

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE
TEACHING

by

LUZ PATRICIA ANDRADE SOLARTE

Submitted to the School of Human Sciences in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of B.A

Linguistics and Languages Department

English and French Program

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ABSTRACT

"TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS ON ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING" ES UNA INVESTIGACIÓN QUE INDAGA INICIALMENTE EN EL ÁREA DE LA EVALUACIÓN PARA DARNOS UNA VISIÓN GENERAL DE LA MISMA, QUE NOS PERMITA POSTERIORMENTE ENFOCARNOS EN LA EVALUACIÓN ALTERNATIVA. UNA TÉCNICA QUE A TRAVÉS DE MATERIALES AUTÉNTICOS COMO PORTAFOLIOS, PERIÓDICOS, PRESENTACIONES ORALES, JUEGOS, ETC., HACE DE LA EVALUACIÓN UN PROCESO MÁS CÓMODO Y MENOS ESTRESANTE, TANTO PARA ESTUDIANTES, COMO PARA PROFESORES. ADEMÁS DE OFRECER A LOS ALUMNOS LA OPORTUNIDAD DE MOSTRAR SU CREATIVIDAD.

ESTE ESTUDIO QUIERE CONOCER PRINCIPALMENTE LA PERCEPCIÓN QUE LOS PROFESORES DEL DEPARTAMENTO DE LINGÜÍSTICA E IDIOMAS DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE NARIÑO, TIENEN ACERCA DE LA EVALUACIÓN ALTERNATIVA, SI ESTÁ SIENDO IMPLEMENTADA O NO EN EL PROCESO DE ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS Y CUÁLES SON SUS ELEMENTOS MÁS UTILIZADOS.

FINALMENTE, ESTA INVESTIGACIÓN INTENTA HACER UNA COMPARACIÓN DE LA EVALUACIÓN TRADICIONAL FRENTE A LA EVALUACIÓN ALTERNATIVA, PARA MOSTRAR SUS LIMITACIONES MÁS COMUNES.

ABSTRACT

"TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS ON ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING" IS A RESEARCH WHICH EXPLORES IN THE ASSESSMENT AREA IN ORDER TO GIVE US A GENERAL VISION OF IT; I TO ALLOW US LATELY FOCUS ON ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT. A TECNIQUE WHICH TROUGHT AUTENTIC MATERIALS SUCH AS: PORTFOLIOS, JOURNALS, ORAL PERFORMANCES, GAMES, ETC., MAKES EVALUATION A MORE CONFORTABLE AND LESS THREATENING PROCESS FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AS WELL, BESIDES OFFERING STUDENTS AN OPORTUNITY TO SHOW HOW CREATIVE THEY ARE.

THIS STUDY MAINLY INTENDS TO KNOW AND DESCRIBE THE PERCEPCTION TEACHERS AT THE LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NARIÑO HAVE ABOUT ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT, IF IT IS BEING IMPLEMENTED OR NOT IN THE PROCESS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREING LANGUAGE TEACHING AND WHICH ARE THE MOST COMMON LIMITATIONS.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	7
1. CHAPTER 1: TECHNICAL-SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS	9
1.1 Topic	9
1.2 Title	9
1.3 Problem Statement	9
1.4 Justification	11
1.5 General Objective	12
1.5.1 Specific Objectives	13
1.6 Delimitations	13
1.6.1 Conceptual	13
1.6.2 Population	14
1.6.3 Geographical	14
1.7 Limitations	15
2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2.1 Defining Assessing	16
2.2 Evaluation, Assessment and Testing	18
2.3 Alternative Assessment	20
2.4 Alternative Assessment Versus Traditional Assessment	22
3. CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS	26
3.1 Population	26
3.2 Sample	26
3.3 Design Research Type	26

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure	27
3.5 Analysis and Interpretation of Data	27
4. CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	28
4.1 Use of Assessment Instruments	28
4.2 Knowledge about Alternative Assessment	34
4.3 Other Current Trends in Foreign Language Assessment	35
4.4 Characteristics of Alternative Assessment	37
4.5 Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Traditional Assessment	38
4.6 Implementation of Non-traditional Assessment Tasks	40
a. Students' Convenience	40
b. Motivation	40
c. Innovation	41
d. Materials	41
e. Teachers' Benefit	42
5. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	43
5.1 Conclusions	43
5.2 Recommendations	45
References	46
APPENDIX	50

INTRODUCTION

This research will mainly explore the assessment area. It will attempt to explain the concept of alternative assessment, in order to extend our current knowledge on this issue since there are few studies or researches about this topic in EFL settings. Additionally, this study intends to describe the perception teachers at the Linguistics and Languages Department in the University of Nariño have about alternative assessment and the reasons why they incorporate these assessment practices (or not) into their courses, exploring their experience and practice in this field. Consequently, it will also inform us about their current knowledge regarding alternative assessment and its effectiveness.

