



Exploration of the Use of Alternative Assessment Techniques in Teaching of English at Secondary Level

Nazia Shahzadi¹, Asma Malik², Dr. Asghar Abbas³

Abstract

The main objective of the study was to explore dominant assessment techniques, secondary school teachers use on regular basis in their English language classes. Quantitative cum Qualitative research design was used. 25 English language public secondary school teachers of Tehsil Gujrat (13 male and 12 female SSTs) were selected through random sampling technique. They were assigned to use alternative assessment techniques as per model developed by the researchers. They were handed over checklist to keep record of assessment techniques. At the end of term, the record of assessment techniques of all the teachers was collected with the checklist. Frequencies and percentages of checklist of all the teachers were calculated. Record of assessment techniques were also observed and analyzed thoroughly for qualitative results. The outcome of the study informed that in tehsil Gujrat, majority of the English language teachers are reluctant to use alternative assessment techniques in their classes. The researchers recommend that further research may be conducted to generalize the results of the study to the entire contents of the English language at secondary level. There may be changes in the annual board examination system to make it compatible with the modern assessment techniques.

Keywords: Alternative Assessment, Implementation, Traditional Assessment, Public Secondary Schools, Learning Outcomes, Secondary School Teachers (SSTs)

1. Introduction

Do evaluation scores stand for considerable educational results? Do progress and development in assessment score symbolize noteworthy learning effects? Are upgrading in evaluation scores outcome of better instruction and education, or do this testing reveal a curriculum and a program of study in which students are being “drilled and killed” (Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters, 2002). In the ever-developing field of teaching and learning, the advantages of alternative assessment are being gradually more acknowledged and alternative assessment measures and methods were initiated into the varied educational grades, a widespread, but however unsupported, vision of measurement modification has promptly expanded. This situation and point of view claimed that radical alteration in the temperament of testing—far from multiple-choice, molecular layouts and towards new multifaceted, considerable and significant performance evaluation—will cause in the development of learning processes.

But prior to such alteration and changes can be executed, elevated and grand quality testing must be thoroughly and analytically extended and authenticated. Consequently, there is a mounting curiosity and concentration on searching the use of unconventional techniques of assessment. To plan high-quality learning decisions, the obtained assessment data should be satisfactory so that it may provide well-designed and purposeful feedback to the learner’s strong and weak points. In order to address this issue there is a need to understand the nature of unconventional assessment and different ways of alternative assessment. In this study the researchers tried to answer the question “What is the current status of alternative assessment in public secondary schools of tehsil Gujrat?”

1.1. Nature of Assessment

Sidek (2012) elucidated that customary and traditional testing system required learners to understand and reproduce specific data. It had to be reformed and adjusted to make assessment tasks more eloquent, more expressive and communicative in nature. Tamjid and Birjandi (2011) believed that teachers should change old-fashioned and customary, one-answer evaluations towards more practical and authentic performance-based assessments in which learners’ individual and particular responsibility was projected. At present in the Western states, pupils are stimulated to contribute wholly in classroom goings-on. According to Potts, (2010) nowadays pupils are being demanded to utilize their reasoning and intellectual power, theoretical information, and linguistic expertise to understand, manufacture, scrutinize, associate, differentiate, communicate, compose and assess etc.

Gronlund & Linn (2005) initiated a transfer from conventional evaluation to a novel paradigm, alternative assessment. Especially, the vision that formative and summative evaluations are two diverse lay out, has fascinated teacher’s concentration (Frey & Schmitt, 2007). With this revolution, innovative and novel assessment practice should be used. Teachers must propose and devise such kind of classroom assessments that make learners more knowledgeable and prepare them for a better position and status of life (Hodges, Lamb & Brown, 2005). Selection of proper kind of evaluation is decisive for appropriate preparation; the major focus of assessment should be on development of the higher-order thinking skills and on the improvement of critical reading, writing skills. The discriminating and sharp stress on assessment emerged at a time of mounting frustration with long-established and conventional multiple-choice type of evaluation. (Sheppard, 2005) acknowledged that in the 90s various types of experimentation were done on a variety of evaluation practices as teachers began probing for healthier and improved ways for discriminating students’ knowledge. She further stated that “teachers have always assessed students’ performance, always done performance assessment, so some of the “new” methods are continuations or revisions of long-standing practice”. All

¹ PhD Scholar STED, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan, naziactscgrt@gmail.com

² M.Phil. Education, QAED, Lahore, Pakistan, Pakfuturelearn.2023@gmail.com

³ Training Coordinator PHCIP-PMIU-PESRP, Lahore, Pakistan, Asgharabbas55@gmail.com

these techniques and ways, as a cluster, at times have been called alternative assessment so that these can be differentiated from regular conventional standardized testing and sometimes these have also been described authentic assessment or performance assessment.

