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# ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT: THE MOTIVATIONAL IMPACT UPON ESL LEARNERS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the motivational role of alternative assessment in learning English as a Second Language. The importance of individual factors influencing second language acquisition revolve around Second language acquisition theories. Within those factors the importance of motivation is undeniable. The aim of this paper is to give an insight into student motivation for learning English as a second language through the use of alternative assessments at the American College of Higher Education. The paper analyses levels of motivation after alternative assessments in English as a second language. Within this paper quantitative methods are adopted. The use of statistical analysis techniques identifies a rise in motivation in ESL through alternative assessments. This paper suggests further research based on psychological needs, a larger sample etc.

Key words: motivational, alternative, assessment, portfolio, needs, tools

## INTRODUCTION

Alternative assessments such as portfolios, observations, and other performance-based assessments are greater in realism and complexity of the tasks assessed, however they are more time consuming to use and score than traditional assessments (Gronlund, 2006, as cited in Alkharusi, 2008, p.243). Additionally, WlodWoski (1985) explained motivation as " the process that

can arouse and integrate behavior , give direction or purpose to behavior, continue to allow behavior to persist , and lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior" (p.2).

As per (Dörnyei, 2003), motivational teaching practice is creating the basic motivational conditions which include teacher behavior that is appropriate, a classroom with a pleasant and supportive atmosphere, appropriate groups norms in a cohesive learner group. Second motivational strategies for generating initial motivation include improving the learners L2 related attitudes and values, increasing the learners' expectancy of success, increasing the goal orientedness of learners, making relevant teaching material for learners and creating learner beliefs which are realistic. With reference to maintaining and protecting motivation, learning can be made enjoyable and stimulating, tasks can be presented in a motivating way, specific goals for the learner can be set, the learners self esteem protected and self confidence can be raised which could bring about a positive social image and learner autonomy, additionally self motivating strategies and cooperation among the learners can be promoted. Positive retrospective self-evaluation can be achieved through teachers appropriate behavior, a supportive and pleasant classroom climate, appropriate group norms in a cohesive group of learners. Moreover, motivational attributes such as providing motivational feedback, increasing learner satisfaction and offering

rewards and grades in a motivating manner also plays an important role. (Dörnyei, 2003, p.30, as cited in Sucuoğlu, 2017, p. 273). Washback is the positive or negative impact of assessment on the learning and teaching process. Performance based assessment provides teachers an opportunity to give the learners feedback that they can use in order to get prepared for future courses or to improve their work in process (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). According to Stiggins (2005), “the process of classroom formative assessment can serve an important role in enhancing student motivation and achievement” (p.1).

In an action research study conducted on portfolio assessment in writing, participants concluded that their writing improved through portfolio without thinking about low grades that they previously obtained. There was a gradual improvement in the writing skills of the participants researched which was observed by the teacher and confirmed by the research questions answered by students. Hence students were keeping their portfolios without anxiety or pressure. The study showed that finding and assessing portfolios assisted students as they learned skills such as problem solving and taking responsibility of learning (Goctu, 2016, p.112). The tools used in this study included observation and interviews. However limitations of the study included a small sample size of only 11 participants which may not be representative of the all the preparatory school students. Additionally the interview was implemented in a single university (Goctu, 2016, p.113). Furthermore the study was conducted using only one skill which is writing.

The next study investigated the perceptions of 3 different alternative assessments in a world language classroom in a midwestern high school in USA. This included dynamic assessment, task-based assessment, and formative

assessment using self- and peer-evaluation. When students perceptions of their assessments scores as well as the final exam scores of the control and experimental group were compared the results stated that the experimental group favorably preferred alternative assessments and formative assessments over task based assessments (Bachelor, 2017, p.30). The researcher used a concurrent nested design study as well as summative test scores, teacher journal observations, post survey open ended questions categorized into themes. Data analysis included a Likert type scale for certain questions on the survey. Student responses for the survey was displayed in bar charts and the likert type scale data was measured on an interval scale (Leedy & Ormrod). A descriptive analysis and ANOVA was used to analyze data. According to Bachelor (2017), the gaps in this study portray that only the first year foreign language students of a single particular institute were used. Furthermore, interviews, in class observations were not used to validate the data provided by the participants (p.34).

