, the teachers design real-life tasks that allow learners to perform the competence that they are going to deal with in real situations during an assessment period.

Based on these definitions of the performance-based approach, it can be noticed that the Malian EFL teachers were not applying it while assessing their students' skills. As said

earlier, they preferred using decontextualized tests although the main objective that lay behind the implementation of the performance-based approach was the contextualization of teaching and learning processes, including assessment so that they could be oriented toward real-world situations. The present study therefore uses qualitative methods of research, namely teacher reflective journals to find out why the Malian EFL teachers are not using PBA activities to assess their students' competencies despite the benefits related to them. It is structured around an introduction, a conclusion, and three sections: review of literature, methods of research, and results and their discussion.

1. Review of Literature

The late twenties have witnessed an array of language teaching and learning methods in Mali. This increase has persisted with the recent implementation of performance-based approach. The proponents of this method claimed that it enhanced the process of language teaching and learning and then oriented it toward real-life situations. However, language assessment did not follow this new trend in Mali. Language teachers, specifically EFL teachers continued favoring the selected response tests although Brown and Hudson (1998) argued that they did not reveal the learners' real abilities in relation to productive skills such as speaking and writing activities or projects. A study by Stefanou and Parkes (2003) about learners' preference related to three types of assessments: PBA, laboratory assessment, and paper-and-pencil assessment also found that the students had a greater preference toward PBA that exposed them to real-world situations and problems.

Another study by Nier, Silvio, and Malone (2014) with nine instructors and 13 students demonstrated that these students would prefer that their teachers oriented their assessment toward real-world situations so that they could use the target language for communicative purposes. In other words, they would have preferred that their teachers did not simply copy the standardized tests. The teachers on the other hand were more concerned with satisfying the curriculum needs. In contrast to these teachers, the teachers (two in total) in a qualitative case study by Munif, Fauziati, and Marmanto (2019) believed that performance assessment is one of the best assessment techniques to evaluate learners' abilities even though they had difficulty providing their learners with quality feedback.

Contrary to Brown and Hudson's (1998) assertion, the findings of the studies by Munif, Fauziati, and Marmanto (2019), and Nier et al. (2014), Kirmizi and Komec (2016) in a study with 124 high school students and 20 teachers from Turkey found that the

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learners preferred the traditional exams to the performance-based assessment. They did not consider PBA as a better indicator of their true abilities. For them, the traditional exams enhanced their learning and increased their chances of obtaining better grades. From the teachers' perspective, learners just copied and pasted the information that they found on the internet while a PBA was used in contrast to the final exams which were done in a classroom under a teacher's supervision. In other words, the teachers in Kirmizi and Komec's study (2016) supported that PBA was not a better indicator of their students' performance. It is necessary to note that learners (high school students) in Kirmizi and Komec's study were younger compared with Nier et al.'s participants who were university students. Their age difference may explain why the high school students were driven more by the grades than the real use of the language.

1.1. Challenges and Criticisms Related to Performance-Based Assessment

Although studies by Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010), Koné (2020), and Zohoorian (2015) proved that PBA activities have a positive impact on EFL learners' motivation, its opponents claimed that reliability and practicality might be low regarding Brown and Abeywickrama's (2010) five principles of assessment.

A test is said to be reliable if administered to learners at different moments, they obtain the same grades with various graders (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). In this situation, the rater-reliability is thought to be high. Based on this definition, it can be said that well-designed multiple-choice questions or matching are good examples of reliable tests.

Regarding practicality, a practical test can be done within the allotted time and its scoring is objective (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Moreover, practicality involves the financial costs associated with designing a test and administering it. Multiple-choice questions and true or false questions can be considered as good examples of practical tests if they are about the lessons that have already been covered by the teacher.