Alternative assessment is always student centered and teacher- created and mainly focused on the curriculum studied in the class. Alternative assessment techniques are of different types according to the learning objectives and skills being assessed. Learners are generally asked to exhibit their knowledge and learning by creating a product, such as an exhibition or oral presentation, or performing a skill, such as conducting an experiment or demonstration. Alternative assessment comprises an extensive continuum of assessment opportunities to handle the diverse learning methods. Some students might choose to demonstrate understanding by writing about something while others might prefer to perform or to display visually.

Performance appraisal is an alternative to the conventional process of evaluating student success. In Long-established and customary assessments students are expected to respond correctly (Mostly on a multiple-choice test), whereas alternative assessments expect learners to exhibit and display understanding and proficiency to resolve problems (National Commission on Testing and Public Policy, 1990). To prepare students for state testing by using time-honored and conventional, summative testing in the classroom is not satisfactory and adequate.

Various research studies also exposed that multiple-choice assessment questions are worthwhile and beneficial only for evaluation of recollection. American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2011 likewise indicated that the multiple-choice tests only displays that pupils can recollect, understand; or in certain cases, explain, but they are unable to assess pupils' capacity to utilize knowledge (Bauer & Brown, 2001). Conventional testing is typically official and offers instructors data regarding the intellectual level of individual student (Clark, 2012). Many efforts have been done to make assessment much more meaningful and expressive. There are many challenges in adopting alternative assessment as a means to assess our students' interest and commitment to school (Baker, 2010). According to Guskey (2003) most of the teachers rely on the outcomes of multiple choice tests, writing tasks, and other such type of assessments for the reason that they direct correlate to classroom teaching objectives. Bloom (1956) also approved that understanding objective characterizes the lowermost level of knowledge. A pupil not only has information, but also comprehends his knowledge (Maeroff, 2001)). Old-fashioned and conventional multiple-choice test items are not suitable evaluation mechanism to assess pupil attainment on the information being taught (Parkes, 2010). The new sophisticated theories in language learning, has led to greater emphasis on acquirement and utility of knowledge, rather than the gathering of pieces of information. New Learning theories required innovative and novel kinds of assessments which would enable learners to generate meaning of their own. The movement from traditional paper pencil test to alternative assessments is called performance assessment. Portfolios, demonstrations, observation, open writing, exhibition etc. are some of the strategies to assess student's work. These different types of assessment strategies and terms have led the search for more meaningful assessments. These strategies can better obtain the significant products and can prepare the students for their future life in order to ensure success (Alderson, 2005).

1.2. Context of the Study

Very few evidences of the use of alternative assessment techniques in Pakistani public secondary schools had been witnessed, therefore there was need to conduct a study in the use of alternative assessment techniques that provided proofs of its effectiveness in Pakistani teaching learning context. So the study aimed to explore the use of alternative assessment techniques by secondary school teachers in the subject of English in tehsil Gujrat.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- To explore the use of alternative assessment techniques by secondary school teachers in the subject of English in tehsil Gujrat.
- To give some suggestion for using alternative assessment techniques by English teachers at secondary level.

2. Methodology

The exploration of the use of different alternative assessment strategies in learning of English at secondary level is a contribution towards improvement in educational assessment methods. The study was descriptive in nature. This research design was considered appropriate to illustrate the contemporary condition in classrooms as far as assessment strategies of secondary school teachers are concerned. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, mixed method design of qualitative cum quantitative techniques were adopted for the study. Seven lessons (Transport, Human Rights and the Madina Charter, A Nation's Strength, A Father's Advice, Hazrat Ali's (R.A) Humanism, Handicrafts of Pakistan and The Menace of Drugs) of 10th class English language Syllabus were selected to observe the alternative assessment practices of Secondary school teachers.

