

ТЕОРІЯ ТА МЕТОДИКА НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ

IRINI-RENIKA PAPAΚAMMENOU (Greece)

ORCID: 0000-0002-7526-0371

STUDENT-CENTERED CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT: PERCEPTION AND NEW METHODS

One of the important roles and responsibilities of teachers is to conduct assessment to assess students' progress. The implementation of alternative assessment methods can be frustrating and rather difficult for teachers. This paper discusses teacher and student perceptions on using alternative assessment. It focuses on how young learners of English perceived three different alternative assessments: peer-assessment, conferencing and the use of students' drawings as assessment materials. The data sources comprised classroom observations, interviews with teachers and written comments from students. Analysis of the data provided insights on how teachers choose assessment techniques in A1 and A2 level classes. Teachers' perceptions on the specific assessment methods are discussed. The written comments from students identified how students perceived the combination of the assessment methods employed by teachers and which assessment method they favored. The results show that teachers and students have positive perceptions on alternative assessment. Students' needs and age are important factors for selecting assessment methods and individual needs must be taken into consideration when choosing alternative assessment methods. This paper highlights the importance of alternative assessment in A1 and A2 level classes since it can improve instruction. Results on the drawings used in the study as assessment materials indicate that students value personalized assessment. Alternative assessment can be a vital component in educators' efforts to improve education.

Key words: *alternative assessment, teacher literacy, students' perceptions, teachers' perceptions, formative assessment, conferencing, drawings.*

1. Introduction

Classroom-based assessment or in-class assessment is assessment carried out by teachers, which is based on the learning that has been taken place in class. Summative assessment and formative assessment are two ways in assessing students' and schools' progress, even though, they provide different insights and actions for educators. In EFL classes in Greece teachers tend to use summative assessment to evaluate their students since it is time-saving both in terms of production and execution. Some examples of summative assessment used by teachers are end-of-unit or chapter tests and end of terms and semester exams. The score of the tests are used for accountability for students and schools. Teachers' lack of assessment knowledge and skills confine them in using student-centered approaches of assessment since they have limited assessment training or not at all. Therefore, one of the challenges for teachers is choosing appropriate alternative assessment techniques and make use of them in the class. The study investigates teachers' and students' conceptions of the use of formative and alternative assessment in

class. It also highlights the importance of alternative assessment procedures in young learners and investigates how they can be applied in EFL classes.

2. Theoretical Background

A teacher spends thirty to fifty percent of classroom time assessing her/his pupils (Stiggins, 1999) and that is why teachers should be properly assessment literate. There are two different approaches to gauge students' learning summative or traditional assessment and formative or alternative assessment. Alternative assessment can be used like an umbrella term for the types of assessment except for anything other than standardized, traditional tests (Barootchi and Keshavarz, 2002).

Summative or traditional assessment (O'Leary, 2006; Yang, 2008) range from teacher-constructed end of lesson exam, achievement tests to standardized tests which evaluate students' progress at specific points in time. Some examples of summative assessment are selected-response items (e.g., multiple-choice), brief constructed-response (e.g., short answer ques-

tions), and essay questions (Al-Nouh et al, 2014). Such assessment techniques have not only positive washback effects by 'delivering objective data to support a teacher's professional judgment, to make high-stakes decisions and as a tool for acquiring the needed information for adjustments in curriculum and instruction' (States et al, 2018) but also negative washback effects since they can 'take valuable instruction time away from students and increase teacher and students stress without producing notable results' (States et al, 2018). Summative assessment can demotivate students and thus create feelings of stress and encourage memorization lacking in demonstrating learners' multiple competencies.

Formative assessment or alternative assessment though give the opportunity to learners to demonstrate the decision-making process in their own learning and assessment. Such assessment techniques can improve an individual student's performance and help teachers to adjust instruction to assist students master material (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007; Harlen & James, 1997, States, 2014). There are a variety of formats of formative and alternative assessment strategies and they can be distinguished from summative assessment since they encourage students' involvement in the assessment and learning process and provide descriptive feedback which can help students to move forward in their learning (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). Some formats of alternative assessment procedures are portfolios, projects journals, blogs, websites, reading logs, videos of role plays, presentations, concept maps, self-evaluation questionnaires, work samples, teacher observations or anecdotal records, self- and peer- assessment, games, polls, creation of visuals and conferencing (Knight & Mantz, 2003; Cirit, 2005). Of great importance is that alternative methods of assessment help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and teachers to gather information on their students' abilities, talents, interests, potentials.