Finally, this project will explore the benefits for teachers and students of alternative instruments to assess, such as: portfolios, oral performances or presentations, journals and many other authentic materials that may constitute a less threatening way of assessing learners. It is well known that this kind of alternatives allows learners to show how creative they are and to feel more comfortable in

the assessment process. Here it will also be shown the importance of avoiding the limitations of the traditional paper and pencil tests and other traditional ways of assessing.

CHAPTER 1: TECHNICAL-SCIENTIFIC ASPECTS

Topic

Assessment

Title

Teachers' Perceptions on Alternative Assessment in Language Teaching.

Problem Statement

The type of questions presented in the ICFES test and the way teachers tend to assess their students in high-schools suggest that in Colombia and more specifically in Pasto, the topic of alternative assessment is not widely known by teachers. Some reasons such as dealing with large classes, lacks of time or training, might be why most teachers tend to focus on paper-and-pencil tests, which give importance to separate elements of language instead of focusing on students' performance.

Alternative assessment is becoming one of the key topics for EFL/ESL teachers and many authors such as Brown (2004), Hancock (1994) and others around the world are interested in

it. But, what do teachers know and think about alternative assessment? That is the question this paper intends to answer. This research can give us a glance on teachers' views, as the first step in encouraging the implementation of alternative assessment in an EFL setting like Pasto.

On the other hand, it can be said that this research paper is important because there is not a great amount of studies about alternative assessment and its implementation in EFL settings, and it could help teachers and students to explore other ways to teach and learn. At the same time, researchers could use these new and interesting approaches to further investigate other implications of this same topic.

Additionally, it is important to note that the Government has imposed a variety of new assessment practices indirectly with the introduction of new policies related to the Colombia Bilingual program. If standardized exams like FCE or TOEFL are implemented in high-school and college levels, students will have to face a performance based assessment, which involves oral production, written products, and open-ended responses. These tests may also include integrated performance, group performance, and other interactive tasks, elements that do not seem to be present

currently in Colombian classrooms and that belong to the field of alternative assessment. This means that traditional assessment needs to be reconsidered and teachers have to update their knowledge because of the new demands on students.

Justification

Assessment is a very important field for ESOL (English as a Second or Foreign Language) teachers, thus, conducting a study about alternative assessment is relevant since it is necessary to know how teachers are assessing second or foreign language learning in Pasto. This research intends to fill this void, but it can also be useful and important for teachers, due to the fact that they will be able to get informed and open their minds to new resources and possibilities in teaching ESOL. They also could analyze what assessing practices they are bringing in the classroom, and compare these with other new trends that allow them to propose more updated and less predictable ways to assess learners.

Alternative assessment is a novel topic which has a lot to do with international trends in assessment as it is shown in standardized tests around the world. In Colombia and

more specifically in Pasto, there is scarce information about it and if the Government wants foreign language teaching to "improve" as the Ministry of Education has stated in different interviews on radio and T.V., this is a topic to consider. The information about new ways to assess is not very widely known since it would be needed that teachers had generalized access to journals or specialized documents and books and as it can be observed everywhere, schools are not equipped with specialized libraries. Furthermore, Colombia, and specifically Pasto, is not a place where teachers are willing to invest their own money on buying books or paying subscriptions to international journals. The review of literature included in this study constitutes a basis for those teachers, future teachers and researchers interested in implementing innovative elements in their professional practice. This study then, will attempt to provide a clear and coherent framework regarding alternative assessment, its characteristics and advantages so that people can make informed decisions about assessment.

General Objective

The main objective of this study is to identify teachers' perceptions regarding the use of alternative assessment, its characteristics and techniques.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives selected for this study are the following:

To learn if teachers are using alternative assessment in their courses or if they might be willing to implement it.

To provide other teachers and future foreign language teachers with a comprehensive and relevant review of current literature on alternative assessment.

To design and apply a survey to get information from teachers about their take on alternative assessment and the possible reasons for it.

To analyze the information obtained with the instrument in order to draw conclusions and suggestions with support from the available literature.

Delimitations

Conceptual: Throughout this research paper some of the definitions taken into account are:

Assessment: According to Spolsky (1992) assessment is an ongoing strategy through which students' learning is not only monitored, a trait shared with testing, but by which students are involved in making decisions about the degree to which their performance matches their ability; also Hedge (2000) states that assessment includes students as participants because they have to assess their own progress, assessment is continuous and inseparable from instruction.

Alternative assessment: It is defined by Tannenbaum (1996) as the process in which the learning focuses on documenting individual student growth over time, rather than comparing students with one another; Hancock (1994) argues that Alternative Assessment involves both the teacher and the student in the learning process using non-conventional strategies; furthermore, Huerta-Macias (2002) claims that Alternative Assessment evaluates what the students integrate or produce rather than what they are able to recall or reproduce.

