

The Perspectives of EFL Students at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait on Ways of Alternative Assessment in Their Courses

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Abstract: This research explores the implementation and impact of alternative assessment methods in the classroom setting. Focusing on the perspective of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the College of Basic Education (CBE) in Kuwait, the research aims to raise awareness amongst the students about the significance of incorporating diverse assessment strategies in the classroom. The study utilizes a questionnaire to gather insights from a sample of 162 female students on alternative assessments methods used in the classroom. The findings reveal a moderate degree of utilization of alternative methods in the sampled courses, with a mean of 2.79 and a standard deviation of 1.08. In contrast, the perceived advantages of these alternative methods are substantial, with a mean of 3.81 and standard deviation of 0.87. This research holds relevance for educators and policymakers seeking to refine educational practices, emphasizing the importance of adapting assessment methods to better align with the needs and perspectives of students in an EFL context. This research not only adds to the existing knowledge base in the realm of alternative assessment methods, but also serves to heighten awareness among CBE students as well as educators, about the significance of diversifying assessment strategies. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on alternative assessment, holding implications for refining educational practices and enriching the learning experiences of EFL students in Kuwait.

Keywords: Alternative Assessment, Kuwait, Student Perspectives, EFL, College Students

1. Introduction

Assessment became a recent topic for instructors, educators, and scholars. It has been discussed in academic courses, workshops, conferences, in-service training, and professional publications. The term "assessment" has various meanings for different contexts and numerous individuals. It is probably most commonly understood as testing and grading by marking quizzes and examinations and giving students course scores to let them know how well they performed in the courses. For the purpose of this research, the definition of assessment by Rixon [33] is relevant where it is defined as "any systematic way of finding out about people's levels of knowledge or skills". The 'people' in this research are the EFL learners at the College of Basic Education (CBE) in Kuwait's, as for 'systematic way'

the focus is on alternative assessment.

Traditional assessment methods are no longer valid to keep pace with the development in the modern educational system because they are unable to determine the learning outcomes mastered by students. They tend to be limited at measuring concepts on the lower thinking levels that do not give an accurate picture of the value of the learning achieved by the student [5]. Therefore, a new vision of assessment is seeing it as a dynamic process that continuously produces data about how well students are doing, i.e., their progress towards learning objectives. So, attention has turned towards alternative assessment because it is able to measure the learner's behaviors in real life situations. This assessment philosophy recognizes that data collection may document and improve student learning if it is consistent with learning

objectives and used effectively to guide instruction. This new vision of assessment is known as alternative assessment where it is seen as the process that relies on measuring performance in real tasks by using several methods and measures such as observation, tests, self-assessment, peer assessment, educational portfolios, etc., to collect information on the learner's knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and on the effectiveness of the educational process, the validity of the curriculum, and the effectiveness of the educational policy.

Although the term 'alternative assessment' can encompass a variety of interpretations, it predominantly signifies approaches that deviate from traditional assessment methods, such as conventional tests and essay questions, and encourages the integration of assessment, teaching, and learning. It also promotes active and well-informed student engagement, involves assessment tasks that are authentic, meaningful and engaging that mirror realistic contexts that focus on both the learning process as well as learning outcomes. Moreover, it moves away from tests or exam scores to a more descriptive assessment based on a set of competencies and outcomes [13, 26, 31, 32].

Many educators have called for the need to use alternative assessment with all its tools and strategies, in order to help the teacher assess student learning, identify their real abilities, and give a clear picture of their skills, in addition to providing the teacher with a basic database for self-communication. Through it, students share what they think, improve their performance, and expand their experience [19]. Therefore, this study will look at how alternative assessment assesses students' performance used in real context to measure their achievements instead of the traditional methods of assessing student learning. It is without a doubt that assessment is increasingly being seen as a crucial component of teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

Many educational institutions around the world are transitioning towards reevaluating their approach to educational assessment. This shift is driven by the challenges posed by the 21st century across various aspects of contemporary life, as well as the demand for individuals to possess a wide range of competencies in the modern world. Additionally, there has been a consistent critique of the limitations associated with the current educational assessment model, which often involves rigid and conventional methods such as regular exams and routine testing. These traditional assessment methods are deemed inadequate for effectively tracking students' academic progress and supporting their overall development, often resulting in stagnation within the educational process [29, 32].