Even though studies on the use of alternative assessment to students have shown that teachers realize the importance of alternative assessment in improving teaching and learning (Yang, 2008; Yu-Ching, 2008; Alkharusi et al, 2012; Gonzales & Aliponga, 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Wongwanich, 2012) they seem to struggle to implement alternative assessment (Metin, 2011). Teachers are forced to use summative assessment due to lack of training assessment (Yu-Ching, 2008; Birgin & Baki, 2009; Tante, 2010),

adequate training programmes (Yang, 2008; Ghazali et al., 2012; Gonzales & Aliponga, 2012) and the difficulties they face when using alternative assessment. Studies have reported a number of factors that affect the implementation of alternative assessment methods such as the difficulty of implementation, time constraints, large class size, difficulty of classroom management, subjectivity of grading, and heavy workloads (Guerin, 2010; Watt, 2005; Yu-Ching, 2008; Alkharusi et al., 2012; Ghazali et al., 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Wongwanich, 2012).

The present study aimed at investigating young language learners instead of teenagers or adults as most studies do. In addition, the study focused solely on classroom-based assessment and not summative assessment in the hope of changing teachers' negative beliefs on alternative assessment. Teachers' competence may reveal important information on the teachers' training needs. Students perceptions on alternative assessment was another critical part of this research. Through the implementation of alternative assessments that relate to students' life, create positive classroom atmosphere and encourage creativity, more useful and effective assessment techniques can be designed. Hence, the results of the study are useful for educators and policy makers to better understand teachers' attitudes on alternative assessment.

3. Research Framework

In order to provide the reader with a picture of the context in which the study was carried out, a short description of the research context in which the study was conducted is presented before stating the research problem.

English education in Greece is carried out in public and private schools or else *frontistiria* (Papakammenou, 2016, p. 119). Private schools, which are the focus of the study, operate after the public school and are regarded as an extra-curricular activity. It is very common students to attend private foreign language schools in the afternoons to learn English and other foreign languages. These schools prepare students for a variety of English high-stake exams. Students start attending *frontistiria* at the age of five.

Teachers in most *frontistiria* use mainly summative assessment to assess their students in all levels. Studies have shown that teachers have excessive workload and they lack assessment literacy (Papakammenou, 2016, Tsagari, 2009). These two reasons force teachers to use ready

made tests taken from books. Unfortunately, this happens not only to advanced classes (B2, C1 and C2 level) in which students sit for high-stake exams but also to all levels of students from early language learners, elementary (A1 and A2 levels) to intermediate level (B1 and B2 levels) students.

In this context, teachers used only summative forms of assessment to evaluate students in all levels of classes. They evaluated students in the end of a chapter and in the end of the semester and school year. Teachers used only ready-made tests which resembled the units of the books they used. The study carried out in *senior* classes which are classes of A1, A2 and B1 level of English according to the CEFR.

The scope of the study was to replace summative assessment in senior classes with formative and/or alternative assessment. Teachers should not use any type of summative assessment and replace it with other forms of assessment that can monitor students' progress, provide ongoing feedback and allow teachers to adjust and improve their teaching methods. In response to the need from teachers in learning new forms of assessment practices and in training on how to apply assessment concepts and techniques and making assessment related decisions (Vogt and Tsagari, 2014; Kiomrs, 2011) the study aimed at fostering a greater understanding of how teachers decide on what assessment techniques to use and what factors contribute to their decisions. The study also focused on a new alternative assessment technique which not only involved students in the assessment process, but it also put students in the centre of the process since they were the ones who participated in the creation of the materials. Teachers made use of drawings and things that students made or had in order to assess them. The study aimed to show how important is for students to use personalised and inclusive materials when they are assessed. The general purpose of the study was to investigate the assessment methods that teachers used as well as the effects of the replacement of summative assessment with other forms of assessment. In addition, the study aims to show how training on new and alternative assessment techniques can help teachers change the existing assessment and teaching reality. Most importantly, this study introduces a more student-centred way to assess students and deals with the washback effect of alternative assessment techniques on teachers and students.