Population: This research paper was carried out with the help of twenty (20) Linguistics and Languages Teachers from

the Linguistics and Languages Department of the University of Nariño.

Geographical: This research study was carried out in the Linguistics and Languages Department of the University of Nariño, located in the city of Pasto, in the southwest of Colombia. The University of Nariño and the Linguistics and Languages Department facilities are in good condition and equipped with the appropriated technological devices for the Language's learning and teaching.

Limitations

It is possible that among the answers given by the teachers, some of them weren't completely honest or accurate; some others didn't give the survey back and some others didn't even cooperate to fill in the survey.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Assessment

This research will be focused on alternative assessment. As a starting point, the term "assessment" is going to be defined since it might seem that for some teachers, evaluation, assessment and testing have the same meaning and implications. Also, another important term related to it is traditional assessment, and of course alternative assessment will be defined in order to show a variety of concepts according to some authors, and to allow researchers, teachers, and students to clearly differentiate between them.

First, it is important to note that assessment for Brown (2001) is a process that encompasses more than a test. Then, a test is a subset of assessment, a procedure that teachers can use to assess students. The author states that:

Assessment, on the other hand, is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain. Whenever a student responds to a question, offers a comment, or tries out a new word or structure, the teachers subconsciously makes an assessment of the student's performance that ultimately is assessed by self, teacher, and possibly other students. (Brown, 2001, p.402).

This is not the only definition regarding assessment. There are others that are worth mentioning. For instance Spolsky (1992) argues that assessment is an ongoing strategy through which students' learning is not only monitored, a trait shared with testing, but by which students are involved in making decisions about the degree to which their performance matches their ability.

Hedge (2004), on the other hand, states that assessment includes students as participants because they have to assess their own progress; assessment is continuous and inseparable from instruction. Assessment also addresses experiences in which students are engaged and allow them a self-assessment through informal observations, and finally, the author states that assessment strengthens students' and teachers' knowledge.

Additionally, Sommer (1989) quoted by Peñaflorida (2002), defines assessment as the process of finding out who the students are, what their abilities are, what they need to know about how they perceive the learning that will affect them. Assessment places the needs of the students at the center of the teacher's planning. The last definition quoted in this research defines assessment as a kind of resurgence

of the multiplicity of intelligences, the way of monitoring students' language progress and performance by using non conventional strategies as stated by Gardner (1993).

Other authors like Brindley (2001) quoted by Carter & Nunan (2001), provide a simple but clear definition about assessment. The author defines it as a term which refers to a variety of ways of collecting information on a student's language ability or achievement.

Evaluation, Assessment and Testing

Some of the previous concepts mentioned before, suggest that test is included or is a part of assessment. Therefore, it is relevant to present some different definitions about it that can provide a more complete view of this term.

For one thing, Mc Namara (2001) states that "test is a procedure for gathering evidence of general or specific language abilities from performance on tasks designed to provide a basis for predictions about an individual's use of those abilities in real world contexts".

Oller (1979) states that "the purpose of tests is to measure variance in performances of various sorts".

According to Hancock (1994), a test also serves as a monitoring device for learning. Tests are given at a particular point in time to "sample" student's learning.

Similarly, Brown (2001) gives a more complete definition about the term test and a very clear explanation about what it involves. For Brown a test is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge or performance in a given domain. A test is also an instrument, a set of techniques, procedures, or items that requires performance on the part of the test taker. He adds that tests are "prepared administrative procedures that occur at identifiable times in a curriculum when learners muster all their faculties to offer peak performance, knowing that their responses are being measured and evaluated" (2001, p.384).

Lastly, Brown (2001) states that a well constructed test is an instrument that provides an accurate measure of the test-taker's ability within a particular domain.

On the other hand, as it was mentioned at the beginning of this research paper the term "evaluation" should be defined due to the relationship that it has with assessment and that some people tend to perceive as one inseparable term.

Weiss (1972) quoted by Bachman (1990), defines evaluation as the systematic gathering of information for the purpose of making decisions. According to Scriven (1991), evaluation refers to the process of determining the merit, worth, or value of something, or the product of that process. In addition, Rossi and Freeman (1993) state that evaluation is the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation, and utility of programs.

To conclude, according to Brown (2001) evaluation is "the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of the curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants' attitudes within a context of particular institutions involved." This means that evaluation refers to the process that happens inside an institution, a program or a course with the purpose of making decisions. Evaluation then is wider than assessment.

Alternative Assessment

All the statements about assessment, testing and evaluation previously quoted are an introduction that will allow the reader to widen his or her knowledge in order to

focus on Alternative Assessment, the main topic in this research paper, which not only is going to be defined but also contrasted with traditional assessment by explaining its objectives, advantages, goals and its main activities.

