

The Status of Alternative Assessment in Morocco: Teachers' Attitudes and Obstacles

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i1.1189>

APA Citation: Kasmi, H. & Anasse, K. (2023). The Status of Alternative Assessment in Morocco: Teachers' Attitudes and Obstacles. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 5(1).300-311. <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i1.1189>

Received:

12/02/2023

Accepted:

30/03/2023

Keywords:

Alternative assessment, assessment techniques, obstacles, educational objectives.

Abstract

Assessment is a fundamental part in language teaching/learning process. It is a guiding factor that provides insight to teachers and learners about the best way to proceed. The literature about language assessment is rich. It includes different forms and techniques of language assessment. In this paper, however, the focus is mainly on alternative assessment. The latter is different both in form and nature from traditional assessment. Researchers confirm that if applied properly, alternative assessment can reflect students' progress and motivate them to keep up the hard work. This paper, hence, aims to study the attitude of language teachers toward alternative assessment and the main obstacles that may hinder its application in the Moroccan classroom. This research is quantitative. It uses a questionnaire as the main data collection tool. The findings indicate that teachers hold a positive attitude toward alternative assessment, but they fail to apply it in their classroom due to different obstacles.

1. INTRODUCTION

Testing and assessment are fundamental parts in life. It is our habit to test everything to choose the best. A mother tests the freshness of vegetables and fruits before cooking. A car's buyer tests its mechanical condition. A dress designer tests the fabric before getting started. Testing also encompasses humans. An engineer must sit for an interview before being hired. A driver must sit for a driving test before receiving his/her driving license etc. Testing is an effective way to ensure that the best person/thing is in the right place. Hence, the importance of testing/assessment can never be over-exaggerated.

In language teaching, testing and assessment gain more prominence. Brown (2004) assert that assessment and testing are two fundamental parts of teaching. If the aim of teaching is to enhance students' efficiency in language, assessment is the only way to confirm and check their progress. Likewise, Sheeba (2017, p. 1) finds that "effective teaching and effective testing

are the two sides of the same coin”. High-quality teaching entails a well-prepared assessment. In fact, assessment do not only measure the progress of students but also the effectiveness of the teaching process as a whole (Black & William, 2018)

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Defining assessment is never an easy task. A quick review of the literature reveals that different definitions are attached to this concept. One source of ambiguity is the variant-related terms. There are mainly three terms that are sometimes confused: assessment, evaluation and testing.

Dietel et al. (1991) define assessment as the group of activities used to understand better students' current knowledge. These activities might include observation, project work or sitting for a paper exam. Bachman (2004, p. 6-7) confirms that “assessment is a process of collecting information about something that we are interested in according to procedures that are systematic and substantially grounded”. Richards & Schmith (2013, p. 35), on the other hand, declare that:

Assessment is a systematic approach to collecting information and making inferences about the ability of a student or the quality or success of a teaching course on the basis of various sources of evidence. Assessment may be done by test, interview, questionnaire, observations, etc.

Definitions of assessment might differ in expressions, but they all meet in several points. First, assessment is a process. It is a systematic step-by-step endeavour that requires preparation and competence from the teacher. Second, it takes many forms: observation, interview, paper-test...etc. Third, it is a long-term commitment to measure students' progress through a mid-term, a semester or a school year. Fourth, it mainly focuses on students' performance and the learning process. The ultimate aim is to measure students' progress in language learning.

Evaluation is another highly related term. Actually, many teachers use it synonymously with assessment. They consider them two faces of the same coin. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish assessment and evaluation as they share many common qualities. Yambi (2018) asserts that assessment and evaluation are data collection processes about student achievement. In addition, they are student-oriented processes that aim to measure student's performance.

Regardless of their common qualities, assessment and evaluation are different concepts that should be treated and understood differently. Evaluation can be defined as the systematic gathering of information to make decisions (Weiss, 1972). Howard and Donaghue (2015) add that evaluation is comparing students' achievements with each other or against a set of standards to define their current level. Weir & Roberts (1994) state that evaluation, in the field of education, is collecting data about students' progress to judge their learning process.

Differences between assessment and evaluation are better explained in the following table adopted from Weir and Roberts (1994) and Howard and Donaghue (2015)

assessment	evaluation
Diagnosing the current level of proficiency	Judging the current level of proficiency
Provides feedback for improvement	Ascertain whether criteria are met or not

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Formative in nature	Summative in nature
Process focused	Product-focused
Criteria are set by many parties	Criteria are set by the evaluator

In simple terms, assessment and evaluation might be the same in practice, but they are different in intentions. While assessment focuses on the learning process at different stages to provide the necessary feedback for improvement, evaluation mainly focuses on the final product to pass judgment and take decisions based on pre-determined criteria. These decisions might include necessary modifications in the teaching process or concern students as placing them in suitable groups corresponding to their proficiency level.