Another study was conducted using an action research to identify if self-assessment in journal writing can promote learner motivation. Every week students were required to write journals based on what they did in class, what they learned, what problems they had, and how they felt in the class. The research tools included a motivational questionnaire with a Likert type scale. To find out the impact of self assessment on motivation, the scores in the questionnaires were analyzed using a sample t-test analysis. Based on the results in the questionnaire and observation it was clear that self- assessment technique was effective in enhancing learners' motivation. The gaps in this study include that only one institution has been used as well as interviews of students have not been used to collaborate student response

of the questionnaire (Birjandi, 2010, p. 214-216).

When considering the importance of motivation in alternative assessments the objective of my questionnaire was to identify if alternative assessments increased motivation in students. The year of study and the programme of study at the American College of Higher Education. The hypothesis was that motivation increases with alternative assessments. The level of education of all participants is the same and they live in the same socio-educational context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper consists of quantitative methods to collect the data. The quantitative methods encompasses the students marks/ attitudinal questionnaire from the alternative assessments.

### **Research Design**

Four action research cycles were used. Within these action research cycles students were provided alternative assessments on reading, writing and speaking in the English language. During each action research cycle, assignments/ assessments were corrected through peer, self correction as well as the teacher. As per many studies peer review is considered an effective activity to benefit ESL/EFL writing students. (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; Rollinson, 2005 as cited in Hislop & Stracke, 2017, p.11). Peer review can help students become more aware of the disparity of how they and other students perceive their writing. (Saito & Fujita, 2004, as cited in Hislop & Stracke, 2017, p.11). Peer review according to Lundstrom and Baker (2009) is helpful for both students providing and receiving feedback (Baker, 2009, as cited in Hislop & Stracke, 2017, p.11). Furthermore, Tsui and Ng (2000) argue that students gained

through reading peers writing as opposed to obtaining feedback (Tsui and Ng, 2000, as cited in Hislop & Stracke, 2017, p.11). At the end of each action research cycle data is analyzed and after careful reflection the next action research cycle begins. Kemmis and McTaggart further note that “Lewin’s deliberate overlapping of action and reflection was designed to allow changes in plans for action as people learned from their own experience” (Kemmis and McTaggart, as cited in Dickens and Watkins, 1999, p.132). During each action research cycle motivation was measured based on an attitudinal questionnaire and assessment marks.

### **Population**

The population of this paper is the first year students of the American College of Higher Education.

### **Sampling Procedure**

The researcher has conveniently selected the first year students of the Faculty of English, Department of English as a purposive sample.

### **Instrumentation**

To collect data the researcher has considered the marks of four alternative assessments in reading, writing, speaking and an attitudinal questionnaire. Reading comprehension is assessed by reading a passage and answering questions individually, an individual oral presentation, a group role play and a letter writing task.

An attitudinal questionnaire was used to measure the frequency and percentage of students attitudes and motivation towards alternative assessments.

Result

**Table 1. Students' results**

Alternative assesment1	Alternative assessment2	Alternative Assesment3	Alternative Assesment4	Total
79	85	92	98	88.5

These are the results of the students alternative assesment scores in reading writing and speaking administered on a weekly basis. Table 1 shows the entire semester results. In the first column the first alternative assessment encompasses reading comprehension is shown and states that the students have successfully scored 79% passing the assessment. The second coloumn portrays the second alternative assessment which is an oral presentation and states that the students have easily succeeded through 85% passing the assessment. The third alternative assessment composed of group role play and showed 92% passing the assessment. The final alternative assessment consisted of a letter writing task and encompassed 98% passing the assessment. To conclude, students' gradual progress has inarguably emphasised the significant encouraging impact of what they have done through alternative assessment 1 and alternative assessment 4 in their final accomplishment. Furthermore, awareness of their accomplished score and peer correction made the students feel they could improve themselves and motivated just as if they were playing an interesting video game.

#### **Attitudinal questionnaire**

An attitudinal questionnaire was provided to students with the following questions after each cycle of the alternative assessments were administered in order to assess their attitudes.

