

Difficulties in Using Methods of Alternative Assessment In Teaching from Iraqi Instructors Points of View

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Abstract:

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the use and application of new forms of assessment that are radically different from the traditional forms of assessment (as paper - pencil) tests. These new forms of alternative assessment (as self and peer assessment, portfolio, interviews.....ect) are more student-centered as they provide students with a tool to be more involved in their learning. They also give them a better sense of control for their own learning. They are tests that also teach.

Nevertheless; there are some obstacles that face Iraqi instructors of English in using the different methods of alternative assessment in teaching. Therefore, this study has tackled these difficulties. It also aims at identifying and classifying these difficulties.

To fulfill this aim, a sample of (30) instructors of English of Diyala University are considered to be the subjects of this study. A scaled questionnaire as an instrument of measurement is used in this study to be an investigatory tool.

The results of this study prove that the hypothesis of this study is verified and accepted which reads that Iraqi instructors of English face difficulties in using methods of alternative assessment in teaching.

Chapter one

1-Statement of the problem and its significance

Assessment is an essential tool for verifying that educational goals have been met and modifying instruction by providing instructors and students with the feedback they need to gauge and improve teaching and learning.

Experience indicates that the process of evaluation has been misused by the majority of EFL instructors since they substitute for it monthly or regular test selected responses test (multiple-choice, matching and true -false) which are the preferred techniques for instructors for measuring their students performance. They also tend to stress the discrete features of language not the overall language proficiency. (AL-Muttawa&Kailani,1989:162).

Besides, these traditional forms of assessment fail to provide the kind of information that the typical classroom instructors are interested in , namely what the students can do in their second language. Because of this, an alternative to the traditional forms of assessment has been proposed in recent years This has come to be termed alternative assessment, authentic or informal assessment. These new forms of assessment focus more on measuring learners ability to use language holistically in real-ife situations .They are tests that also teach. In this way, a more accurate picture of students language profile can be obtained. (Richards&Renandya,2002:330)

Nevertheless, there are some limitations regarding the use of alternative forms of assessment into classroom. Today, alternative assessment is relatively new for most instructor, undeveloped and jet to be studied systematically, ie .instructors may face some obstacles of how to implement types or forms of alternative assessment within the constrains of classroom life.

Relating to the same point, Brecht&Walton (2002:56) states that performance assessment (as one form of alternative assessment) requires large amount of instructors time .To design and administer assessment and to scrutinize students performance, instructor with 20 or 30 student would be unable to manage.

In addition ,applying the different types of alternative assessment depend on the instructors skill in identifying students competencies, gleaning information about students strategic behavior and relating observation to specific instructional techniques.

So, this study has been tackled to identify the main difficulties encountered by Iraqi instructors of English in applying the different forms of this new trend of assessment .The present study is also expected to be useful in the literature of this field.

1-2.Aim of the study :

The present study aims at identifying and classifying the main difficulties in using methods of alternative assessment in teaching English as a foreign language from Iraqi instructors point of view.

1-3. Value of the study

1-The present study is expected to be of a great value for Iraqi instructors who will benefit from its details about these new methods of assessment in teaching.

2-It is going to provide feedback about the different method of authentic assessment since this modern trend of evaluation may be unknown or ignored to most Iraqi instructors of English.

1-4 Hypothesis

The present study hypothesizes that Iraqi instructors of English face difficulties in using methods of alternative assessment in teaching.

1-5 Limits of the study

The present study is limited to the difficulties in using methods of alternative assessment in teaching faced by instructors of the English department in college of Education (AL-Assmai) and college of Basic Education at Diyla University for the academic year 2010-2011.

1-6 Procedures

To achieve the aim of the present study ,the following procedures are adopted:

1-A thorough survey is done concerning the topic under investigation.

2-A sample consists of the instructors of English in the college of Education and the college of Basic Education at Diyla university is selected as the subjects of this study.

3-A questionnaire is constructed under the supervision of a number of specialists who examine the validity of its items and make comment , suggestion and modification if necessary.

4-The instructors responses are analyzed and then computed using adequate statistical techniques.

1-7. Definition of Basic Terms

1-Difficulty:

Webster (1976:630)defines difficulty as((a thing ,hard to be done or overcome, something that causes labor or perplexity and requires skill and perseverance in mastering, solving or achieving a hard enterprise)) . Liter (1964:54) defines it as any

obstacle that prevents achieving certain objectives and incentive the challenge and requires a great deal of efforts and thinking.