On the basis of these definitions, PBA opponents argued that it can be challenging to objectively rate the activities designed through this approach. In a similar vein, Green and Hawkey (2012) explained that the intra and inter-rater reliability can be low while grading open-ended questions because they do not have any preset answers. The assessors sometimes rely on their intuition to grade these questions. On the other hand, O' Sullivan (2012) suggested the use of rubrics and well-trained graders in order to reduce the examiner bias. Rubrics are tools that are designed to grade oral and written tasks and other performance-based activities such as projects and experiments (Koné, 2020). They can be holistic or analytical. Holistic rubrics provide learners and teachers with a general description of each criterion without proposing a specific illustration for

the different levels of performance whereas an analytical rubric offers a specific description for each criterion and the various levels of performance (Green & Hawkey, 2012). In addition to these varieties, Crusan (2014) proposed primary trait rubrics that can be used to grade some specific features in a learner's piece of writing. For example, they can be used to grade the use of words of coordination or simple past. This specific rubric allows a learner to focus their effort on the targeted points as explained by Crusan "students appreciate the freedom to focus on one feature in their writing to the exclusion of others as it frees them from worry and raises awareness of that one issue and ways to combat it" (p. 211). Additionally, it eases a teacher's workload and gives them some opportunities to provide their learners with quality feedback that can be used to improve further performance.

Contrary to O'Sullivan's perspective, a study by Howell et al. (1993) with 147 educational professionals revealed that the raters lowered their expectations once they noticed that a test taker was from a racial minority despite their professionalism and the use of rubrics. In other words, these teachers were guided by their own intuition or personality. In another study by Metin (2013) about teachers' difficulties in preparing and implementing performance tasks, the findings indicated that the teachers considered crowded classes, conception and appropriate use of rubrics, learners' low levels, insufficient time, lack of technological facilities as challenges that prevented the successful implementation of performance tasks in content-based classrooms. In addition to these difficulties, the teachers in Metin's study did not know how to administer performance tasks appropriately and then convert them into grades. Offering quality feedback that is conducive to successful learning was another challenge since these teachers were not prepared to satisfy learners' needs during the completion of the various tasks. What is interesting is that the PBA instruments have a high washback, authenticity, and validity regarding the five principles of assessment (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010) despite the challenges and criticisms mentioned previously.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

Little or no empirical evidence is available to explain why the Malian EFL teachers are not utilizing PBA as an assessment method despite its positive impact on the learning and teaching processes. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this empirical gap by exploring the issues that block the implementation of PBA in the Malian EFL context. It also attempts to find out solutions to the identified obstacles. To achieve these aims, the following research questions are addressed:
-   What are the factors that prevent Malian EFL teachers from using PBA instruments while assessing their students' skills?

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- How can they implement PBA tools in their classrooms?

2. Methods
2.1. Research Design

A qualitative approach was utilized to design this study. For example, retrospective techniques, namely teacher reflective journals were used so that the teacher participants could reflect on their assessment practices by explaining why they made certain choices. These written reflective accounts additionally allowed the researcher to get an insight into the situation and understand why these teachers were not applying PBA as an assessment method. According to Bashan and Holsblat (2017, p. 4), data collected with journals "show what occurs during the implementation of any program or change and the participants' perception of these occurrences". Furthermore, reflecting on their assessment practices might motivate these teachers to find solutions to their assessment-related issues with the help of an expert.

2.2. Participants

The sample involved four EFL teachers. They were all teaching at public universities except for one who was teaching at a private university. Convenient sampling technique was used to recruit them although there were many teachers who volunteered to be respondents. The participants were selected because they were aware of PBA although they were not using it as a method of assessment. As a result, they would be able to better explain why they privileged the selected response tests at the expense of PBA. Selecting fewer participants would also ensure the validity of the data and guarantee a rigorous analysis of their written accounts. Table 1 offers a description of the participants' biographic profile. However, they were given pseudonyms in order to keep them anonymous.

Table 1. Participants' Biographic Profile

Names	Gender	Age	School	Teaching Experiences
Mariam	Female	37	Public University	11 years Learned about PBA during training sessions organized by the Ministry of Education
Oumar	Male	33	Public University	9 years Learned about PBA through conferences
Seydou	Male	35	Public University	9 years Learned about PBA through conferences
Sitan	Female	37	Private University	15 years Learned about PBA through webinar sessions and conferences

2.3. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures
2.3.1. Teacher Reflective Journals

Data were collected using teacher reflective journals. A reflective journal gives a voice to the writer and allows them to reflect on the processes of teaching and learning in order to decide on their future perspectives (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017). The participants made a retrospective written account of their teaching practices in relation to their assessment during a semester. In the Malian EFL context, a semester ranges from 12 to 15 weeks. Each of the participants mentioned that they made two tests for a total of eight (one final test for the class grade and another for the exam grade). Therefore, they reflected on their assessment practices in their reflective journals in order to explain their choice for the assessment materials. The participants were not given any writing instructions except for reflecting on their assessment practices. This was decided in order to increase the validity of the data.

