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# Alternative Assessment and English Language Teaching and Learning in Morocco: High School Teachers' Perceptions and Favourite Methods and Techniques

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**Abstract** — Alternative assessment is an integral part of the process of English language teaching and learning. Its importance emanates from the fact that it provides educators, learners, parents, policy makers and the public with feedback about the effectiveness and the efficiency of the educational services. This small-scale study aimed at finding out Moroccan high school English language teachers' perceptions about alternative assessment, the methods and techniques they use, and the reasons for using them. An Ex Post Facto research design was adopted in the study. The findings revealed that most teachers are aware of the importance of alternative assessment in the process of English language teaching and learning. As for their favourite alternative assessment method, it was found that most of them opt for performance assessment. Concerning the techniques used and the reasons for using them, it was found that most of them make use of role plays, oral presentations and mini-projects for a number of reasons.

**Key words** — Assessment; alternative assessment, English language teaching and learning, perceptions, methods, techniques.

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is worth noting that assessment plays a major role in the teaching/learning process of any school subject. It has always been a debatable issue especially with regards to whether the present system of assessment reflects the actual potential of students. Huba and Freed (2000) define assessment as “a process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning” in (Nasri et als., 2010: 37). It is perceived to serve two main purposes: (a) informative, to improve instruction; and (b) summative, to measure students' achievement (Scriven, 1967: 41).

The current study aims at finding out Moroccan high school English language teachers' perceptions about alternative assessment, their favourite method(s), the techniques they use, and the different reasons for using them.

## II. THE STUDY PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

As an ELT practitioner (former high school teacher and supervisor and currently an assistant professor of English), I noticed that most, if not all, teachers still adhere to the traditional orthodoxy that perceives assessment as an end rather than a means. This means that they make use of traditional methods and techniques to gauge learners' knowledge and degree of mastery of English as a foreign language for the sake of giving them grades/marks. That is to say, they use written exams and tests in the classroom to gather data about their learners. Such methods and techniques do not yield information which can be used later to make appropriate decisions related to the teacher's instructional practices and/or the learners' learning behaviors. This can be attributed to two factors. The first one is that standardized assessment techniques are easy to develop, inexpensive to administer, and their results are simple to report and understand. The second is that some teachers believe that alternative assessment methods and techniques don't help them have an idea about their learners' proficiency level in the target language and the problems they still encounter when attempting to use the language to perform given tasks.

In the same vein, Cohen (1990: 47) views traditional assessment strategies as being inadequate. He offers several complaints to explain his dissatisfaction with traditional assessment namely:

- Traditional assessment focuses upon products of learning, but rarely upon process of learning.
- Traditional strategies assess limited aspects of academic learning.
- Traditional assessment strategies provide some information about certain types of learning progress in some subject areas, but largely neglect crucial areas such as, divergent and creative thinking, as well as critical thinking and problem solving.
- Traditional assessment strategies can cause irreparable lifetime damage to individual students, especially to their self-images by providing negative feedback.
- Many (if not most) important educational outcomes cannot be measured, weighed, or counted, and in fact, assessment represents probably at best ten percent of the total impact of learning on students (Wubshet and Menuta, 2015: 160).

This study aims at raising teachers' awareness to the importance of incorporating alternative assessment into their daily instructional practices given its ability to provide them with important pieces of information that inform both teaching and learning. It is expected to be of a great value for Moroccan high school teachers of English since they will benefit from details about these new methods and techniques of assessment. Also, it will provide feedback about the different methods and techniques of authentic assessment because this modern trend of evaluation may be ignored by most of them.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1. DEFINING ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

According to Gronlund (1998), alternative assessment is used to refer to "*assessment methods that provide an alternative to the traditional paper-and-pencil tests*" in (Nasri et als., 2010: 39). Alternative assessment is defined by McNamara (2001: 329) as "*a movement away from the use of standardized multiple-choice tests in favor of more complex performance-*

*based assessments.*” Hancock (1994: 3) describes the term as “*an ongoing process involving the student and teacher in making judgments about the student’s progress in language using nonconventional strategies.*” Linn and Miller (2005) define assessment of student learning as “*a systematic process of collecting information about student progress towards the learning goals.*”

The definitions cited above maintain the idea that alternative assessment is used to mean the different non-conventional strategies and techniques teachers use to measure what learners can do with the language. In other words, it includes the various tasks they can perform making use of their linguistic, communicative, and strategic skills.