2-Alternative assessment

Alternative assessment consists of all of those efforts that do not adhere to the traditional criteria of standardization ,cost-effectiveness, objectivity and machine-scorability .

(valencia&pearson,1994:355)

Alternative assessment is different from traditional testing in that it actually asks student 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.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Background

2.1- An Introductory Note:

This chapter deals with the presentation of the different methods or forms of alternative assessment. This presentation is meant to provide a theoretical perspective about methods of authentic assessment .The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information on the major theoretical issues that will be referred to in the empirical part of the study.

2.2-Alternativf Assessment.

The term alternative assessment refers to variety of different types of evaluation procedures .i.e. it provides a menu of possible rather than any one single method of assessment .

2.3-Reasons for using alternative assessment

Interest in the use of nontraditional forms of assessment in the classroom reflects the changing paradigm in education in general and in second language teaching in particular.

Beckman and Klinghammer (2006:105) present some reasons for using kinds of alternative assessment:

1-Learners make real use of the target language .in this case English –for an actual purpose .The language is a means of communication.

2- Learners demonstrate what they have actually learned and how well they can use what they have learned .criteria or guidelines based on the goals of the class are set up in advance so both teachers and students know what needs to be done to complete the class successfully.

3- Learners get involved in their own evaluation .understanding how to evaluate themselves enables learner to take responsibility for and self –direct some of their own learning.

4-Learners' motivation to learn and use the language may be increased.

5-It gives learners the chance to a direct display of their progress to family members and others in their school and community.

6-It trains learners to assess their own learning progress and to identify their own strength and weaknesses.

7-It inspires creativity as it involves multi-stage tasks and real problems that require creative use of language rather than simple repetition.

8-It replicates real-world communication contexts and situations outside the classroom.

2.4-Methods of Alternative Assessment.

The main methods of alternative or authentic assessment are presented as follows:

1-Self-Assessment or self record-keeping

Beckman & Klinghammer (2006:104) state that self assessment is a reflective process in which learners evaluate their own work based on pre-set criteria. These criteria or guidelines are standards set in advance and shared with the learner that establish how a performance will be evaluated.

Stiggins (1994:33) states that self-assessment is a vital aspect of all learning. It is the very heart of the writing process. Valencia & Pearson (1987:25) add that those who cannot self-assess cannot read.

In contemporary language teaching, learners are trained systematically in ways of assessing their own learning progress. They can identify their own strength better than? In this way, learners, parents and employers can see precisely what progress has been made and what communicative tasks learners can successfully carry out (Nunan, 2001:85)

Richard & Renandya (2002:351) add that self-response assessment of one's own writing is a step towards learner autonomy. Studies on this form of assessment reveal that students are capable of analyzing and responding to their own writing given the proper training and by allowing them to practice self-feedback, the teacher is encouraging them to be self-sufficient and independent.

2-Peer Assessment

In this method, students are encouraged to share their work with each other. They may not like this at the beginning, but with the teacher's encouragement, they will gradually get used to the idea of communicating their ideas to each other.

Dean(1996:147)states that it is helpful for students to work in pairs to assess each others work and discuss its good and bad points.

It is worth mentioning that peer and self assessment on speaking give students the opportunity to rehearse ideas and improve the effectiveness of their communication with restatement and clarification based on the concurrent feedback given by the teacher and their peers. (pally etal 2000:231)

3-portfolio.

It is a systematic collection of a learners work over a period of time .It demonstrates learner progress and is evaluated according to pre –set criteria.

(Beckman&klinghammer,2006:104)

It is ongoing process involving the student and the teacher in selecting samples of student work for inclusion in a collection ,the main purpose of which is to show the student progress .The greatest overall benefit of using portfolio assessment is that student are taught by example to become independent thinkers and the development of their autonomy as learners is facilitated

A wide variety of portfolio exists :working portfolio ,performance portfolio ,assessment portfolio , group portfolio ,application (e.g for college admission) portfolio and so forth .The main contents of portfolio are samples of creative work, tests ,quizzes ,homework,projectes and assignement ,audiotaped of oral work, students diary ,entries ,logs of work on a particular assignment, self-assessment comments from peers and comments from teachers. (wiggins,1993:52)

Farr & lowe (1991:29) highlights the importance of portfolio assessment by stating that no system of assessment is as perfect as portfolio assessmen ,because students are required to

write ,but within this requirement ,they can choose the topic, audience ,responders in the class ,revision strategies, and so on . They are also free to select from their works the pieces they want to include in their portfolios.