To begin with a definition of alternative assessment, Hamayan (1995) quoted by Tannenbaum (1996), argues that alternative assessment refers to procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction and can be easily incorporated into daily activities of the school or classroom. Another important concept defines alternative assessment as an ongoing process involving the student and teacher in making judgments about the student's progress in language using non-conventional strategies (Hancock, 1994). Tannenbaum (1996) claims that alternative assessment focuses on documenting individual student growth over time, rather than comparing students with one another, its emphasis is on students' strengths that is, what they know, rather than weaknesses or what they do not know.

On the other hand, it is important to mention that there is not a single definition of alternative assessment. Rather, a variety of labels have been used to distinguish it from traditional, standardized testing.

Alternative vs. Traditional Assessment

A comparison between alternative assessment and traditional assessment is provided by Garcia and Pearson (1994) quoted by Huerta-Macias (2002). The characteristics of alternative assessment that separate it from traditional assessment are presented next:

First, alternative assessment is different from traditional assessment in that it actually asks students to show what they can do. Students are evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they are able to recall and reproduce. The main goal of alternative assessment is to "gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing "real-life" tasks in a particular domain".

Additionally Huerta-Macias (2002) states that alternative assessment provides alternatives to traditional testing in that it does not intrude on regular classroom activities, reflects the curriculum that is actually being implemented in the classroom, provides information on the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student, provides multiple indices that can be used to gauge student progress and is more multiculturally sensitive and free of norm,

linguistic and cultural biases found in traditional assessment.

Furthermore, alternative assessment procedures are nonintrusive to the classroom because they do not require a separate block of time to implement them, as do traditional assessment.

It can be added that alternative assessment is also based on daily classroom activities, besides reflects the curriculum, unlike traditional assessment, that often test skills incongruent with classroom practices, because the data collected are based on real-life tasks, alternative assessment provides information on the strengths and the weaknesses of a student.

Alternative assessment, continuing with the definition provided by Huerta-Macias (2002), also provides teachers with a "menu" of possibilities to use in one same course, rather than any one single method for assessment. This allows that students' growth can be reliably assessed because information from various sources is included in the process and contrary to traditional testing which typically provides only a set of numbers, alternative assessment documents a story for every student and gives teachers the knowledge to be able to

reflect on, discuss and assist a student's journey through the learning process.

To sum up, Amstrong (1994) and Bailey (1998) quoted by Brown (2004) highlighted the differences between alternative assessment and traditional assessment as shown in the next table:

TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT	ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT
One-shot, standardized exams	Continuous long-term assessment
Timed, multiple-choice format	Untimed, free response format
Decontextualized test items	Contextualized communicative tasks
Scores suffice for feedback	Individualized feedback and washback
Norm-referenced scores	Criterion-referenced scores
Focus on the "right" answer	Open-ended, creative answers
Summative	Formative
Oriented to product	Oriented to process
Non-interactive performance	Interactive performance
Fosters extrinsic motivation	Fosters intrinsic motivation

Finally it is important to take into account some of the most usual activities in alternative assessment and explain them through examples, since they can show clearly how alternative assessment works; the main activities are:

Nonverbal assessment strategies which use gestures and all kind of body language or drawings, diagrams and illustrations, in order to express academic concepts without speech.

K-W-L Charts that focus on what a student knows what he/she wants to know and what he/she has learned inside the same class.

Oral performance or presentations, which include interviews, oral reports, oral plays, describing, comparing, explaining, analyzing, summarizing, retelling, paraphrasing stories or text material and so on.

Oral and written products, which are content area thinking and learning logs, reading response logs, writing assignments, dialogue journals, and audio or video cassettes.

And the last activity is portfolio, which involves both student and teacher in selecting samples of student work for inclusion in a collection, the main purpose of which is to show the students' progress as explained by Hancock (1994).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Population

This study will be carried out with a group of twenty (20) foreign language teachers who currently belong to the Linguistics and Languages Department of the University of Nariño.

Sample

The sample of the study consists of 20 teachers, chosen at random. They will answer a survey designed to know about their assessment practices and their take on alternative assessment.

Design Research type

This research is descriptive since it will attempt to show how teachers in an EFL setting decide on their approach to assessing foreign language and if they are informed about more recent trends such as alternative assessment. The reasons why they incorporate these practices or why they do not incorporate alternative assessment will also be described.

Data gathering procedure

This study will be developed by applying a survey to the sample selected. This instrument, the books and articles reviewed will provide the information needed for the analysis of data.