It can be said that the justifications that push us to use alternative assessment is to overcome the shortcomings in the traditional assessment methods. For example, traditional assessment tools measure student cognitive aspect more than the performance aspect, while alternative assessment tools measure the motor performance aspect as well as the cognitive

and emotional aspects. Furthermore, the traditional assessment tools aim to measure what the student knows of the the information or skills previously studied, while alternative assessment aims to measure what the student can do [41].

Traditional assessment methods tend to concentrate on measuring lower level concepts and often overlook higher order thinking skills. They do not effectively contribute to the development of students' critical thinking or their journey towards creativity and innovation. To address this, those responsible of the educational system policies need to develop assessment procedures that effectively and proficiently align with the goals of education in learning a language setting [4].

As a result of the criticisms directed at traditional assessment methods, recent trends in the field of assessment and educational reform have advocated for alternative assessment, which focuses more on student performance. This approach represents a more comprehensive and dynamic way to assessing students' abilities compared to the constraints of traditional tests. In this approach, knowledge is viewed as something actively constructed by students, and the assessment process goes beyond the limitations of multiple-choice questions typically administrated with pencil and paper. Consequently, alternative assessment methods have gained significant attention and widespread acceptance in developed countries. The incorporation of these alternative assessment tools in educational systems has shown progress in student performance and learning through continuous feedback. Moreover, it also provides a holistic view of a students' overall development [2].

Many alternative assessment ways have been developed and integrated into educational practice because of new insights into student learning, and a substitute for standardized tests such as multiple-choice tests, peer assessment, self-assessment, portfolio assessment, authentic and performance assessment [13, 27]. In the new era of assessment, students are expected to be reflective, active learners who essentially control their educational learning processes through personal decisions. Given that learning and assessment are integrated, this also implies that students should actively participate in evaluating their progress. Given the well-established significance of students' attitudes in motivating their learning, it is only natural for people in the field of education to take a keen interest in students' attitudes toward assessment, a crucial component of the language learning experience.

According to Hancock [20], one of the advantages of alternative assessment is that it offers students ample opportunities to demonstrate their proficiency in completing assignments. Alternative assessment formats prioritize the learner's role by actively involving them in their educational journey and giving them control in their language acquisition as noted by Abbas [1]. Moreover, language classes that emphasize several alternative assessment techniques enable students to assess what they have learned both inside and outside the classroom in authentic contexts. The use of learner-centered learning and teaching methods, skill integration, process emphasis, and open-ended or multiple

solution types, all facilitate these educational aspects as highlighted by Burrows, Ouellet, Joji, & Man [11].

3. Statement of the Problem

Students are assessed academically for both formative and summative purposes. The first aims to raise the quality of learning and serves students' learning needs, whereas the second is required for knowledge or performance accreditation and meets the needs of society to assess the value of education [10]. Boud [10] made the case that alternative assessments should be created to enhance student learning because the necessity for formative assessment is frequently overlooked. Modern educational reforms have proposed new assessment guidelines that insist on continuously considering students' progress throughout the academic year, enforcing two or more midterm exams, attendance, and participation scores, homework and different activities scores.

In reality, it looks like a continual scoring is all that the assessment procedure entails all too frequently. Both students and teachers appear to be constantly adding up points which frequently have the unfortunate preoccupation with grades and scores rather than progress and learning. There is no need to have quizzes and examinations that frequently throughout the academic year to serve as a type of formative and summative commentary on students' progress. Teachers are under constant pressure to complete the teaching materials that are scheduled by the syllabus and curriculum. They also have to prepare, deliver, score, and correct tests at all times. Also, finding time for formative assessment must be a major challenge when taking into account the high students' number per teacher. Tests are often given as scheduled, but do they provide advantages for students' progress? Tests and grades alone do not greatly enhance learning or guarantee students' success as several studies have demonstrated [9].

The majority of the data and literature found in various research carried out at universities and schools provided evidence of students' perceptions of alternative assessment. Additionally, other studies found that students had favorable opinions on alternative assessment [7, 14, 18, 22, 23, 36]. Other research [8, 12, 24, 37, 39, 40] also suggested that student's perceive alternative assessment as innovative, reflective, and communicative. This positive perception of alternative assessment methods was found to influence the quality of their learning in practical real-world context.

In a research published by Phongsirikul [30] discovered that students viewed portfolios as crucial tools for assessing their learning. As a result, their instructional strategies changed and became more creative. Studies carried out simultaneously by [23, 30, 37] shed light on students' attitudes toward alternative assessment and showed that they were more motivated to use it. In their study on students' self-assessment, Mangkuto et al. [25] discovered that the majority of students rated self-assessment as a pragmatic technique of assessment for learning the English language because it allows them to identify their subject matter, the challenges they face, and the struggles that should be developed to overcome those

challenges while also enhancing their understanding and knowledge. Irawan [22] discovered that the majority of students accepted alternative assessment well and cited student-designed examinations, learner-centered assessments, projects, and presentations as examples. Additionally, the results showed that students' attitudes were more motivated as compared to the conventional assessment approach.