2.4. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis as described by Harding and Whitehead (2013) and Nimehchisalem (2018) was utilized to analyze the data. First, I merged the participants' written accounts and read them many times to comprehend them. Once I had a better understanding of the data, I organized them based on the main concepts or ideas that emerged the most to explain why the participants were not applying PBA. This iterative process was carried out until all the concepts or ideas that were related to the difficulties perceived by the participants in implementing PBA were organized around the various themes. In other words, I repeatedly read and analyzed the data until there were no more ideas or concepts to explain the participants' reluctance to implement PBA. It is worth mentioning that the data analysis was done manually.

3. Results and Discussion

The report of the findings and their discussion are organized around the different themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data in order to explain why the participants did not use PBA in their classrooms during an assessment period. Whenever, I present a finding and discuss it, some pedagogical recommendations are made so as to answer the second research question: How can Malian EFL teachers implement PBA tools in their classrooms?

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3.1. Theme 1: Lack of Adequate Training

Most of the participants did not follow any structured or formal training about PBA except for webinar sessions or conferences. Based on their explanations, these training sessions were not sufficient to apply a completely new and demanding assessment method. They commonly mentioned that they did not receive any training in the design of appropriate performance assessment materials, including the design and use of effective rubrics. For example, two of the participants explained that they were not familiar with designing rubrics, nor did they know what to put in them:

> I don't know how to develop effective rubrics that can be used to score performance activities since I have not followed any formal training about that. Moreover, my knowledge about rubrics and all these things about PBA is very limited. I only know them through conferences and it was just presented by some participants for 15 or 20 minutes. I think that it is really demanding to apply a method about which you are not very knowledgeable even if it is supported by the government. (Seydou)

Additionally, converting performance to grade was mentioned as a challenge. This finding lends support to the study by Kirmizi and Komec (2016) that revealed the teachers' difficulty in converting their learners' performance to grades. The other two teachers who knew about rubrics explained that they did not use them because they did not know how to adapt them to their specific needs. In other words, their knowledge of rubrics was limited to the basic guidelines. According to O'Sullivan (2012), a well-designed rubric can mitigate some of the weaknesses related to a PBA instrument and then increase its reliability. A study by Andrade and Du (2005) with 14 undergraduate students additionally found that these learners believed that the use of rubrics helped them to focus their effort on the targeted points in order to obtain better grades. They also felt less anxious about the tasks. Designing an effective rubric and sharing it with learners before they complete a performance task is like overcoming half of the obstacles that will hinder the successful use of a PBA instrument.

It is important to note that the participants were not enthusiastic about designing appropriate performance activities that take into account their curriculum specific needs along with learners' uniqueness. They mention that the absence of formal training is a reason for their lack of enthusiasm:

> Most of the exams are done at the end of the year or a semester and they are two-hour exams that do not give any space to PBA activities that can be extended to weeks or months. Moreover, it is too complicated to use PBA questions during a timed exam if you do not know how to proceed. If we were well-trained for it, applying it could be more interesting and bearable. (Mariam)

In such a situation, well-structured training sessions should be organized for the EFL teachers in order to facilitate the implementation of PBA. Language teachers and researchers whose research interests are PBA can lead these training sessions and share

their experiences with their colleagues. These sessions can additionally focus on the implementation of PBA activities that include the teaching and learning goals. For example, role plays or informal oral presentations can offer learners some opportunities to test their new knowledge in real situations. Furthermore, these activities can be used as formative assessment or preparation for the summative tests. However, it is necessary to reveal that the Malian educational system is norm-referenced; therefore, offering grades that determine learners' ranks seems to be more prevalent than using activities that are interactive and formative. In other words, the final product is more valued than the process used to achieve it. This may explain why the EFL teachers have difficulty applying PBA that requires them to help learners in their work by providing them with quality feedback at each step of the assessment process.