## 2. ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT VS. TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT

Bailey (1998: 207) compiles the major differences between alternative assessment and traditional assessment in the following table:

**Table 1.** Alternative assessment vs. traditional assessment

<b>Alternative assessment</b>	<b>Traditional assessment</b>
Continuous, longitudinal assessment	One-shot tests
Direct tests	Indirect tests
Authentic tests	Inauthentic tests
Group projects	Individual projects
Feedback provided to learners	No feedback provided to learners
Untimed exams	Speeded exams
Contextualized test tasks	De-contextualized test tasks
Criterion-referenced score interpretation	Norm-referenced score interpretation
Classroom-based tests.	Standardized tests

From the table above, one might deduce the idea that alternative assessment is a dynamic process which can be used hand in hand with traditional assessment for the simple reason that they do complement each other. It can be delivered as an additional assessment along with traditional assessment any time to collect data regarding learners’ progress and the effectiveness and efficiency of the instructors’ teaching practices.

## 3. ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT METHODS

There are three common methods of alternative assessment according to Moqbel (2015), performance assessment, self-assessment and peer assessment.

### 3.1. PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

This method of assessment is used to assess and evaluate both product and process. For Moqbel (2015), this assessment method includes the set of activities which ask learners to come up with given products (brochures, video clips, portfolios, etc), and to perform or present their ability (role plays, debates, demonstrations, etc).

Performance assessment is also viewed to be “*a form of assessment which can allow students to employ and practise their knowledge, skills and talents based on meaningful and exciting duties and activities*” (Sozbilir and Neacsu, 2014: 29). In the same vein, Reeves (2000: 108) believes that there are five main points in performance assessment: “*1. It is focused on complex learning, 2.it engages higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills, 3. it stimulates a wide range of active responses, 4. it involves challenging tasks that*

require multiple steps, and 5. it requires significant commitments of student time and effort” in (Ayu Fajarsari, 2016: 15).

### 3.2. SELF-ASSESSMENT

Brown and Hudson (1998) argue that self-assessment is “assessment that requires learners to evaluate their language abilities or language performances.” Teachers usually provide some guidelines for students that are related to the criteria of the work or assignment that will be assessed. Moqbel (2015) claims in this respect that self-assessment is “a process in which students are required to assess their performance against standards, and it refers to procedures by which students themselves evaluate their language skills and knowledge” in (Ayu Fajarsari, 2016: 16). Self-assessment is, then, the process which involves learners evaluating their own use of the language to perform several tasks both inside and outside the classroom.

### 3.3. PEER ASSESSMENT

This form of assessment is defined by Toppin et als., (2000: 15) as “an arrangement for peers to consider the level, value, worth, quality or successfulness of the products or outcomes of learning of others of similar status.” Moqbel (2015) asserts in this concern that using peer assessment helps learners enhance their collaborative skills, get more opportunities to learn from each other and use the target language to communicate their ideas and thoughts, and makes them more aware of the objectives of the course they are taking (Ayu Fajarsari, 2016: 17).

## 4. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Like any assessment approach, Nasab (2015) claims that alternative assessment has got both advantages and disadvantages. Some of them in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Advantages and disadvantages of alternative assessment

Advantages of alternative assessment	Disadvantages of alternative assessment
It is used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- evaluate the process and the product of learning besides other important learning behaviors.</li> <li>- evaluate and scrutinize instruction.</li> <li>- producing momentous results to various stakeholders.</li> <li>- connect cognitive psychology to other related fields.</li> <li>- to adopt a collaborative approach to learning.</li> <li>- provide support for students' psychology.</li> <li>- endorse autonomous learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is time consuming and costly for teachers (Brindles, 2001).</li> <li>- Teachers need to be skillful enough (Clark and Gipps, 2000).</li> <li>- Learners need a great deal of guidelines and supervision.</li> <li>- It is open to criticism in terms of psychometric qualities of validity, reliability and practicality (Brown and Hudson, 1998).</li> <li>- Practitioners have doubts about the possibility of the true application of this kind of assessment to large-scale classes (Worthen, 1993).</li> </ul>

The idea to be deduced from the table above is that proponents of alternative assessment believe it is ongoing, formative and developmental in nature. This allows the teacher to gather as much information as possible about the learners on a regular basis. In contrast, those who still adhere to the traditional test-based summative orthodoxy think that it is more convenient thanks to its higher degree of validity, reliability and objectivity.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

### 1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The main objective of the study has been to investigate Moroccan high school English language teachers' perceptions about alternative assessment, their favourite method(s), the techniques they use, and the different reasons for using them. Given its exploratory nature, an EXPOST FACTO research design was adopted. According to Hatch and Lazaraton (1991: 101), this design type allows the researcher "to find out what is going on rather than what causes this."

### 2. THE PARTICIPANTS

The study involved 46 Moroccan high school teachers of English belonging to different institutions in four regional academies for education and training. Here are some demographic pieces of information about them.