Additionally, Gholami's [18] research revealed that students' attitudes towards alternative assessment were positive and that they believed written assignments to be crucial learning tools. Also, Du Plessis and Koen [16] conducted a study on portfolio assessment and discovered that it affected students' perspectives. The results also showed that portfolio assessment is a crucial stage in students' orientation to careers and gives them the chance to study thoroughly for a long future. Ibberson's [21] study explained that learners' and teachers' opinions and attitudes toward self-assessment were favorable. Retroactive assessment, on the other hand, may be challenging for some students, according to some teachers and some students who perceived self-assessment as complicated.

Fajarsari [17] discovered in a subsequent study that students had a favorable opinion of alternative assessment and found that even pupils with limited competence could assess others and themselves. Further research revealed that students felt alternative assessment helped them improve their knowledge, English proficiency, individual learning, and group learning. In other studies, students' perceptions of portfolios, a kind of alternative assessment, were found to be favorable and it was noted that portfolios helped students develop their language abilities, particularly their writing [8]. Additionally, Siow [38] conducted a study to ascertain students' perspectives on self and peer assessment and the findings revealed that students marked self and peer assessment as more important for the learning process. Peer and self-assessment help students think critically and improve their work appropriately, according to additional research findings. Additionally, they made the point that peer assessment enhances their learning process since they receive feedback from their peers, which helps them become analytical. They expressed a desire for peer assessment in their future academic studies.

The significance of students' perceptions of alternative assessment may be demonstrated for two reasons. First, according to Mussawy [27], a student's viewpoint will influence their learning strategy which will then influence how effective the student is in the classroom. Second, instructors and students will work together to identify the best assessment tool to use in the classroom. Teachers that are aware of the needs and capabilities of their students will have an impact on the students and their learning [3].

4. Methodology

4.1. Aim and Research Questions

The primary aim of this study is to explore the perspectives of students who are studying English at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait. The focus is on understanding how they

perceive and experience various methods of alternative assessment in their courses. Additionally, the study aims at exploring the benefits and advantages that these students associate with alternative assessment practices. To achieve these research goals, a questionnaire was designed and administered to the participants to address the following research questions:

- 1) What are the perspectives of students on ways of alternative assessment in their courses?
- 2) What are the advantages of alternative assessment from the participants' point of view?

4.2. Participants

Since the aim of this research is on exploring perspectives of students regarding alternative assessment, students who were enrolled in the "Assessing Young Learners" course were specifically chosen. This particular course familiarizes them with assessment terms and ultimately what alternative assessment is and what it entails. Moreover, this choice of participants aligns with a purposive sampling strategy, which involves deliberately selecting individuals "to satisfy specific research needs in a project" [34]. The research was conducted over the span of two academic semesters, and the platform utilized for this purpose was Microsoft Teams. This online channel serves as a familiar and readily accessible mode of communication between students and their instructors throughout the CBE.

4.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In order to reach the research objectives a questionnaire on EFL students' perspectives on ways of alternative assessment consisting of two parts was used. It referred to some previous studies that dealt with alternative assessment ways such as [6, 7, 15, 28, 35, 39]. The questionnaire items were formulated in their initial form, and reached (25) items, following the five-point Likert scale (to a very considerable degree, to a considerable degree, to a moderate degree, to a low degree, to a very low degree), taking the following relative weights (5, 4, 3, 2, 1). To analyze the questionnaire data, SPSS software was used. As for the descriptive statistics overviewing student perceptions on alternative assessment, descriptive statistical analysis was relied on namely means and standard deviations.

5. Results and Discussion

The current study aimed to answer two research questions, each of which shed light on different aspects of the students' perceptions and experiences related to alternative assessment practices. In this discussion, a focus on the first research question and its findings will be presented in Table 1. The results provide an overview of the student's perspectives on the various methods of alternative assessment based on the 11 different constructs of the questionnaire. Means and standard deviations were calculated to derive meaningful insights from these responses, they also serve as a valuable statistical measure for summarizing student perceptions.

Table 1. Students' Perspectives on Ways of Alternative Assessment.