2.1 Data Collection

For the daily record of assessment techniques, checklist was developed. It would be used by SSTs to keep record of assessment techniques during the whole term. Checklist would help the researcher to collect data quantitatively. After a time period of one term; each teacher presented the exercises, quizzes, tests, and assignments etc. that he/ she used to assess the students during the whole term along with the checklist.

3. Results and Interpretation

Data was analyzed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. In quantitative data analysis the record of assessment techniques implemented by English language SSTs on checklist was calculated first daily, then weekly and at the end, of whole term. In qualitative data analysis the assessment techniques practiced by SSTs, were studied and analysed thoroughly to make record of assessment techniques.

3.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The following table shows the detail of assessment techniques of secondary school teacher's one term's assessment practices which they recorded on the checklist.

Table 1: Overall record of one term's assessment techniques utilized by secondary school English language teachers

| Sr | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------|-----------------|-----------|----------|------------------|--------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Kinds of Assessment | Self-Evaluation | Observation | Presentation/Demonstration | Portfolios | Peer Assessment | Checklist | Journals | Anecdotal Record | Open Writing | Round Table | Traditional Assessment |
| Teacher 1 | 13 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 2 | - | - | 3 | - | 49 |
| Teacher 2 | 13 | 5 | 6 | - | 6 | - | - | - | 4 | 2 | 50 |
| Teacher 3 | 10 | 7 | 4 | - | 5 | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | 60 |
| Teacher 4 | 15 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 3 | - | - | - | 2 | - | 51 |
| Teacher 5 | 17 | 2 | 4 | - | 4 | 3 | - | - | - | 1 | 46 |
| Teacher 6 | 11 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 1 | - | - | 7 | - | 52 |
| Teacher 7 | 12 | 7 | 6 | - | 5 | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | - | 47 |
| Teacher 8 | 14 | 4 | 3 | - | 2 | 2 | 1 | - | 2 | - | 61 |
| Teacher 9 | 07 | 2 | 2 | - | 3 | 3 | - | - | 3 | - | 43 |
| Teacher 10 | 14 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 4 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 34 |
| Teacher 11 | 17 | 4 | 5 | - | 4 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 38 |
| Teacher 12 | 15 | 3 | 1 | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 42 |
| Teacher 13 | 11 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | 40 |
| Teacher 14 | 14 | 6 | 3 | - | 1 | 3 | - | - | 3 | 3 | 37 |
| Teacher 15 | 20 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 20 |
| Teacher 16 | 10 | 2 | 4 | - | 2 | 4 | - | - | 2 | 1 | 63 |
| Teacher 17 | 17 | 3 | 2 | - | 3 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | 4 | 53 |
| Teacher 18 | 12 | 5 | 3 | - | 4 | - | - | - | 3 | 2 | 29 |
| Teacher 19 | 19 | 2 | 5 | - | 5 | 2 | - | - | 1 | 4 | 40 |
| Teacher 20 | 10 | 1 | 2 | - | 6 | - | - | 1 | 2 | 3 | 42 |
| Teacher 21 | 17 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 9 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 4 | 46 |
| Teacher 22 | 16 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 8 | - | 2 | - | 2 | 6 | 38 |
| Teacher 23 | 17 | 9 | - | - | 7 | 2 | - | - | - | 7 | 39 |
| Teacher 24 | 26 | 10 | 2 | - | 6 | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | 4 | 45 |
| Teacher 25 | 18 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 3 | - | - | - | 3 | 50 |
| Total | 365 | 124 | 79 | 9 | 109 | 32 | 11 | 3 | 42 | 52 | 1115 |
| | 16% | 5.5% | 3.5% | .4% | 4.8% | 1.4% | .5% | .1% | 1.8% | 2.3% | 49.5% |

Table 1 shows the quantitative data analysis of assessment practices of sampled English language high school teachers on checklist. The weight-age of traditional assessment was 49.5% whereas the weight age of alternative assessments ranged 0% to 5.5% except self-evaluation. It was apparent that most of the teachers frequently utilised conventional and customary assessment techniques although some time they have practiced alternative assessment techniques. The ranking of different kinds of alternative assessment are further elaborated below with the bar graph. Difference in bars length indicated the score for the ranking of the alternative assessment techniques.