3.2. *Theme 2: Low Practicality*

The findings revealed that the participants were not using the PBA activities during an assessment time because of its low practicality. The participants mentioned large classes, lack of time, the cost, subjectivity, and the constraints related to a very structured curriculum to explain low practicality as can be seen in this sample comment: "I personally don't use performance-based assessment in testing. First of all, it is time consuming. It is also harder to evaluate as it is expensive"

3.2.1. *Large Classes*

In the Malian EFL context, the size of the English classes ranges from 40 to 80 students. It is essential to explain that it varies according to the schools. For example, teacher training schools and private universities tend to have fewer students (25-45) than faculties (80-100). As a result, the participants think that it is difficult or even impossible to administer a PBA instrument to them. Moreover, it is too demanding in a teacher's busy schedule. Consequently, they used decontextualized selected response tests to ease their labor as shown in Mariam's comment:

> It [PBA] can be an effective method for involving students in monitoring their own learning by presentations, observations, or demonstrations of a skill in creating a product resulting from a performance by giving up timed traditional paper and pencil test. However, I didn't use it to evaluate my students because it won't be easy to do it because of the number of students in classes, sometimes we can have more than 60 in a language class which is not recommended pedagogically. If the number were limited at least to 15 or 20 it would be possible since performance-based assessment needs more skills, demonstrations, and gestures.

Contrary to this view, specialists of large classroom management such as Brady (2012) suggested small group work so that each learner can benefit from sufficient time of

practice. Additionally, an inspiring group leader can play the role of a teacher. Dörnyei, Henry, and Muir (2016) also argued that intensive group projects are a salient framework to facilitate group motivational flows that can be contagious. In other words, motivational currents can be spread when learners share the same passion and goal while working on a collaborative project. Based on this perspective, group projects such as oral presentations and field work can be used as assessment tools in order to increase learners' motivation. Quality feedback that is given by the classroom teacher or the group peers during this intensive project work and used as an assessment instrument can also be conducive to successful English learning.

Based on the explanations provided earlier, small groups composed of three or five students can be used together with well-designed intensive projects that embed the teaching goals as a framework for applying PBA in large classes. Using assessment materials that give the learners some room to test their new knowledge and then practice it in real-life situations can push up their motivational level and therefore transform an assessment into a moment of interaction and learning. However, it is significant to mention that the classroom teachers should help the small groups become cohesive with positive group norms by raising learners' awareness of the positive group work dynamics. To reach this goal, Poupore (2016) suggested the use of model videos that learners can watch and the adaptation of rules regulating the small groups so that they can germinate and reach maturity. Once the groups complete these steps, they will gain some experiences that will enable them to function autonomously inside and outside the classroom. Each member of the group should further be assigned a role so that they can be fully involved in the collective work and therefore deserve the group grade.

3.2.2. *Designing Performance-Based Assessment Activities Is Time Consuming and Expensive*

The participants explained in their entries that they were more concerned with meeting the requirements of a curriculum than organizing long and expensive performance assessment tasks that have a high authenticity, validity, and washback on the basis of the principles of assessment (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). The process-oriented aspect of PBA makes it less practical and difficult to implement in the Malian EFL context. Additionally, the participants had difficulty integrating the teaching and learning goals in their assessment materials because of their busy schedule. As a result, they used selected response tests that are very high in practicality as illustrated in this sample comment: "Given the variety of the subjects I teach, this method [traditional assessment] is suitable for me because it is less demanding".

From the perspective of a PBA proponent, the process-oriented aspect that characterizes performance assessment provides learners with opportunities to negotiate and use the language for genuine interaction. For example, a study by Kobayashi (2003) found that learners not only focused their effort on the language usage during project work, but they also discussed the meaning and form in order to choose the right words.