Analysis and interpretation of data

The data obtained will be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Some frequencies will be considered and if some answers in the interviews are specifically meaningful they will be analyzed separately as well.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

After having collected the necessary information from the teachers, their answers were organized around frequencies in order to find out which were the most and least commonly used assessment strategies. A short comment about the answers given follows each set of answers. This comment will be based on the authors and ideas present in the review of literature in order to compare the theory about assessment and the ideas given by real teachers.

Use of assessment instruments

In the following table are presented the frequencies in which the interviewed teachers use the different instruments to assess students. The numbers in each frequency show how many teachers actually use the instrument itself.

<i>Instruments</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
Written exams	6	6	2		
Oral exams	8	5	1		
Portfolios	1	2	4	5	1
Group work	7	6	1		
Multiple-choice tests		1	2	10	1
Oral products (plays, presentations, demonstrations, story-telling)	6	4	4		

Written products (reading logs, dialogue journals, vocabulary logs)	5	4	3	2	
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Table 1. Instruments to assess Students

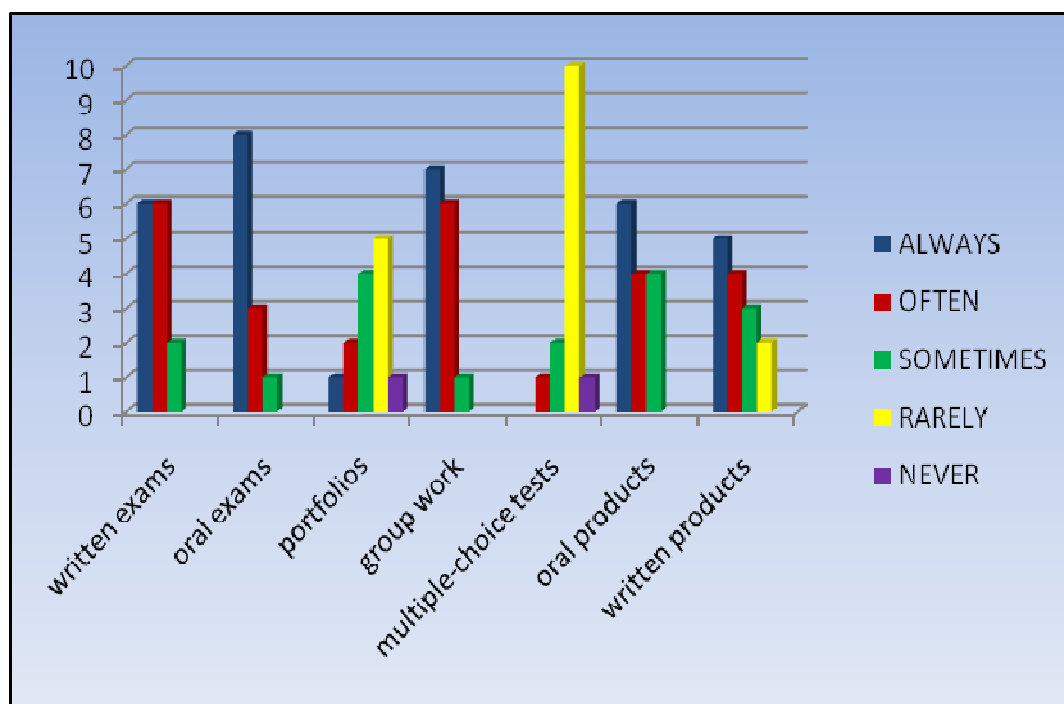


Chart 1. Frequency of use of the instruments

According to the survey (See Annex 1), “portfolios” and “multiple-choice tests” are the least used instruments; both are located or classified in “rarely” and “never” used boxes or categories. Four teachers out of fourteen who answered the survey affirmed that they rarely use portfolios, and one of them said that he/she never use portfolios as an instrument to evaluate students’ performance.

Additionally, ten teachers out of fourteen marked that they rarely use multiple-choice tests and one out of them marked that he/she never use this instrument in the teaching process, which means that teachers prefer other kind of written tests, for example, open-ended answer ones, that allows students expose their opinions freely, create new answers by using the language and going out from traditional paper and pencil tests which demand for an only one and "right" answer.

From the previous frequencies in the answers provided by the teachers it can be inferred that assessment instruments that are closer to the tasks used in alternative assessment are not very commonly used. This can be due to the fact that teachers might not be aware of the fact that portfolios are a useful tool to keep a record of the students' work over an extended period of time. It might be thought that portfolios and alternative tasks are not rigorous enough and consequently students are not going to take them seriously or that the grades obtained through these tasks are not reliable. However, teachers should try to experiment new ways to elicit their students performance. The limited use of portfolios as an instrument in L2, shows us that teachers prefer "one shot" standardized tests, rather

than continuous long term assessment that allows students being assessed comfortably and gives them more opportunities for improving their scores, which involves that students will be able to produce, rather than recall and reproduce.