Testing is the third related term. Unsurprisingly, many people and even teachers, sometimes confuse it with assessment and evaluation. The ambiguity stems from the fact that assessment, evaluation and testing are processes of measuring students' proficiency. However, "a test, in simple terms, is a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain" (Brown., 2004, p. 14). Carrol (1968) declares that a test is a procedure that elicits a certain behaviour to make inferences about the test-taker competence. Tests are techniques used to measure students' ability to fulfil a task, demonstrate a skill, or understand an idea.

A test, then, is different from assessment and evaluation. While assessment and evaluation are long-term processes, a test is a time-limited technique. Testing is a technique that gives teachers an idea about students' level of proficiency. They may include such activities as true-false, matching or gap-filling. Lynch (2001) explains that testing is part of the assessment. Assessment is the collection of data about the learning process and students' level of proficiency. These data may come from observation, students' portfolios, interviews or tests. Hence, the assessment includes testing.

2.1. Alternative Assessment

Assessment has always been an integral part in language teaching. Students are supposed to sit for a test at the end of a course, a mid-term or a semester. However, traditional assessment has been the subject of heavy criticism. Bailey (1998) points out that traditional assessments are inauthentic and indirect. Traditional tests use "artificial" language and tasks. In addition, it tests students' "know-about" language instead of their ability to use language properly in real-life situations. Law and Eckes (1995) add that traditional assessment can't capture the linguistic capabilities of students because it relies on single-occasion tests. Simonson et al. (2000) note that traditional assessment focuses on memorization and neglects other important cognitive skills such as problem-solving, logical thinking, and analyzing.

These voices and others agreed that there is an urgent need for a new form of assessment. Assessment should be a form/part of learning, continuous and authentic. "Assessmentcan also be authentic and engaging demonstrations of students' abilities to grapple with the central challenges of a discipline in real-life contexts" (Kulieke et al., 1990, p.2). Alternative assessment, hence, responded to traditional assessment's challenges.

Alternative assessment is sometimes defined as any alternatives to traditional assessment (Oosterhof, 1999; Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1988). However, this definition can't clear the ambiguity. Bailey (1998, p. 207) held the following analogy to clarify the difference between traditional and alternative assessment:

Traditional assessment	Alternative assessment
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One shot test	Continuous longitudinal assessment
Indirect tests	Direct tests
Inauthentic tests	Authentic tests
Individual projects	Group projects
No feedback	Feedback provided to learners
Speeded exams	Untimed exams
Discontextualized	Contextualized test tasks
Norm referenced score interpretation	Criterion referenced score interpretation
Standardized tests	Classroom based tests

Reeves (2000) states that alternative assessment focuses on complex learning, engages higher order thinking skills, stimulates a wide range of active response, involves challenging tasks that requires multiple steps, and requires significant commitment of Ss' time and effort. So, we can say that alternative assessment is a new philosophy of assessment that is based on the following principles: a) assessment should be part/form of learning, b) assessment should be continuous to catch students' step-by-step progress, c) assessment should use real-life tasks and language to test students' ability to communicate in real-life situations, d) assessment should use different techniques to meet students' various personalities and styles of learning.

To attain these objectives, alternative assessment uses new techniques of assessment as: presentations, teacher's observation, portfolio, interviews, self-assessment, peer-assessment, and projects. These techniques meet the three fundamental qualities of alternative assessment: authentic, direct and continuous. In addition, they can be easily incorporated in the language course. Still, alternative assessment is not perfect. Dikli (2003) highlights that alternative assessment carry some concerns in terms of subjectivity, reliability and validity. Bailey (1998), for example, notes that portfolio results might be unreliable as each student has his/her own portfolio. Law and Ecke (1995) mention that alternative assessment is time-consuming. Unlike traditional assessment which can be held in one session; alternative assessment might take a week. Simmonson et al (2000) add that alternative assessment is hard to score due to their personalized nature.

2.2. Language Assessment in Morocco

Language assessment in Morocco has been the subject of many research papers and articles. Since the 80s, and probably even earlier, researchers started questioning assessment practices and methods in Morocco.