The results of the study will recommend new ways to assess, monitor and evaluate students with or without the use of summative assessment. Focusing on formative and alternative assessment techniques, the study studies their influence on students, teachers and the whole teaching procedure. Thus, the researcher seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are students' perceptions to alternative assessments?
2. What is the students' most favorite type of alternative assessments?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions to alternative assessments?

3.1. Participants

The participants in the present study were 95 EFL learners of English in Greece. They were boys and girls between 9-11 years old of A1 and A2 level of English. These students learned English as a foreign language in a *frontistirio* in a province in west of Greece. The students were taught four hours per week by two teachers. The teachers were English language teachers both with undergraduate and postgraduate studies in English Language and teaching. The participant teachers taught all levels at the specific *frontistirio*. Each teacher taught 2 hours per week the same class and they both used integrated-skill instruction. The study focused on the two teachers to obtain a complete picture of teachers' teaching and assessment practices in the specific class and to allow comparisons (Yin, 2010). Consent was secured from both teachers and the students' parents for their participation in the study.

3.2. Data Collection

To investigate how teachers assessed students both a case study and an action research took place and a variety of data collection methods were combined.

Action research allows 'interventions in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 186) and for this reason it considered to be the most suitable for data collection. The researcher could not only capture teachers' and students' attitudes and feelings but also to monitor changes and improve processes since action research offers opportunities for continued reflection. The researcher could also observe how the alternative assessment techniques worked for the participants.

Aiming at implementing alternative assessment methods a framework for the action study was laid down. The framework included the following steps: (1) the delivery of a workshop on alternative assessment techniques; (2) the choice of the assessment techniques; (3) the formation of assessment material. Data collected in the course of the research project took various forms, including:

- semi-structured interviews with teachers
- written comments from the students on specific aspects of their experience
- classroom observations

Teachers chose to use assessment techniques that value student's needs as a group or as individuals and encourage them to participate in the learning process all the time. Also, they chose a variety of assessment methods in order to better identify what students have mastered and what aspects need improvement. The assessment methods they chose to use were peer assessment, conferencing (personal face time with the teacher) and the use of students' drawings. Teachers used students' drawings to assess their skills. They created reading, writing, speaking and listening activities using what groups, pairs or each student drew in previous lessons in order to assess their learning.

Classroom observations were conducted in order to gain a clearer picture of the teaching and the assessment techniques used in the lessons. Both participant teachers teaching all A1 and A2 classes during the same period were observed. This served to conduct a comparative study across teachers and across classes. During each observation, real-time field notes were taken recording actions and descriptions of resources and materials used during the lesson, comments were made, and a digital camera was used to record the lessons. Observations were the ideal data collection procedure because they can 'discover things that participants not freely talk about in interview situations' (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 305) and in this case it proved useful especially with students. Overall, 20 classes employing new assessment techniques were observed and video recorded – 10 of each teacher.

Follow-up interviews were conducted to teachers after lessons in order to justify their actions, explain the rationale behind them and comment on students' and the teaching procedure. Interviews could not be conducted to students due to time constraints, so students were asked to comment on a piece of paper in the end of the

class or after the application of an assessment procedure. Both follow-up interviews and written comments provided information on why teachers taught the way they did, what affected teachers' choices and how students reacted to it.

3.3. Analysis

Interviews and classroom observations were video recorded and subsequently transcribed using Atlas.ti (Muhr and Freise 2004). The data gathered was analysed by using coding that correlated with the research questions.