On the other hand, the most common used instruments in English teaching are "group work activities" and "oral exams". Eight teachers out of fourteen, answered that they always use oral exams and seven teachers out of them always use group work activities, which means that production and interaction are very important for teachers; they are focusing on oral skill and communicative performance through interactive activities, opinions exchange presentations and so on; however the other instruments such as written exams, oral and written products are very used by teachers and the difference respect to the most used instruments (group work activities and oral exams) is one or two votes.

It is important to bear in mind that "written exams" is a very used instrument being that six teachers out of fourteen answered that they always implemented written tests and also six out of them answered that they often use it; this fact implies that teachers have a strong influence from

traditional assessment, since this is one of its most well known instruments.

As it is mentioned along this research paper and in particular in the literature review, traditional assessment has a lot of limitations, the most relevant are mentioned by Amstrong (1994) and Bailey (1998) quoted by Brown (2004). These are: one-shot standardized exams, timed, multiple-choice format, decontextualized test items, scores suffice for feedback wash back, norm-referenced scores focus on the "right" answer, summative evaluation, it is oriented to product, there is not interactive performance and finally it fosters extrinsic motivation.

To sum up, Huerta-Macias (2002) argues that traditional assessment procedures require a separate block of time to implement them; it also tests skills incongruent with classroom practices, and it provides only a set of numbers. Despite these limitations that different authors have pointed out, it is relevant to mention that besides traditional assessment, most teachers tend to use alternative assessment instruments such as: group work, oral products and written products. This means that little by little, teachers, especially new graduates, are implementing different

instruments that require students to adopt different roles and get involved in new types of interaction, for instance, using group work encourages negotiation of meaning and oral products such as presentations force students not only to answer the teacher's questions, but to produce longer pieces of discourse. Again, portfolios have not been frequently used by them and that should change because portfolios could be a practical tool in the English teaching process, not only for assessment, but also because this instrument encourages continuous assessment and serves as a register of the students' performance. It also gives students the chance to become more creative, using the language they know in a more spontaneous way and, more importantly, at their own pace.

It is relevant to mention that most teachers use alternative assessment instruments such as: group work, oral products and written products; in spite of that, portfolios have not been frequently implemented by them which could be a useful tool in English teaching process, given that portfolios are instruments which allow a continuous evaluation that give teachers an idea about students' progress as well as what they are able to do on their own and how much time they will devote to this task.

For the previous analysis, it is relevant to mention that teachers should incorporate alternative assessment in their daily classes in order to avoid students being assessed superficially and on the contrary, it helps them to get a more comfortable and complete assessment.

The second question in the survey, asks teachers if they know what alternative assessment is and also asks them for a concept about it in order to show how familiar they are with this new trend and how interested they are in motivate students and propose them current activities which avoid students get bored and have monotonous and predictable classes.

Knowledge about alternative assessment

According to this part of the survey all teachers are familiar with the concept of alternative assessment which is encouraging in view of the fact that they have used it occasionally, once or twice or they could put it into practice in future classes. It can be added that all the definitions provided by the surveyed teachers are well targeted and make evident that teachers really know what alternative assessment is. This is a very positive thing given that without knowing the definition or the

characteristics of alternative assessment, it is likely that teachers would not want to attempt to use different strategies. Being aware of the rationale of alternative assessment can help teachers see the potentialities of this approach and take more "risks" when it comes to designing and applying assessment tasks.

In addition teachers' definitions are well targeted and expose that teachers really know what alternative assessment is. The most frequent characteristics linked to alternative assessment mentioned by teachers were: the different ways activities and non-traditional instruments assess students, they also mentioned using the language for communicative purposes to improve oral skill as well as performance and focusing on the process rather than the product.

Other current trends in foreign language assessment

The purpose of this part of the survey is to analyze if teachers know other trends different from alternative assessment and which ones they are implementing.

As a result, nine out of fourteen teachers answer to this question. The most distinguished trend was self-assessment, which plays an important role in the foreign language assessment, it fosters the respect and the

confidence between teachers and students, besides it makes students responsible people. Other mentioned trends were: diagnostic tests, proficiency tests, for instance: TOEFL, MET, FCE, and performance based assessment.

Some of the trends that teachers did not mention in the survey are given by Amstrong (1994) and Bailey (1998) quoted by Brown (2004) and these are: untimed, free response format, individualized feedback and criterion-referenced scores.

The fourth question of the survey exposes a chart of different characteristics from alternative and traditional assessment located at random from letter "a" to letter "i", from which teachers have to tick the most necessary to implement in L2 assessment.

This question pretends to evidence if teachers have a deeper knowledge about alternative assessment, if they differentiate between alternative assessment and traditional assessment, how well they know its characteristics or if on the contrary they are not well informed about it and tick some traditional assessment characteristics despite they previously provided a concept about alternative assessment.