**Table 3.** Some demographic information about the participants

Gender	Male		Female		Total					
	N	%	N	%	N	%				
	40	86.95%	06	13.05%	46	100%				
Teaching experience	Less than 10 years		More than 10 years		Total					
	N	%	N	%	N	%				
	26	56.52%	20	43.48%	46	100%				
Academy	Draa-Tafilalet		Souss- Massa		Fez-Meknes		Beni Mellal-Khenifra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	37	80.43%	04	08.69%	03	06.53%	02	02.35%	46	100%

The table above demonstrates that both male and female high school teachers of English from four different academies took part in the study. 56.52% of them have been teaching English in high school for less than ten years whereas 43.48% of them have been teaching English for more than ten years.

### 3. DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected making use of a structured questionnaire that comprises five parts. Part one includes three ice-breaking items which sought to gather demographic information about the participants (gender, teaching experience and school). Part two consists of six items which aim at finding out teachers' perceptions about alternative assessment. Part three comprises three items which attempt to determine teachers' favourite alternative assessment method(s) and to justify their choice. Part four includes eight items which try to identify the different alternative assessment techniques the participating teachers use and why they use them. The last part consists of eight items which purport to find out the major reasons for using alternative assessment techniques instead of the traditional paper-and-pencil assessment ones.

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Items in part B in the questionnaire aim at finding out teachers' perceptions about alternative assessment. The table below shows the results obtained.

**Table 4.** Teachers' perceptions about alternative assessment

Responses Statements	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Alternative assessment is more likely to promote learners' English language proficiency.	43	93.4%	01	2.2%	02	4.4%	46	100%
2. Alternative assessment is more likely to increase learners' motivation to learn English.	40	86.9%	02	4.4%	04	8.6%	46	100%
3. Alternative assessment is much more effective than traditional assessment.	34	73.9%	08	17.4%	04	8.6%	46	100%
4. I feel enthusiastic to assign my learners tasks that require from them to produce and perform their English language skills.	41	89.2%	01	2.2%	04	8.6%	46	100%
5. Alternative assessment is more likely to yield information that can be used to improve my teaching practices.	41	89.2%	03	6.4%	02	4.4%	46	100%

The results displayed in the table above demonstrate the following:

- ◆ 93.4% of the participants believe that alternative assessment is more likely to promote learners' English language proficiency.

- ◆ 86.9% of them think that alternative assessment is more likely to increase learners' motivation to learn English.

- ◆ 73.9% claim that alternative assessment is much more effective than traditional assessment.

- ◆ 89.2% state that they feel enthusiastic to assign their learners tasks that require from them to produce and perform their English language skills.

- ◆ 89.2% declare that alternative assessment is more likely to yield information that can be used to improve their teaching practices.

The participants' higher degree of agreement with the five items suffice to claim that teachers perceive alternative assessment to be of paramount importance in the process of English language teaching and learning. For this reason, they claim that it is highly advisable to use it hand in hand with traditional assessment to have deeper insights into learners' major strengths and weaknesses.

## 2. TEACHERS' FAVOURITE ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT METHOD(S)

The items in part C seek to determine the alternative assessment method teachers prefer to use. The table below highlights the major findings related to this issue.

**Table 5.** The alternative assessment method teachers prefer to use

Responses Alternative assessment methods	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Performance assessment	36	78.3%	10	21.7%	46	100%
2. Self-assessment	12	26.1%	34	73.9%	46	100%
3. Peer assessment	08	17.4%	38	82.6%	46	100%

The results obtained reveal that most teachers (78.3%) prefer to use performance assessment when testing their learners. They favour this method for the following reasons:

- ◆ It is more accurate to be implemented in high school environment.
- ◆ It enables teachers to identify how well learners performed a given task.
- ◆ It allows learners to recognize their mistakes and it puts them in real-life like conditions;
- ◆ It provides teachers with enough opportunities to personalize learning and to push learners to produce something of their own making use of what they have learnt.
- ◆ It gives teachers ample evidence about learners' knowledge and skills.
- ◆ It determines what learners can and cannot do with the language;
- ◆ It informs teachers about the extent to which learners can use the language in real-life like situations appropriately.
- ◆ It encourages and triggers autonomous learning.

## 3. THE ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES TEACHERS USE

The items in this third part purport to identify the most frequently alternative assessment techniques teachers use. The pieces of information in the table below explain this.

**Table 6.** The alternative assessment techniques most teachers use.

Responses Alternative assessment techniques	Yes		No		No answer		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Portfolios	17	37%	29	63%	00	00%	46	100%
2. Mini-projects	32	69.6%	14	30.4%	00	00%	46	100%
3. Role plays	41	89.1%	05	10.9%	00	00%	46	100%
4. Oral presentations	37	80.4%	09	19.6%	00	00%	46	100%
5. Article review	04	08.7%	42	91.3%	00	00%	46	100%
6. Posters	24	52.2%	22	47.8%	00	00%	46	100%
7. Conferences/Interviews	07	15.2%	39	84.8%	00	00%	46	100%
8. Journals	05	10.9%	41	89.1%	00	00%	46	100%

The results shown in the table above indicate that most teachers opt for role plays (89.1%), oral presentations (80.4%), and mini-projects (69.6%) to assess their learners. Such techniques are believed to be much more convenient in yielding the pieces of information teachers need to inform both teaching and learning.