4. Findings and Discussion

The first question focused on students' reaction towards the alternative assessment techniques used in the study and especially the new method. Written comments from students showed that students enjoyed the new methods used. Peer-assessment was a fun activity for students since they reported that they '*had fun*' and '*it was like playing a game*'. Most students found it a very useful technique because they could help one another and share their work. They believed that it was '*more like a game and fun activity than assessment*' and they felt willing to participate. Sharing their work with their classmates made the assessment procedure more interesting to them. Most students commented that '*I loved to read other students' essays and comment on them*'. A very interesting comment was that '*peer-assessment helped me understand what I did wrong*'. Students also reported that it encouraged them to work harder to achieve better results. Some students also reported that the combination of peer-assessment and conferencing helped them a lot. They referred that '*I enjoyed spending some personal time with my teacher and discussing my difficulties and concerns*'. Some students preferred conferencing over peer-assessment because they felt that it helped them progress and understand their mistakes. A student wrote '*conferencing allowed me to spend some time with my teacher and show me ways to study and improve myself*'. Results show that students are in need of guidance and understanding of their mistakes. A combination of the assessment techniques seem to be more effective and useful in aiding students develop self-awareness and build up their understanding. Young learners prefer fun activities that allow them to interact and engage in the learning process. However, some students found conferencing more stressful than peer-assessment. '*I felt really stressed when I*

should spend one-to-one time with my teacher. I did not know what to tell her and I did not have anything to discuss with her. I prefer peer-assessment because it is fun' a student said. Combining activities can serve all students' needs.

It is worth mentioning also that students were very happy and relieved without summative assessment. As soon as teachers announced the absence of tests in the end of each unit students were very enthusiastic. There were a few students that said that they *'don't mind tests'* and asked the teachers to make exceptions and allow them to write the tests. These students were excellent students according to the teachers and they always scored great marks. Regarding the new activity students were impressed that their drawings were used, and they felt that they were involved in the assessment process. Also, they felt at ease with the assessment procedure because the drawings were more familiar to them depicting topics and pictures that they new about. Students commented that *'I loved that my teacher used our drawings because I could talk, write and understand more things than the pictures my book has'*. Implementing personalised assessment can customize the learning experience and each individual student gets the right assessment based on how they learn and what interests them.

The observations on teachers' meeting for the selection of the assessment methods showed that teachers were very eager to use new assessment methods, but they persisted on having guidance on how to implement them. Also, teachers discussed a lot about the students' needs and age as they believed that they are the most important factors when choosing assessment techniques. Teachers did not feel sufficiently prepared for either using or selecting alternative assessment techniques which highlights teachers' need for training. Teachers had positive perceptions on alternative assessment techniques, and they highlighted the positive effects all three assessment techniques had on students' feelings and classrooms' atmosphere. A teacher mentioned that *'the techniques we used not only made students more competent, but they also created feelings of involvement, fun and achievement'*.

An interesting point noticed in the study is that teachers referred to the curriculum content and teaching. Teachers believed that using alternative assessment methods influenced them in order to promote changes in their educational practices.

Teachers did not rely as much as they used to on the coursebooks since they did not used ready-made tests from books. They also spent time on more creative activities and tasks. Teachers also were in favor of the new assessment methods because they believed that they empower students to take charge of their learning. Another point to consider is that teachers changed their mentality about grades. A teacher mentioned that *'now I can see that students do not need grades. It is better to give them opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and us to monitor their progress'*. So, significant changes can be reached in educational practices when teachers use alternative assessment procedures.

5. Implications

The alternative assessments from this study produce positive results; students and teachers have positive perceptions of these assessments. With that said, the new, alternative assessment technique should be considered as an alternative assessment approach and more studies regarding materials and new techniques are needed. Further research is needed to explore more alternative assessment techniques in different age groups and cultures. Different combination of assessment methods can be more effective and suitable for intercultural, multilingual and other types of classes. The new assessment method requires more investigation on how it can be applied to other contexts and age groups and how it can be adopted to become more effective. Different data may generate with the use of different collection tools and approaches so more research using a variety of research methods and looking at different aspects of the assessment procedures is needed.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrated the combination of alternative assessment techniques and the introduction of a new way to use materials for assessment to young students. Teachers need to consider important factors and be more skilled when selecting assessment methods. They need to focus on the educational needs of students something that alternative assessment can accomplish. Students should be given more opportunities to show proficiency and participate in their own learning. Alternative assessment can be used as a tool for promoting changes in learn-

ing, teaching practices and teaching content and lead to the shaping and renovation of education systems and teaching programs.