Researchers (Ezzaki, 1986; Mellouk, 1992; Boubekri, 1997) found that assessment in Morocco neglects high-order thinking skills. Questions mainly revolve around recalling pieces of information taught in the classroom with little or no space for creativity. This may account for Bouziane's (1993) findings that uncovered secondary students' inability to answer higher-order questions. Students were only trained to rely on memory rather than analysis and deductive reasoning. Ouakrime (1986, p. 238) cautions that the examination system in Morocco "increases the risk of exam results being perceived more as subjective judgments made on students' performance than a fair 'evaluation' of the range of their knowledge and abilities". El Mazgualdi (1996) supports the same idea by stating that tests affect students psychology and attitudes. Most tests are unfair and harm students both during and after school (Bouziane, 2017). Ghaicha & Omarkaly (2018) declare that assessment in Morocco has often been restricted to its summative function. Consequently, Bouziane (2017) asserts that there is an urgent need to "reconsider testing in Morocco in general and in ELT in particular" (Bouziane, 2017. p. 311).

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Considering all these facts and criticism of traditional assessment, the Ministry of National Education (2007) called for integrating alternative assessment in language testing. As stated earlier, alternative assessment differs from traditional assessment in form and nature. It is continuous and authentic. Moreover, it uses different techniques such as portfolio, teacher's observation, project and performance...etc. However, Babni (2019) finds that most if not all, Moroccan teachers still adhere to traditional assessment. Several other studies found that while Moroccan teachers hold a positive attitude toward alternative assessment, they still use traditional activities to test their students (Mamad & Vigh, 2021; Bouchib, 2016; Ghaicha & Omarkly, 2018; Ghaicha & Oufela, 2021). Researchers name the following as the main obstacles to applying alternative assessment in the Moroccan classroom:

- 1) Time constraints and parents' doubts about the objectivity of the grading (Ghaicha & Omarkly, 2018)
- 2) Teachers are marginalized in the process of national test construction (Mellouk, 2001)
- 3) Teachers are not trained in the area of alternative assessment (Bouziane, 2017)
- 4) The use of alternative assessment is not rewarded nor encouraged by educational officials, school managers, and administrators. (Ghaicha & Oufela, 2021)
- 5) Teachers are familiar with traditional assessment and preoccupied with exam scores (Mamad & Vigh, 2021).

These obstacles can account for the discrepancy between teachers' attitude toward alternative assessment and their classroom practices. While teachers realize the benefits of Alternative assessment, they find themselves unable to introduce it to their classroom routine due to contextual and subjective factors.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to uncover Moroccan teachers' practices in language classroom, this research adopt quantitative method to collect, analyze and interpret data. A questionnaire was used as a data-collection tool. The questionnaire is composed of 10 questions distributed on 3 parts. The first part targets demographics of the respondents. The second part deals with their classroom practices in language assessment and the third part is about their attitudes toward alternative assessment.

The sample of this study includes 60 English language teachers both in secondary and highschool level. The selection of the participants is based on non-probability (convenience-availability) sampling strategy. This strategy helps increasing the number of the participants and hence increase the representativeness of the sample.

This research aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What is teachers' attitude toward alternative assessment?
- 2) Which form of assessment do teachers use in their classroom practices?
- 3) What are the obstacles to applying alternative assessment in the Moroccan classroom?

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

	Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
Male	32	53,3	53,3	53,3
Female	28	46,7	46,7	100,0
Total	60	100,0	100,0	

Table 1: gender of the respondents

First, our sample comprises 60 English teachers (secondary and high school). The table above shows that 53,7% are male while 46,7 are female.

	Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage cumulé
1-5 ans	11	18,3 %	18,3
6-10 ans	23	38,3%	56,7
11-15 ans	14	23,3 %	80,0
> 15 ans	12	20,0%	100,0
Total	60	100,0 %	

Table 2: the number of teaching experience years

The statistics show that the respondents have different years of experience. 18,3% are still novice teachers with teaching experience between 1-5, 38,3% between 6-10 years, 23,3% between 11-15 years, and 20% more than 15 years.

	Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
20-25	2	3,3	3,3	3,3
26-30	8	13,3	13,3	16,7
31-35	19	31,7	31,7	48,3
> 35	31	51,7	51,7	100,0
Total	60	100,0	100,0	

Table 3: the class's size

The number of students in class is a decisive factor in choosing the mode of assessment. Hence, the questionnaire included a question about students' numbers. 3,3 % declare that their classes include between 20-25 students. 13% teach classes of 26 to 30 students. 31,7% teach classes with 31 to 35 students while 51, 7 % teach large classes (over 35 students).

	Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
very dissatisfied	2	3,3	3,3	3,3
dissatisfied	18	30,0	30,0	33,3
ok	25	41,7	41,7	75,0
satisfied	15	25,0	25,0	100,0
Total	60	100,0	100,0	

Table 4: Teachers' Satisfaction with Assessment in Morocco

This question evaluates teachers' satisfaction with assessments in their classes. The findings show that 3, 3% are very dissatisfied, 30% are dissatisfied, 41,7% are OK, and 25% are satisfied. These numbers show teachers' dissatisfaction with assessment in their classes.

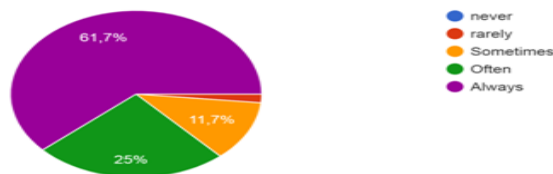


Figure 1: the frequency of providing feedback

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Teacher's feedback is essential in language assessment. It guides students to the areas that need more attention and raises students' self-confidence. The findings show that 61,7% of respondents never provide feedback, 1,7% rarely provide feedback, 11,7% sometimes provide feedback, and 25% often provide feedback.

	Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
rewarding/ punishing	50	83,3	83,3	83,3
descriptive	10	16,7	16,7	100,0
Total	60	100,0	100,0	

Table 5: types of feedback

Feedback can be classified into two categories. Firstly, rewarding/ punishing feedback are evaluative in nature. They react positively or negatively to students' achievement. Secondly, descriptive feedbacks try to diagnose students' problems and guide them to the best way for a better achievement. Findings show that the majority of our respondents (83,3%) provide rewarding/ punishing feedback and the rest (16,7%) provide descriptive feedback

(S.A: strongly agree; A: Agree; N: Neutral; D: Disagree; S.D: Strongly disagree)

	S.A	A	N	D	S.D
Assessment should provide feedback to students	61,7	33,3	3,3	1,7	0
Assessment should assign grades to students	10	45	25	20	0
Assessment should push students to perform meaningful tasks	50	45	5	0	0
Assessment should determine the extent to which students meet instructional goals and objectives	48,3	48,3	1,7	0	0
Assessment should increase competition	30	58,3	8,3	3,4	0
Assessment should guide and improve learning	45	46,7	8,3	0	0
Assessment should promote learners' autonomy	60	35	3,3	1,7	0
Assessment should allow students to evaluate their own performance	55	36,7	8,3	0	0
Assessment should encourage students to recall and remember facts	15	61,7	13,3	10	0
Assessment should promote collaborative learning	31,7	50	18,3	0	0

Table 6: teachers' perception of language assessment

The table above shows teachers' philosophies and perceptions about assessment; it includes both classical/ "modern" objectives of language assessment as well as bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (bloom et al, 1956). The findings show that respondents hold variant ideas about educational objectives. For example 31,7% strongly agree that assessment should promote collaborative learning while 30% strongly agree that assessment should promote competition. Moreover, 10% strongly agree that assessment should assign

grades to students whereas 55% strongly agree that assessment should allow students to evaluate their own performance.

	Deep understanding	Surface knowledge	Both
Never	1,7	1,7	8,3
Rarely	16,7	5,0	10,0
Sometimes	31,7	40,0	38,3
Often	33,3	28,3	26,7
Always	16,7	25,0	16,7
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 7: the objectives of the assessment

Respondents were asked about the areas they target when assessing their students. In Bloom’s taxonomy, Deep understanding refers to high-order thinking skills (evaluation, synthesis, analysis), while surface knowledge is equivalent to low-order thinking skills (knowledge, comprehension, application). The data show that 31,7 % sometimes target deep understanding, 40% sometimes target surface knowledge and 38,3% target both of them.

	MC Q	True_false	Matching_exercise	gap filling	interviews	portfolio	Peer assessment	presentation
Never	3,3	0	0	0	45,0	38,3	25,0	10,0
Rarely	10,0	1,7	3,3	0	33,3	26,7	30,0	20,0
Sometimes	35,0	11,7	30,0	13,3	15,0	25,0	30,0	46,7
Often	31,7	40,0	31,7	36,7	5,0	5,0	10,0	18,3
Always	20,0	46,7	35,0	50,0	1,7	5,0	5,0	5,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 8: the frequently used techniques by respondents

Respondents were provided with a different set of assessment techniques that vary between traditional and alternative. The objective is to determine the kind of techniques teachers frequently use when assessing their students. The data show high tendency toward traditional techniques. For example, respondents state that always use MCQ (20%), true false (46,7%), Matching exercises (35%), Gap filling (50%). Whereas, in alternative techniques the percentages are far lower. Only 1,7% use interviews as an assessment technique, Portfolio (5%), peer assessment (5%), and presentation (5%).