4-Learning logs:

Learning logs are written account in which learners keep track of their own English use ,activities and progress through the term. (Beckman and Klinghammer,2006:104)

Richard and Renandya (2002:349) specify the significance of learning logs by stating that they help teachers see what their student are learning particularly In learning logs , student s write on the knowledge they have gained from studying in their writing classes and from their own thinking .A teacher need not grade learning logs ,but can assess how much a student has gained or benefited from the writing class.

5-Conferences /Interviews.

They are one –on-one sessions between the learner and the instructors. learners assess their own standing in the class ,using previously set criteria and determine goals and expectations together with the instructor.

Richard and Renandya (2006:351) state that conferencing is an effective means of teacher response to student writing .It is a form of oral teacher feedback .A short conference of 10to15 minutes will enable the teacher to ask the students about certain parts of the letters writing which are problematic.

According to Kroll (1991:259)one advantage of conferencing is to allow the teacher to uncover potential misunderstanding that the student might have about prior written feedback on issues in writing that have been discussed in class.

6-performance Assessment.

To assess performance ,two things are needed, a task to perform and the criteria for a successful performance . During the performance , the teacher and student audience evaluate the performance, using the established criteria .After the performance, they give constructive feedback to the performers. (Beckman&Klinghammer,2006:107)

The three key features of performance assessment are
1-the student construct, rather than select responses.
2-assessment format allows teachers to observe students behaviour on tasks reflecting real world requirement and
(3)Scoring relevant patterns in students learning and thinking.
(Gardner,1993:53)

7-Journals.

They are daily or weekly writing entries by learners in which they reflect on their own learning experiences and progress.

Richard & Renandy a (2002:349) states that journal keeping ,being informal in nature ,enables a student to get extensive writing practice .The main advantages of journals are:

1-It can be enjoyable since it gives the student free rein to write on any topic at the spur of the moment and,

2-It offers students the privacy, freedom and safety to experiment and develop as a writer.

3-It contributes greatly to the humanistic approach to teaching and learning, an example of which is the integration of values during the sharing sessions.

8- Protocol Analysis.

Protocol analysis is a writing procedure that promotes the process approach to writing .It is also known as the composing a aloud protocol or a think aloud activity ,which is the exact opposite of the fixed model used by traditional composition teacher .This type of analysis reveals the conscious processes involved in writing .In this approach , students are asked to record every thought that comes at mind during the writing process .The transcripts are analyzed and used as one of the instruments for assessing student writing .for through protocol analysis, the teacher can tell how students write ,the strategies they use to generate ideas , how often they revise and edit their work and whether their written work has improved .

(Richard &Renandya, 2002 :(348-9))

Chapter Three

Methodology &Procedures

3.1-population and sample selection

Information about the population of the present study has been drawn from the department of English in the college of Education (AL-Assmaie) and the college of Basic Education at Diyla University.

The choice is intentional (in the selection of Diyla university).The total number of instructors in the department of English in the two above-mentioned colleges is 30 who represent the sample of the present study .

3.2-The Instrument of the study.

In order to achieve the aim of the present study ,which is identifying and classifying difficulties faced by Iraqi instructors

in using methods of alternative assessment in teaching, questionnaire has been constructed by the researcher.

The type of the questionnaire used in this research is rating scales questionnaire .A strength of this type of questionnaire is that it elicits responses to specific question in the form of scaled, quantifiable data which can then be subjected to powerful statistical analysis.

(Backman and palmer,1996:243)

The items of the questionnaire has been collected on the basis of the related literature, interviews ,the open-ended questionnaire and the experts opinions since this questionnaire was exposed to a jury of experts specialized in English language teaching and linguistics .

3.3 -Description of the questionnaire

To fulfill the aim and verify the hypothesis, rating scaled questionnaire has been constructed by the researcher.

The questionnaire consists of 20 items .They represent the major difficulties or obstacles that may be faced by Iraqi instructors in using methods of alternative assessment in teaching. These items are supposed to elicit these difficulties by three rating scales:

- I extremely agree.
- I partially agree.
- I disagree.

3.4-Face validity of the questionnaire

The most important quality to be considered when selecting or constructing an evaluation instrument is validity .According to Heaton (1975:153) validity of a tool is "the extend

to which it measures what it is supposed to measure and nothing else".

Face validity is the best type of validity in the case of self rating .(Nunnaly ,1972:353)

In order to find out the face validity of the questionnaire ,the items of the questionnaire have been exposed to six jurors* and experts specialized in English language teaching and linguistics.