Characteristics of Alternative Assessment

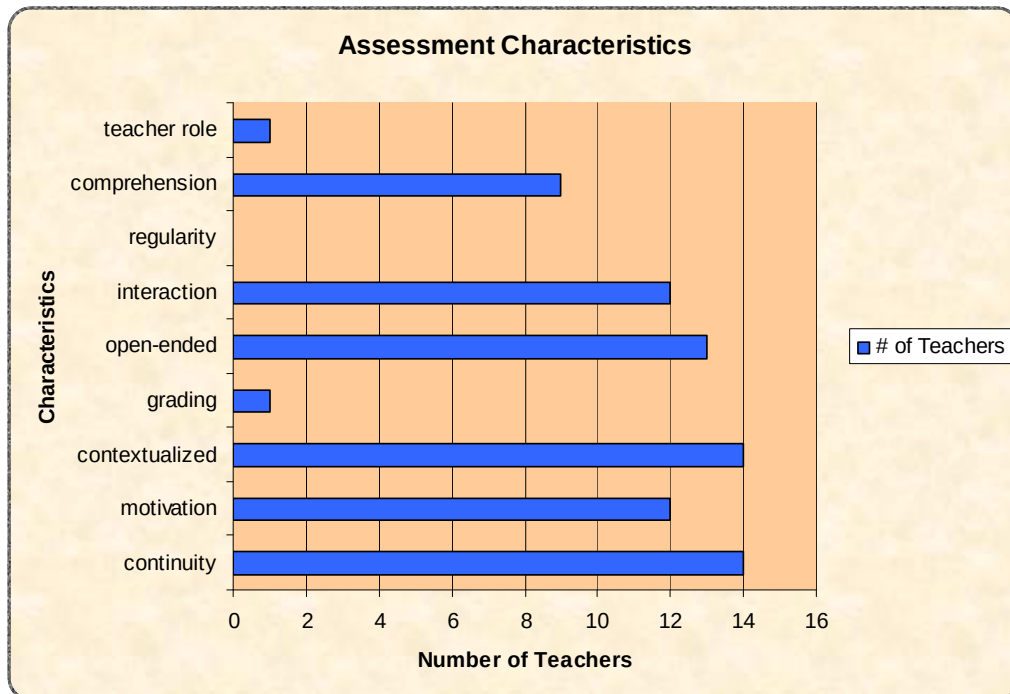


Chart 2. Assessment Characteristics

The main objective of filling this table (See Annex 1), is to cross the data and proves if the information previously given in the second question is consistent with the information obtained from this chart (Chart 2) of L2 assessment characteristics, in order to check if teachers in fact know the meaning of alternative assessment, and what its implications are.

Consequently, the result of this analyses proved that most teachers know this current trend and apply it in their teaching process, hence they did not mark D, G and I letters, typical characteristics of traditional assessment, there was

just one teacher who put a tick on letter D, and one who put a tick on letter I. However, they marked the most typical characteristics of alternative assessment such as: continuity in assessment, contextualized tasks, intrinsic motivation, open-ended answers, interactive performance and comprehension of language rather than production.

This part of the survey calls teachers into question about the effectiveness of traditional assessment in L2 assessment process, it also allows them to realize about the limitations of it and makes teachers become aware of how interesting could be to implement alternative assessment in their teaching daily process.

Teachers' perceptions regarding traditional assessment

Teachers' view about traditional assessment is negative, because they all consider that traditional assessment does not allow them to assess each aspect of the learning process, it just take into account few aspects of the students' progress, traditional assessment also focuses on grammar and written production which involves a superficial assessment and finally teachers think that this approach emphasizes on recognizing language features rather than using language in real-life contexts.

According to the opinions above, it is necessary to implement alternative assessment in daily classes, because this trend is designed to assess the student as a whole, likewise teachers admit that there are a lot of elements which should be added to traditional assessment and the mainly mentioned were: authentic materials, oral production, interactive performance, portfolios, usage of language in real-life contexts, self-assessment and formative assessment.

All the previous elements belong to alternative assessment and these are the elements that traditional assessment needs to make a real and integral assessment.

The last question of the survey asks teachers about their availability to use alternative assessment in their courses and the mainly reasons to implement it, which would be mentioned one by one and classified into subcategories in order to identify which are the advantages and the disadvantages of using this trend.

On the other hand, this part of the survey gives us an idea about the acceptance of this research paper from teachers.

Implementation of non-traditional assessment tasks.

Teachers' answers to this question were positive since they all are willing to implement alternative assessment in their courses.