	Time constraint	Students’ engagement	Assessment criteria	class time	Inadequate training	Outclass commitments
not a barrier	18,3	5,0	11,7	10,0	11,7	38,3
small barrier	21,7	18,3	11,7	25,0	20,0	18,3
moderate barrier	30,0	38,3	40,0	45,0	33,3	25,0
large barrier	30,0	38,3	36,7	20,0	35,0	18,3
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Table 9: obstacles of applying alternative assessment in Morocco

In order to define the obstacles of applying alternative assessment in Moroccan classroom, teachers were provided with a set of obstacles to put on a Likert scale. 30% of

Respondents consider time constraints a large barrier, 38,3% students engagement, 36,7% assessment criteria, 20% class time, 35% inadequate training, and 18,3% outclass commitment.

5. DISCUSSION

Reflecting on the collected data, the one can get a clear idea about the status of alternative assessment in Morocco. In regard to the first question about teachers' attitudes toward alternative assessment, data show that respondents hold a positive attitude toward alternative assessment. Firstly, 30% are dissatisfied with assessments in Morocco. Secondly, respondents strongly agree that assessment should provide feedback to students (61,7%), push students to perform meaningful tasks (50%), promote collaborative learning (31,7%) and promote learners' autonomy (60%).

The second research question is about the kind of techniques teachers use in their classrooms. Teachers stated that they always use MCQ (20%), true false (46,7%), matching exercise (35), and gap-filling (50%). On the other hand, only 1,7% use interviews, portfolios 5%, peer assessment 5%, and presentations 5%. Obviously, there is a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs/ attitudes and their classroom practices. Babni (2019) explains teachers' preference for traditional assessment by being easy and practical. On the contrary, alternative assessment is difficult and time-consuming. Indeed, using traditional techniques, a teacher can test a whole class in one hour, whereas interviews, presentations and portfolios might take a few days.

The third research question is related to the obstacles of applying alternative assessment in Moroccan classrooms. The findings show that respondents hold a positive attitude toward alternative assessment but fail to translate those attitudes into daily practices. Respondents consider the following as large barriers: time constraint (30%), students' engagement (38,3%), assessment criteria (36,7%), class time (20%), inadequate training (35%), and outclass commitment (18,3%). Alternative assessment is a long-term process; it is time-consuming. Also, the majority of respondents (51,7%) teach large classes (>35 students). It is difficult to test and notice every student in large classes individually. In addition, the criteria of alternative assessment are not clear as in traditional assessment. Moreover, it requires students' long-term commitment because every session is an opportunity to observe students' progress and achievement. Last but not least, it requires special training of teachers to apply those techniques in their classrooms. Bouziane (2017) declare that Moroccan teachers are not trained in alternative assessment; hence further training is highly needed.

5.1.Recommendations

Despite the poor presence of alternative assessment in teachers' assessment practices, we must highlight their willingness and readiness to apply alternative assessment. This research uncovered that teachers realize the importance and the urgent need of alternative assessment in today's world. However, several obstacles stand between them and presenting alternative assessment to their classes. Education officials and stakeholders, thus, need to consider the following:

- 1) Training teachers in the area of alternative assessment.
- 2) Recognizing and rewarding innovation in language assessment.
- 3) Reducing the number of students in classes.
- 4) Sensitizing students and parents about the importance and validity of alternative assessment.

6. CONCLUSION

This research paper investigates Moroccan teachers' attitudes toward alternative assessment and the main obstacles that hinder applying it in the Moroccan classroom. A

questionnaire was distributed to 60 middle and high school English teachers in Morocco to attain this goal. The collected data showed respondents hold a positive attitude toward the alternative assessment and realize its importance. However, they can't apply it in their classroom due to many obstacles such as large classes, class time, lack of training, outclass commitments and students engagement. It is imperative hence that education officials and stakeholders offer sufficient training in alternative assessment, reduce class size and raise students and parents' awareness of the importance of alternative assessment. Applying alternative assessment in the Moroccan classroom is evidently a long-term process that demands commitment, hardwork and preparation but it is worthy of all the efforts.

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