No.	Alternative assessment ways	Mean	SD
1	In-class Participation	3.63	0.91
2	Communication Assessment	1.73	0.99
3	Performance-Based Assessment	2.99	1.02
4	Concept Map	2.51	1.19
5	Self-Assessment	3.50	0.88
6	Oral Presentation	2.93	1.19
7	Peer Assessment	2.04	0.97
8	Portfolio Assessment	2.79	1.06
9	Appreciation Feedback	2.92	0.98
10	Homework	3.55	0.95
11	Student Observation	2.78	1.11

According to Table 1, the mean score of 2.79 suggests that, on average, female students perceive the ways of alternative assessment in their courses as having a moderate degree of effectiveness. This suggests a relatively balanced view, neither highly positive nor strongly negative. The analysis of the data presented in Table 1 portray interesting insights into the perceptions of female students in regards to the various alternative assessment ways in their courses as highlighted below. The three highly regarded methods among alternative assessment are "in-class participation", "homework", and "self-assessment". They received mean scores of 3.63, 3.55, and 3.50, respectively, indicating that these methods are perceived as having a large degree of effectiveness. This suggests that students find these approaches particularly beneficial for their learning and progress. Moreover, the result of "self-assessment" signifies that students place considerable value on assessing their own work and performance. As for the two moderately perceived methods, "Performance-based Assessment" and "Oral Presentation" rank fourth and fifth with mean scores of 2.99 and 2.93. These methods are perceived with a moderate degree of effectiveness, suggesting that students view them as reasonably useful but not as highly beneficial as the top three methods. As for the three moderate to lower-ranked methods of "appreciation feedback", "portfolio assessment" and "student observation" come in sixth, seventh and eighth positions with mean score of 2.92, 2.79, and 2.78. These methods are also viewed moderately by the students, indicating they hold some value but not as much as the highly regarded ones. As for the two less favorably related methods that are "concept assessment" and "peer assessment" positioned ninth and tenth place with mean scores of 2.51 and 2.04. These methods are perceived with a low degree of effectiveness, suggesting that students may not find them as valuable or effective in assessing their learning. Finally, the least favorable method "communication assessment" ranked at the bottom with a mean score of 1.73, indicating that it is the least favorable perceived alternative assessment among students.

In summary, the analysis of the mean scores provides valuable information about how female students at the CBE in Kuwait perceive different alternative assessment methods. The results show variations in their attitudes, with in-class participation, homework, and self-assessment being the most highly regarded, while communication assessment is viewed the least favorably. The findings highlight the importance of

considering student preferences and perceptions when designing and implementing alternative assessment strategies, as the effectiveness and perceived value of these methods can vary significantly. Educators can use these insights to make informed decisions about the types of alternative assessment approaches they employ in their courses and tailor them to better meet the needs, expectations, and preferences of their

students.

As for the second research question and its findings, they will be presented in Table 2 using means and standard deviations were used. The results provide an overview of the student's perspectives on the advantages of alternative assessment based on the 14 different constructs of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Students' Perspectives on the Advantages of Alternative Assessment.

No.	Advantages of Alternative Assessment	Mean	SD
1	Fairness is evident in alternative assessment ways.	3.84	0.81
2	Alternative assessment reveals skills I didn't know I had.	4.47	1.03
3	Alternative assessment increases my self-confidence as a future student and teacher.	3.96	1.06
4	Alternative assessment enables me to meet requirements and performance criteria.	2.77	1.03
5	Alternative assessment allows me to get qualitative feedback on my performance from my teachers.	3.95	0.69
6	Alternative assessment stimulates self-learning.	3.46	0.94
7	Alternative assessment encourages collaborative work.	3.43	1.06
8	Alternative assessment helps develop self-assessment skills.	4.34	0.55
9	Alternative assessment encourages me to use thinking skills such as analysis and problem-solving.	3.71	0.87
10	Alternative assessment activates creative thinking skills.	4.21	0.65
11	Alternative assessment increases communication skills between teachers and students.	3.89	0.80
12	I can easily perform the tasks assigned in the alternative assessment because of the clear performance criteria.	3.70	0.80
13	Alternative assessment provides constructive feedback to improve my performance.	3.94	0.75
14	Alternative assessment makes me more open to constructive criticism.	3.73	1.09