Each member of the jury was requested to point out his/her remarks and suggestions regarding the suitability of the questionnaires items.

Accordingly ,some items have been modified and other have excluded .The remaining are 15 which constitute the final version of the questionnaire .see table -1-

Table-1-
The questionnaire items

NO	Items	I agree	I Partially agree	I disagree
1-	The time needed to implement methods of alternative assessment is not sufficient.			
2-	Incorporating alternative assessment into class -room activities is a difficult tasks.			
3-	It is difficult to assess language skills holistically.			
4-	Applying methods of alternative assessment demands a supportive classroom environment in which students feel comfortable with one another.			
5-	Most Iraqi students who are used to traditional teacher-centered classroom have not been expected to take responsibility for assessment before.			
٦-	Iraqi instructors' abilities are not suitable to the implementation of the intended assessment.			
٧-	It is difficult for most instructors to use portfolio assessment since applying such a procedure demands special classes with special shelves of file storage.			

8-	Some change is required in the classroom routines and activities to implement methods of alternative assessment			
9-	It is difficult for instructors to rely on direct observation that are recorded with checklist and rubrics.			
10-	It is difficult for most instructors to assess performance tasks.			
11-	Alternative assessment may not yield results that can be easily averaged to attain a final grade			
12-	Instructors tend to emphasize wrong and right questions and not focus on communication.			
13-	It is difficult to achieve objectivity with respect to the use of the intended assessment			
14-	Engaging students in the different methods of alternative assessment demands providing certain technologies.			
15-	Instructors tend to stress the linguistic forms and not the overall language proficiency			

3.5-The pilot Administration of the questionnaire

After constructing the questionnaire ,A pilot study was required to find out exactly whether the questionnaire is well constructed or not.

Fifteen instructors from college of Education (Ibn Rushed) university of Baghdad /department of English / has been chosen for the pilot administration of the questionnaire.

Results of the pilot administration can be considered a good indicator for making any necessary modification in the final version of the questionnaire and to determine the effectiveness of the items in the light of the subjects responses.

3.6-Final Administration of the questionnaire

The final version of the questionnaire was distributed to the subjects at the beginning of January ,2011 .

The instructors were asked to give their views regards the items according to scale of three dimension .The instructors responses have been utilized by the researcher.

3.7 Overall performances

In order to investigate the hypothesis of the study which reads (Iraqi instructors of English have difficulties in using methods of alternative assessment in teaching).The responses of the subjects were investigated by using the mean and the theoretical mean formula . The mean score of the subjects was (42.62) compared with the theoretical mean (30).

This result indicates that the mean is higher than the theoretical mean .This proves that Iraqi instructors of English face difficulties in using methods of alternative assessment in

teaching Accordingly ,the hypothesis that mentioned is verified and accepted.

* The names of the jury members arranged alphabetically.

1-Amthel Mohammed, PhD. college of Education (AL-Assmaie)University of Diyla.

2-Arwa Abdel-Raswl, PhD. College of Education (AL-Assmain) university of Diyla

3-Khalil,Ismail.ph.D.college of Education (AL-Assmaie) university of Diyla .

4-Enaam yousif, PhD college of Basic Education .university of Diyla .

5-Nakham Kadwri, PhD. college of Education .university of Tikrit.

6-Salam, Hamed, PhD. college of Education (Ibn Rushed) university of Baghdad.

Chapter four

Conclusions ,Recommendations and Suggestions for further Research

After presenting the difficulties faced by Iraqi instructors of English in using methods of alternative assessment in teaching throughout th procedures of this study,the researcher considered the weighted mean of the items that ranges from (60% to 90%)as difficult topics . Consequently , seven items or topics were considered to be difficult as it is shown clearly in table-2-

Table-2-

Weighted mean of the questionnaire items

Item No.	I extremely agree	I partially agree	I disagree	Weighted mean %
١	25	4	1	83.33
٢	١٨	١٠	٢	60
٣	12	8	٨	40
٤	٢٦	٢	٢	86.66
٥	٢٠	٥	٥	66.66
٦	10	٥	15	33.33
٧	٢٢	٥	٣	73.33
٨	٢1	5	4	70
٩	10	15	٥	33.33
١٠	15	١٠	5	50
١١	9	6	15	30
١٢	١١	١٠	٩	36.66
١٣	13	5	١٢	43.33
١٤	27	2	1	90
١٥	14	6	10	46

Conclusions remarks can be clearly pointed out as follows:

1- Item number (14) which reads(engaging student in the different methods of alternative assessment demands providing contain technologies)constituted the most difficulty for instructors. It got weighted mean (90%).