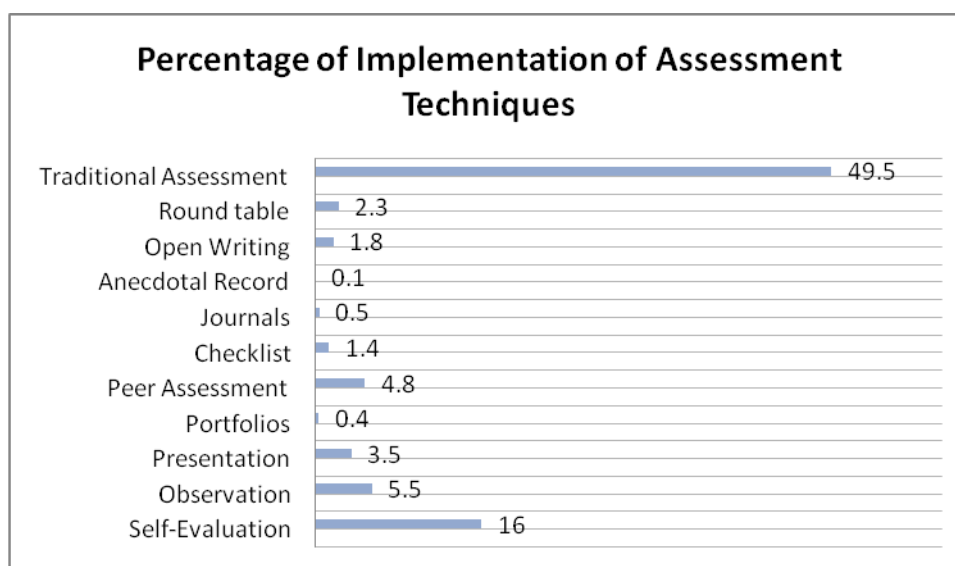


Figure 1: Percentage of Implementation of alternative assessment techniques

The graph indicates the ratio of implementation; self-evaluation 16%, Observation 5.5%, Presentation 3.5 %, portfolio 0.4%, Peer Assessment 4.8%, Checklist 1.4%, Journals 0.5%, Anecdotal Record 0.1%, Open writing 1.8%, round table 2.3% and traditional assessment 49.5 % were implemented.

3.2. Qualitative Data Analysis Of Assessment Packages

Detailed analysis of the assessment techniques showed that the tests, class work and homework assignments were constructed mainly of multiple choice, fill-ins and short answer questions. Although alternative assessment activities such as project work, peer assessment, self-evaluation, observation and performance-based tasks etc. were present only in limited range. Much of the assessment activities that were submitted for analysis still rely heavily on traditional assessment activities such as written tests that primarily consist of multiple-choice, fill-in and other types of closed questions. Although project work, literature assignments and book tasks do offer students opportunities to engage in authentic activities. But these types of activities were not used as often as traditional assessment activities.

3.3. Ranking Of Assessment Techniques

The following table presents the ranking of alternative assessment techniques in descending order in accordance with percentage score.

Table 2: Ranking of Assessment Techniques used by Secondary School Teachers

| S. No. | Kinds of Assessments | Score Percentage | Ranking |
|--------|------------------------|------------------|---------|
| 1 | Traditional Assessment | 49.5% | 1 |
| 2 | Self –Evaluation | 16% | 2 |
| 3 | Observation | 5.5% | 3 |
| 4 | Peer Assessment | 4.8% | 4 |
| 5 | Demonstration | 3.5% | 5 |
| 6 | Round Table | 2.3% | 6 |
| 7 | Open ended Questions | 1.8% | 7 |
| 8 | Checklist | 1.4% | 8 |
| 9 | Journal | 0.5% | 9 |
| 10 | Portfolio | 0.4% | 10 |
| 11 | Anecdotal Record | 0.1% | 11 |

The assessment technique that stands on the top with respect to the use of secondary school teachers is “Traditional Assessment” with score 49.5 “Self-evaluation” is on 2nd number in ranking with 16%, “Observation” is on 3rd number with 5.5%, Peer Assessment is on 4th number with 4.8%, “Demonstration” is on 5th number with 3.5%, Round Table is on the 6th number with 2.3%, Open ended Questionnaire” is on 7th number with score 1.8%, Checklist is on 8th number with 1.4%, Anecdotal Record is on 9th number with 0.1, Portfolio is on 10th no with score 0.4% and Journal is on 11th number with score 0.5%. The following graph indicates the ranking more clearly.