According to Table 2, the data reveals that the average mean score for students' responses on the "Advantages of Alternative Assessment" dimension was 3.81, signifying that female students perceived the advantages of alternative assessment in their courses quite positively. The analysis of the data from Table 2 advantages of alternative assessment are highlighted as follows. The "Alternative assessment reveals skills I didn't know I had" ranked first with a significant degree of agreement scoring a mean of 4.47. This implies that alternative assessment methods help students discover previously unrecognized skills and abilities. "Alternative assessment helps develop self-assessment skills" came in the second rank with a very strong degree and a mean of 4.34. This suggests that alternative assessment not only evaluates students, but also aids in growth of their ability to assess their own performance. The third rank was "Alternative assessment activates creative thinking skills" with a very large degree and a mean of 4.21. This indicates that alternative assessment techniques foster creative thinking among students. "Alternative assessment increases my self-confidence as a future student and teacher" came in the fourth position with a mean of 3.96, indicating the positive impact alternative assessment has on students' self-confidence and their future roles as both students and future teachers. "Alternative assessment allows me to get feedback on my performance from my teachers" ranked fifth, with a substantial degree of agreement and a mean of 3.95. This shows that alternative assessment methods provide students with valuable feedback from their teachers. "Alternative assessment provides constructive feedback to improve my performance" came in the sixth rank with a large degree and a mean of 3.94. This emphasizes the idea that alternative assessment offers constructive feedback aimed at enhancing student performance. "Alternative assessment

increases communication skills between teachers and students" came in the seventh rank with a large degree and a mean of 3.89. This suggests that alternative assessment methods promote better communication between teachers and students. Eighth on the list was "Fairness is evident in alternative assessment ways" with a notable degree and a mean of 3.84. This indicates that students perceive alternative assessment as a fair method of evaluation. "Alternative assessment makes me more open to constructive criticism" came in the ninth rank with a large degree and a mean of 3.73. This implies that alternative assessment encourages students to be receptive to constructive criticism. "Alternative assessment encourages me to use thinking skills such as analysis and problem-solving" came in the tenth rank with a mean of 3.71. This suggests that alternative assessment promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students. The eleventh position was "I can easily perform the tasks assigned in the alternative assessment because of the clear performance criteria" with a mean of 3.70. This highlights the importance of having clear performance criteria for tasks in alternative assessment. "Alternative assessment stimulates self-learning" came in the twelfth rank with a mean of 3.46. This suggests that alternative assessment methods encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning. The thirteenth rank was "Alternative assessment encourages collaborative work" with a mean of 3.43, implying that alternative assessment promotes collaborative efforts among students. Lastly, "Alternative assessment enables me to meet requirements and performance criteria" ranked last with a moderate degree and a mean of 2.77 indicating that students perceived this aspect less positively in comparison to the other benefits.

In summary, the study results show that the female students

in the study sample are mindful to the importance of alternative assessment methods in their learning. They perceive these methods as playing a valuable role in their learning journey and have generally positive attitudes towards them. One key aspect highlighted in the study is that alternative assessment provides female students with a variety of benefits. These include feedback on their educational progress and the extent to which they are achieving their learning objectives. This feedback not only helps them track their academic performance, but also assists in identifying potential social and psychological issues they might be facing. Furthermore, alternative assessment methods are seen as a useful tool for addressing and adapting to problems or challenges students may encounter during their learning. Moreover, this study suggests that alternative assessment is not only beneficial for students, but also plays a role in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities, as well as the instructional tools used in the classroom. This indicates that female students perceive alternative assessment as a comprehensive approach that contributes to their growth.

6. Conclusion and Study Significance

The study's findings provide valuable insights into the perceptions of alternative assessment methods among female students at CBE. The study results clearly show that these alternative assessment methods are positively viewed by the students as a way to improve their educational experience. These results are consistent with findings of some studies [7, 14, 18, 22, 23, 37] which all have reported similar findings. Moreover, these results are consistent with the work of [8, 12, 24, 37, 38, 40]. These students perceived alternative assessment as a means to foster creativity, reflection, and connectivity, thus enhancing the quality of their learning experience. Furthermore, the current study aligns with Irawan's [22] research, indicating that a majority of learner's maintain a positive outlook on alternative assessment methods.

Furthermore, the study's focus on identifying perspectives of female students at the CBE in Kuwait regarding alternative assessment is crucial. This information is valuable for educational policy makers and educational administrators as it offers a comprehensive view of student opinions on alternative assessment methods. Taking these students views into consideration and incorporating them into the educational process, it becomes possible to develop and refine alternative assessment methods better to meet the needs and expectations of students. It also signifies the growing recognition of the importance of alternative assessment strategies and tools in education. This way, the study not only benefits the students directly involved, but also contributes to the ongoing development of education and assessment practices at CBE and potentially beyond.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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