#### 4. THE REASONS FOR USING ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

The items in this part attempts to pinpoint the reasons for which teachers use alternative assessment methods and techniques. Table 7 will give an idea about this issue.

The results displayed in the table above reveal that most teachers use alternative assessment methods and techniques for eight major reasons:

- 97.8% said that they use them to help learners make use of the target language in a meaningful way, and to make them demonstrate what they have learnt and how well they can use that to perform given tasks.
- 95.6% of them said that they use them to replicate real-world communication contexts and situations outside the classroom.
- 93.5% of them said that they use them to involve learners in their own evaluation.
- 91.3% of them said that they use them to motivate learners to learn and use the target language, to give them the chance to a direct display of their progress, to train them to assess their own learning progress and to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and to inspire creativity.

From what has been said earlier, it seems apparent to state that Moroccan high school teachers of English use alternative assessment methods and techniques to inform the learning process given the number of benefits they offer to both teachers and learners.

**Table 7.** The reasons for using alternative assessment in the EFL classroom.

Responses  The reason(s) for using alternative assessment methods and techniques	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. To help learners make use of the target language in a meaningful way.	45	97.8%	00	00%	01	02.2%	46	100%
2. To make learners demonstrate what they have learnt and how well they use that.	45	97.8%	00	00%	01	02.2%	46	100%
3. To involve learners in their own evaluation.	43	93.5%	02	04.3%	01	02.2%	46	100%
4. To motivate learners to learn and use the target language.	42	91.3%	03	06.5%	01	02.2%	46	100%
5. To give learners the chance to a direct display of their progress.	42	91.3%	03	06.5%	01	02.2%	46	100%
6. To train learners to assess their own learning progress and to identify their own strengths and weaknesses.	42	91.3%	03	06.5%	01	02.2%	46	100%
7. To inspire creativity.	42	91.3%	03	06.5%	01	02.2%	46	100%
8. To replicate real-world communication contexts and situations	44	95.6%	01	02.2%	01	02.2%	46	100%



outside the classroom.								
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## VI. IMPLICATIONS

In the light of the findings presented and the conclusions drawn, it sounds legitimate to list the following pedagogical and research implications and recommendations:

- ◆ Teachers should plan to introduce alternative forms of assessment gradually in conjunction with traditional forms of testing. Using a combination of alternative assessment and more traditional measurement allows them to compare results and obtain a comprehensive picture of their learners' language competence and performance.

- ◆ At first, it is advisable for teachers to use checklists and rubrics to evaluate learners' performance but not ask them to do self and peer evaluation. When designing checklists and rubrics, teachers can ask learners to provide input on the criteria that should be included in each. This approach gives the teacher time to become more comfortable with the use of alternative assessment.

- ◆ Teachers are in urgent need of a training course to bridge the gap between theory and practice since they are not used to such a way of assessment.

- ◆ Teachers are recommended to focus on applying these practical alternative assessment methods and techniques in the language classroom and possibly in other content area classroom as well.

- ◆ Teachers are advised to experiment with a variety of instructional methods as they implement forms of alternative assessment especially with learners with serious learning problems.

- ◆ An experimental study can be conducted to investigate the possible impact of using methods of alternative assessment in teaching on improving the learners' overall performance.

- ◆ Investigating learners' attitude toward using methods and techniques of alternative assessment is also needed to allow learners the chance to voice their opinions about those methods and techniques.

- ◆ Investigating difficulties faced by teachers in using methods and techniques of alternative assessment is also needed to find out solutions and to suggest better ways to handle such difficulties.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the study has been but a humble attempt to shed some light on Moroccan high school teachers of English perceptions about alternative assessment, their favorite methods and techniques in addition to the reasons for using such methods and techniques. The findings revealed that most of the participating teachers believe that alternative assessment should be part and parcel of the process of English language teaching and learning. As for their favourite method, most of them opted for performance assessment given its ability to inform both teaching and learning. When it comes to the frequently used techniques, many of them chose role plays, oral presentations and mini-projects since they allow teachers to have a clear picture about their learners' ability to use the target language in a meaningful way to perform given tasks. Concerning the reasons for using alternative assessment methods and techniques, most of the participating teachers employ them for eight major reasons.

Several pedagogical and research implications and recommendations have been listed. They could be used to determine the potentials alternative assessment can offer to the ELT community in particular and all the stakeholders in general. The goal is to draw their attention to the various benefits they might gain from using alternative assessment methods and techniques in the ELT classroom.

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