Regarding the solutions, a teaching material should be adapted to the financial means of a school. For example, projects such as reading circles, interviewing other students on campus, discussion cards, or organizing debates around social issues in which learners are interested do not require huge financial means to be organized and they have the potential to involve learners in their own assessment process. Alternatives in assessment such as conferences, portfolios, and learner journals can also be used so that teachers can share assessment responsibilities with their learners. For example, students can be paired so that each of them can have a reader who can respond to their piece of writing. These assessment projects can be used with EFL students so that they can reflect on the processes of teaching and learning and then decide on their future learning goals. Although designing these projects and providing learners with quality feedback can be arduous, they are worth being used at least once a semester so that English learners can stop seeing the English language as a mirage that will never be within their reach in a francophone country.

3.2.3. *Subjectivity*

In line with Howell et al.'s (1993) findings claiming that the rating of learners' writing skills was subjected to examiner bias, the participants of this study also considered that grading learners 'oral or written performance is subjective because the rater is sometimes guided by their intuition or familiarity with the students.

> It is too demanding for a teacher to observe more than 60 learners performing a task and assess them when the questions do not have any preset answers like in multiple-choice questions where the answers are usually stored in the rater's brain after correcting a few copies. With performance assessment only a teacher's conscience can help him or her be fair. I personally think that fairness [reliability] cannot be guaranteed and learners may complain about their grades. Moreover, the grade may vary from one teacher to another. (Seydou)

As discussed in the literature review section, designing rubrics and training the teachers to use them (O'Sullivan, 2012) can reduce the examiner bias claimed by Howell et al. (1993) and the participants of this present study. Additionally, collaboration between teachers facilitates the design and use of rubrics and then increases the inter-rater reliability.

3.2.4. *Administrative Constraints*

In the Malian EFL context, teachers are obliged to follow a structured curriculum and then organize the final exam accordingly as shown in Oumar's comments:

> I must teach what is proposed by my department since I cannot change it without my committee's approval. Moreover, during the exam, I must propose test questions and I do not know how to convert PBA tasks into small questions so that they can please my administration. They consider PBA as a way not to organize a final exam. The grades of the final exams are used to take administrative and pedagogical decisions and that is why we find it normal to organize timed traditional tests. Moreover, it is not possible to organize PBA tests in two hours, so I prefer using other types of tests to satisfy the administrative needs.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that each pedagogical committee is responsible for designing their curriculum and submitting it to the central department. As a result, teachers can give some room to PBA materials. Besides, the activities assessed through PBA can be designed according to the content of the curriculum. Furthermore, an assessment should not be oriented only toward the final product. Grading the processes used by learners to develop the final product can increase their chances of getting a better grade in order to validate the course. As a result, they will accept an assessment as an integral part of their learning. Furthermore, it can be noticed that teachers in this context were organizing their assessment just to provide learners with grades that enable the school administration to take educational decisions. They were not evaluating their learners' skills so as to improve the processes of teaching and learning English. It is important to reveal that this practice was encouraged by the school administrations that did not give teachers any opportunities to adapt their teaching and assessment to real-life situations.

3.3. Theme 3: Learners' Low Proficiency Levels and Language Anxiety

According to the participants, the proficiency levels of most of their students prevented them from implementing PBA. For example, they explained that their classes are composed of learners with various levels of proficiency. They mentioned that it is not surprising to find students whose levels are high advanced in the same class with those whose levels are intermediate or beginner. These differences in proficiency levels can deteriorate the classroom atmosphere and then increase certain learners' language anxiety as explained by Mariam:

> I noticed during some of my rare informal oral tasks that my students with very low levels felt frustrated and preferred not to speak. This behavior impacted negatively the class atmosphere and increased the tension and jealousy among students, so I decided to use a test that gives at least equal chance to everybody during the final test in order to be fair.

Learners' low proficiency levels were also considered by Sitan as a factor that impeded the assessment process and the use of PBA tools:

> My learners' levels do not allow them to use English in real situations although they have been learning it for years. Their exposure to English was very limited in the secondary schools and they do not have the same levels even if they attend the same class. For example, certain students were very shy during group work that I have once used as a formative assessment.