2- Item number (4)which reads (Applying methods of alternative assessment demands a supportive classroom environment in which students feel comfortable with one (another) constituted the second difficulty for instructors. It go a weighted mean (86.66%).

3- Item number (1)which reads (the time needed to implement methods of alternative assessment is not sufficient) constituted the

third difficulty for instructors .It got a weighted mean (83.33%).

4-Item number (7)which reads (It is difficult for most instructors to use portfolio assessment since applying such a procedure demands special classes with special shelves of file storage) constituted the fourth difficulty for instructors It got a weighted mean (73.33%).

5- Item number (8) which reads(some change is required in the classroom routines and activities to implement methods of alternative assessment) constituted the fifth difficulty for instructors. It got a weighted mean(70%).

6-Item number (5) which reads(Most Iraqi student who are used to traditional teacher –centered classroom have not been expected to take responsibility for assessment before) constituted the sixth difficulty for instructors .It got a weighted mean (66.66%).

7-Item number (2)which reads (incorporating alternative assessment into classroom activities is a difficult task) constituted the seventh difficulty .It got a weighted mean (60%).

4.2 Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

In the light of the findings achieved and conclusions derived, the following pedagogical implications and recommendations are drawn:

- 1- Instructors should plan to introduce alternative forms of assessment gradually in conjunction with traditional forms of testing . Using a combination of alternative assessment and more traditional measurement allows the instructor to compare result and obtain a comprehensive picture of student language performance that either

- alternative or traditional measurement alone would provide.
- 2- At first, the instructor should use checklist and rubrics to evaluate student performance but not ask them to do self and peer evaluation. When creating checklist and rubrics, instructors can ask student to provide input on the criteria that should be included in each .This approach gives the instructor time to become more comfortable with the use of alternative assessment.
 - 3- Training course for teacher and instructor are necessary to bridge the gap since they are not used to such away of assessment.
 - 4- Instructor are recommended to keep focus on applying these practical alternative of authentic assessment in the language classroom and possibly in other content area classroom as well.
 - 5- Instructor should experiment with a variety of instructional methods as they implement forms of alternative assessment especially with students who have serious learning problems.
 - 6- The hope remains that despite some obstacles, alternative assessment support a richer more open_ ended curriculum.
 - 7-what we are moving toward is an assessment practice that send the message that the process of participating in all aspects of curriculum and of acquiring skills and achieving goals are important element in evaluating students outcomes.

Suggestions for further research

- 1- An experimental study can be conducted to investigate the effect of using methods of alternative assessment in teaching on improving the student overall performance.
- 2- Investigating student and teacher's attitude toward using methods of alternative assessment in teaching.

- 3- Investigating difficulties faced by instructors in using methods of the intended assessment and in other universities in Iraq

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الملخص :

شهدت السنوات الأخيرة اهتماماً متزايداً في استخدام وتطبيق إشكالات جديدة لعملية التقييم تكون مختلفة جذرياً عن الإشكالات التقليدية (كاختبارات الورقة والقلم). أن هذه الأشكال الجديدة من التقييم البديل (كالتقييم الذاتي، التقييم الجماعي، محفظة الأوراق، المقابلات.....الخ) يكون محوراً للطلبة لأنها تزودهم بالوسيلة التي تجعلهم أكثر اشتراكاً في عملية التعلم. كما أنها تعطيهم إحساساً أفضل بالسيطرة على عملية تعلم اللغة. وتعد هذه الأشكال وسائل اختبارية بالإضافة إلى أنها وسائل تعليمية أيضاً.

ومع ذلك، فإن هناك بعض المعوقات التي تواجه تدريسي اللغة الانكليزية في العراق في استخدام تلك الأشكال الجديدة من التقييم البديل في التدريس، ولذلك أعدت هذه الدراسة لتسلط الضوء على البعض من هذه المشاكل أو الصعوبات . كما أنها تهدف إلى تحديد وتصنيف تلك الصعوبات.

ولغرض انجاز هدف الدراسة فقد اعتبرت عينة مكونة من (٣٠) تدريسي في جامعة ديالى كعينة لهذه الدراسة. وقد استخدم استبياناً متدرجاً كوسيلة بحثية وإحصائية.

أثبتت نتائج هذه الدراسة بأن الفرضية القائلة أن تدريسي الجامعة يواجهون صعوبات في استخدام الإشكالات الجديدة من التقييم البديل في التدريس قد تم قبولها.