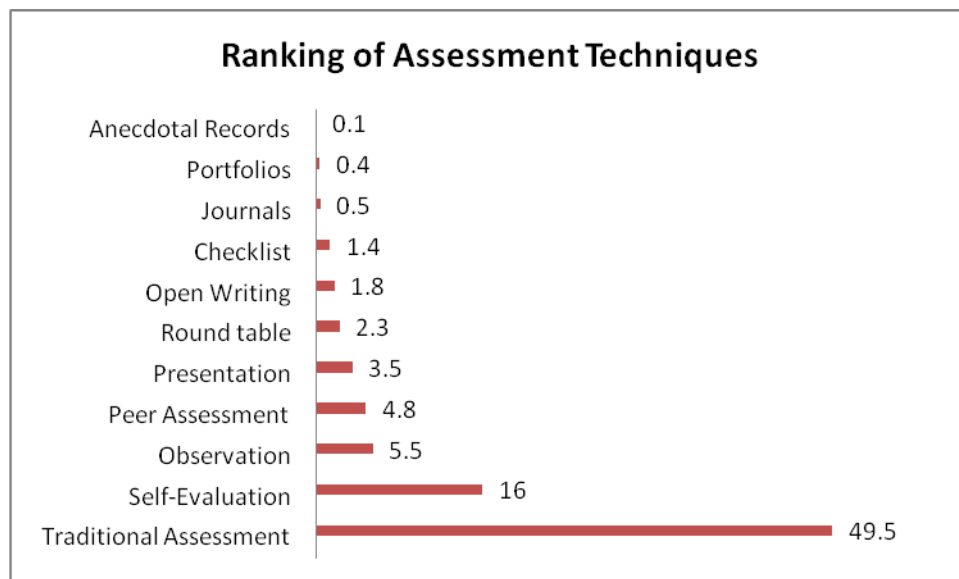


Figure 2: Graphical Representation of Ranking of Assessment Techniques

The graph indicates the ranking of implementation of alternative assessment techniques. Traditional assessment with 49.5 %, is on the top whereas anecdotal record with 0.1% is in the bottom line.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Use of traditional assessment was prominent in qualitative and quantitative data analysis of the assessment packages. Alternative assessment activities such as presentation, peer assessment, self-evaluation, observation and performance-based tasks etc. were present only to some extent. So it may be concluded that majority of the English language teachers were reluctant to use alternative assessment techniques in their classes.

The conclusions of the present study are in consonance with the conclusion of the study “Alternative Assessment in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Israel” by Grabin (2007). The study concluded that most of the teachers are not ready to use alternative assessment in their classes. Similarly other studies just as “Approaches to alternative Assessment” by Hammod 1994, (Smith & Fey, 2000), & Stecher, (2010) reported the positive effect of alternative assessment practices in English teaching and assessment. Like many other under developed countries, mostly the assessment practices in Pakistani public secondary schools are embedded in summative evaluation methods constructed on conventional and customary MCQs, True/False, and Fill in the blanks paper pencil test. Alternative assessment approaches are not given much importance. Different previous research studies have shown that alternative assessment techniques are considered very comprehensive evaluation and testing tools that broadened the scope of assessment approaches, stimulated shared and cooperative learning, made learners creative thinkers and enhance their interests in English language learning (Shahid, 2002). However, while practicing alternative assessment techniques teachers faced many challenges. Their workload may be increased, its time consuming, the newness of the alternative assessment techniques, pupil’s negativity and expenditure-related issues. Teachers want to change rigid, standardized testing to comprehensive and flexible assessment practices (Rahmani, 2012). The major problem is that there is a dire need of professionally trained and developed teachers for the implementation of alternative assessment techniques in classrooms (Siddiqui, 2010).

The researchers recommend that further research may be conducted to generalize the results of the study to the entire contents of the English language at secondary level. There may be changes in the annual board examination system to make it compatible with the modern assessment techniques.

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