According to the participants, their learners' test taking and speaking anxiety increase while oral interactive activities are planned to be used as assessment materials because of their low proficiency levels that hinder their productivity during the communicative tasks as seen in Sitan's comment: "Some students might experience anxiety: test anxiety. I find my students very shy. Some are active but most of them are very shy". Moreover, their levels may not allow them to practice their knowledge in real-life situations as asserted by Sitan: "Students cannot apply appropriately the knowledge in various contexts". However, it is necessary to mention that these difficulties are narrated by teachers. Giving a voice to learners may give a different dimension to the question.

To continue with solutions, specialists such as Oxford (1999) argued that anxiety may not be harmful if it does not become a trait. Additionally, it is difficult to find a language learner whose anxiety level is zero during a text. Being slightly anxious during a test can even be interpreted as a sign of concentration and attention that the test taker gives to the test. Therefore, it is necessary to increase learners' awareness of anxiety and let them use the language with minor mistakes, especially if they do not interfere with the overall understanding (Dörnyei, 2014; Oxford, 1999). Based on the findings of a study by Andrade and Du (2005), training learners to the use of rubrics can additionally decrease their language anxiety and increase their chances of satisfying the assignment requirements in order to obtain better grades.

3.4. Theme 4: Lack of Adequate Facilities

The findings revealed two main features to explain the lack of facilities: teaching and learning materials and technological equipment.

3.4.1. Teaching and Learning Materials

The participants wrote in their reflective entries that their schools did not provide them with appropriate libraries so that their learners could conduct their research. Moreover, the very few textbooks that existed did not respond to the teachers and learners' specific needs:

> My university does not have any appropriate library. Most of the books that we possess are given by English speaking countries' embassies. It is true that they can enhance our knowledge, but they do not reflect our curriculum needs. For example, we do not have recent books about teaching methods, assessment techniques, or classroom management. Most of the books are related to content-based courses. They are not adapted to our learners' levels.

> Having access to books is very important so that learners can perform an activity with success. (Seydou)

Based on this participant's explanations, the teaching and learning materials are not ordered based on the demand, but the schools just accept what is given to them. Although it is recognized that these materials are relevant, they did not offer the participants a better insight into the new trends in language teaching and learning. Having access to the right teaching resource that is being published daily contributes to successful teaching and learning.

3.4.2. *Technological Equipment*

Additionally, a lack of technological equipment such as virtual libraries, computers, and access to the high speed-internet connection are other issues that prevented the participants from developing PBA materials and administering them to their students during an assessment time as revealed in this comment:

> Suppose that I want my students to prepare a presentation about American elections or something related to their own country, how can they attain these goals if they do not have computer or internet connection. We do not even have online learning platforms that learners and teachers can use to discuss the activities during these periods of Coronavirus. (Oumar)

As most of the skills assessed through PBA activities are communicative tasks, it may be challenging to apply them if learners do not have access to the internet connection or if they do not possess a personal computer to prepare or present the final product. Furthermore, teachers and learners do not have access to online materials in order to develop their research during a PBA activity. In case the internet connection is available, the speed is low or it may not be extended to the classrooms.

CONCLUSION

A thematic analysis of the participants' written accounts implies that the Malian EFL teachers were aware of PBA. However, they were not applying PBA activities to assess their learners' competencies due to a lack of training, low practicality, a lack of adequate facilities, and learners' low proficiency levels that caused anxiety during communicative tasks. As solutions to the successfully implementation of PBA in the Malian EFL context, teachers should volunteer to design their own teaching, learning, and assessment materials taking into account their learners' proficiency levels, learning goals, and the curriculum purposes with the help of experts. As communication is the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language, it is necessary to apply PBA along with traditional assessment so that learners can be aware of their true abilities that cannot be revealed by the timed traditional tests.

However, this study has some limitations related to the absence of interviews that could give the participants some opportunities to deepen some of their explanations. What is interesting is that they were not given any writing instructions that could restrict their reflections and therefore decrease the validity of the data collected. This study can be considered as a blueprint for the implementation of PBA in the Malian EFL context. Further studies can investigate the learners' own reaction to the implementation of PBA using ethnographic tools such as observation and learner diaries. Comparing the results obtained from these investigations could motivate the Malian EFL teachers to reconsider their assessment practices.

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