References

- Al-Kharusi, H., Aldhafri, S., Alnabhani, H., & Alkalbani, M. (2012). Educational assessment attitudes, competence, knowledge, and practices: An exploratory study of Muscat teachers in the Sultanate of Oman. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 1(2).
- Al-Nouh, N., Taqi, H. & Abdul-Kareem, M. (2014). EFL Primary School Teachers' Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills in Alternative Assessment. *International Education Studies*, 7(5), 68-84.
- Birgin, O., & Baki, A. (2009). An investigation of primary school teachers' proficiency perceptions about measurement and assessment methods: The case of Turkey. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1, 681-685. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.119>
- Cirit, N. C. (2015). Assessing ELT Pre-Service Teachers via Web 2.0 Tools: Perceptions toward Traditional, Online and Alternative Assessment. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 14(3), 9-19.
- Cohen, L., & Manion, L. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*. 4th eds. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in Education*. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Garrison, C., & Ehringhaus, M. (2007). Formative and summative assessments in the classroom. Westerville, OH: Association for Middle Level Education. https://www.amle.org/portals/0/pdf/articles/Formative_Assessment_Article_Aug2013.pdf
- Ghazali, N., Yaakub, B., & Mustam, A. (2012). "Why do we need to change?" Teachers' attitude towards school-based assessment system. SCR London's First International Conference on Social science and Humanities in the Islamic World (28-30 May 2012).
- Gonzales, R., & Aliponga, T. (2012). Classroom assessment preferences of Japanese language teachers in the Philippines and English language teachers in Japan. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 36(1).
- Guerin, E. (2010). *Initial findings from a pilot Italian study of EL teachers' stated language assessment knowledge-base and needs*. Papers from the Lancaster University Postgraduate Conference in Linguistics & Language Teaching, Vol. 4: Papers from LAEL PG.
- Harlen, W., & James, M. (1997). Assessment and learning: Differences and relationships between formative and summative assessment. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 4(3), 365-379.
- Kiomrs, R., Abdolmehdi, R., & Naser, R. (2011). On the interaction of test washback and teacher assessment literacy: The case of Iranian EFL secondary school teachers. *English Language Teaching*, 4(1), 156-161.
- Knight, P., & Yorke, M. (2003). *Assessment, learning and employability*. Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Metin, M. (2011). The examinations of teachers' attitude towards performance assessment with respect to the different variables. *Energy Education Science and Technology Part B: Social and Educational Studies*, 3(3), 269-284.
- Muhr, Thomas, and Susanne Freise. 2004. *User's Manual for Atlas.ti 5.0 (2nd Edition)*. Germany: Scientific Software Development.
- O'Leary, M. (2006). Towards a balanced assessment system for Irish primary and secondary schools. *Oideas*, 52.
- Papakammenou, I. (2016). A Washback Study of the Teaching Practices Used in EFL Exam Preparation Classes in Greece. In D. Tsagari (Eds.), *Classroom-based Assessment in L2 Contexts*, (pp.118-137). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- States, J., Detrich, R. & Keyworth, R. (2018). Overview of Summative Assessment. Oakland, CA: The Wing Institute. <https://www.winginstitute.org/assessment-summative>.
- Stiggins, R. (2001). The unfulfilled promise of classroom assessment. *Educational measurement. Issues and Practice*, 20(3), 5-15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3992.2001.tb00065.x>
- Tangdhanakanond, K., & Wongwanich, S. (2012). Teacher attitude and needs assessment concerning the use of student portfolio assessment in Thailand's educational reform process. *International Journal of Psychology*, 10, 7-8.
- Tante, A. (2010). The purpose of English language teacher assessment in the English-speaking primary school in Cameroon. *ELTED*, 13.