Everyone agrees with the efficiency of this trend, they are motivated for many factors which have been divided into subcategories.

a. *Students' convenience*

Alternative assessment activities lower the students' stress allowing real evaluation of their performance, they also have funny classes, so learning is not boring, and other important aspect is that students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

b. *Motivation*

Alternative assessment allows students being intrinsically motivated through creative and innovative activities which let them to identify and strengthen their skills while they have time to prepare their tasks and work at their own pace.

c. *Innovation*

Teachers are willing to employ alternative assessment in their courses because of innovation in evaluation and instruction, and due to they need to keep up to date since education is changing continuously.

d. *Materials*

Alternative assessment offers a great amount of materials and different options to assess our students, some of the most commonly pointed out by teachers were:

Group projects

Contextualized communicative activities

Open-ended written tasks

Presentations

Portfolios

The materials mentioned before require more effort than written exams; activities such as portfolios are more demanding works; however students are less stressed and feel comfortable while working on this.

e. *Teachers' benefit*

Teachers have found on alternate assessment the approach to evaluate the student as a whole; teachers are able to integrate students' skills through the activities above,

which avoid teachers to spend so much time grading papers and to get superficial scores.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

-This survey made possible to identify teachers' perceptions regarding alternative assessment, which means, to discover if they truly know this approach, if they are putting into practice its activities and materials; and as a last data, teachers state if they are willing to implement this current trend and expose their points of view about the advantages of using it.

-All teachers are inclined to alternative assessment; nevertheless the fact that one of the most used instruments by them is "written exams" points that they also have influence from traditional assessment.

-Most teachers are interested in foster oral production, which is positive for L2 students, given that nowadays in the teaching and learning field, it is more important using language for communicative purposes than learning vocabulary, make translations or focus on grammar.

-Most teachers mentioned "self-assessment" in the third question in the survey, as a current trend in foreign language assessment, which could mean that teachers unconsciously feel prepared for allowing students to

participate in their own assessment process which could be a sign of we are evolving in the education area.

-One of the main motivations for teachers using alternative assessment is economizing time and material; they can incorporate the assessment process to the class, evaluate students' performance during the class and avoid preparing written tests which imply to spend time and money.

-Despite the fact that twenty-three surveys were handed, just fourteen teachers answered it, the sample was not big, however all fourteen teachers, proved that they have a basic knowledge about alternative assessment, its characteristics and its implications.

-Teachers linked recently to the Linguistics and Languages Department, have a wider knowledge respect to the topic, than more experienced teachers who belong to it for a long time now, this may be due to some subjects such as *Evaluation, Assessment and Testing* was incorporated lately to the curriculum, so older teachers did not have the opportunity to deepen in these new trends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

-It is important to use portfolios as a tool in English teaching, in order to form a habit on students to get prepare not only for taking a test, but also for working harder during the semester, and learn to innovate by using the language in a less predictable way.

-Teachers should put into practice current trends as portfolios instead of written exams, being that portfolios can offer a registration regarding students' progress along the course, thus assessment process will be more useful for students as well as for teachers.

-Students should keep working in oral production through instruments such as: plays, presentations, demonstrations, story telling and so on, in order to improve their oral skill which is very useful these days.

-Teachers should try out new proposals from traditional assessment such as self-assessment, since some of them think that the teacher is the only one who can assess learners. Self-assessment could make students more responsible people willing to be honest in their learning process in order to become future real teachers and integral human beings.

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APPENDIX

ANNEX 1

DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENT

SURVEY

University of Nariño

Linguistics and Languages Department

English-French Program

Directions

Please take some minutes to fill out this survey. Your answers will contribute to clarify some aspects related to assessment and alternative assessment, so be as honest as possible. This information is anonymous and it will only be used for research purposes.

1. State how often you use these instruments to assess your students:

<i>Instruments</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
Written exams					
Oral exams					
Portfolios					
Group work					
Multiple-choice tests					
Oral products (plays, presentations, demonstrations, story-telling)					
Written products (reading logs, dialogue journals, vocabulary logs)					

2. Are you familiar with the concept of alternative assessment? Yes ____ No ____

If so, please provide a personal definition of it.

3. Are you informed about other current trends in foreign language assessment? Which ones?

4. Write an X next to the characteristics you consider necessary to implement in L2 assessment. You can choose several options.

Characteristic	
a. Assessment is continuous	
b. It fosters intrinsic motivation	
c. It features contextualized communicative tasks	
d. The grading only requires marking the letter for the right answer	
e. It should include open-ended, creative answers	
f. It requires interactive performance	
g. It takes place only once or twice in the semester	
h. It seeks to measure comprehension of the language, rather than production	
i. The teacher is the only one who can assess learners	

5. Do you consider that traditional assessment allows teachers to assess every aspect of the L2? If not, what needs to be added to this type of assessment?

6. Would you be willing to implement non-traditional assessment tasks in your courses?

Yes ____ No ____ Why?

Thank you for your cooperation!