Statement 1: Current feedback system helps in raising students' performance level. Through this statement the feedback the students get from teachers and peers can be evaluated. 54% agreed, 40% strongly agreed, 2% were undecided and 4% disagreed.

Statement 2. Alternative assessment activities are aimed at achieving students' learning objectives. The effectiveness of the activities used by the teacher can be checked through this statement. The

students responded with 42% strongly agreed and 36% agree, 18% neither agree nor disagree 4% of the respondents replied disagree and 1% stated strongly disagreed.

03: Feedback system is effective in evaluating student's learning needs. This statement described if learning needs are met through feedback. 60% agreed and 26% strongly agreed , 11% were undecided, and 3% disagreed.

04. Alternative assessment helps in raising students' motivation. Through this the learners motivation can be evaluated. Through the students responses most of the students see alternative assessment as motivational tool. Therefore 62% agreed and 20% strongly agreed , 15% were undecided, and 3% disagreed.

05: Alternative assessment system is effective in giving opportunity of selfevaluation. This means that learners have the opportunity of self evaluation. 58% of the responses say strongly agree, 20% agree respectively, while 4% were undecided, 13% disagree with the statement and 5% strongly disagree

06. Current alternative assessment helps students to become aware of potential gaps between their current learning and desired learning. This statements assists learners identify learning gaps.76% strongly agreed, 16% agreed, 3% remained undecided, 5% of the respondents replied disagree.

07. Alternative assessment guides students through ways which they can remove the potential gaps and improve their weakness. 27% of the responses were in favour of "strongly agree" as well as 41% indicates "agree". 21% indicated "undecided". 11% replied disagree and 0% strongly disagree.

08: Students get individual attention of instructor in areas of weaknesses. To this particular statement, 31% and 40% of responses say that they strongly agree and agree respectively. Making an aggregate of 72 with percentage 72%. Also 6% said

they disagree and 5% strongly disagree while 18% remained undecided.

09: Alternative assessment helps in identifying your strengths and weaknesses. 47% of the respondents responded strongly agree, 39% replied with agree. Additionally, 6% of the respondents indicated undecided and 5% replied disagree to the statement, and 3% said strongly disagree.

10. Alternative assessments improve students' performance. 52% of the respondents responded strongly agree, 37% replied with agree. Additionally, 6% of the respondents indicated undecided and 4% replied disagree to the statement, and 1% said strongly disagree

11. Formative assessment suggests the ways which learning could be improved. Statement 60% of the respondents responded strongly agree, 27% replied with agree. Additionally, 3% of the respondents indicated undecided and 5% replied disagree to the statement, and 5% said strongly disagree

## ***DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE***

The focus of this research was to evaluate the impact of alternative assessment on raising students motivation. . The findings of this study based on the views and attitudes of the participants regarding how they can positively benefit from the results of formative assessment practices in their learning The first statement showed that students performance is raised through the current feedback system and hence assisted learners acquire comprehension and target language. It was evident that most of the participants agree with this statement. Learning can be improved through feedback. This increases language proficiency as In the second statement, most of the informants agree that

formative assessment is effective in achieving their learning objectives. When considering feedback in evaluating students' needs most participants showed their agreement and noted that feedback and alternative assessment their leaning needs can be expressed and shown. Alternative assessment assists students receive feedback and shows them what needs to be done to improve. Furthermore, the impact of alternative assessment in raising student motivation is widely seen here. Statement five notes that most students agreed that alternative assessment provides a means for student self evaluation. Student self assessment is vital to boost learning and achievement through reflect the quality of their work through constructive feedback about student work. Self assessments assists students be more confident and improve their performance. Additionally through self assessment students understand their strengths and weaknesses and become more efficient in improving their learning skills which leads them to be highly motivated and their awareness is raised. Furthermore the majority of people agreed that alternative assessments assists students become aware of particular gaps. Additionally alternative assessment assists to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning. As per statement seven most respondents agreed with the statement that alternative assessment assists to bridge gaps and improve weaknesses in learners. . More over 72% prefer alternative assessment as a useful tool to detect flaws and positive points in student performance. The results indicate that alternative assessment is of paramount importance specifically in improving students' performance and learning as a whole which is seen in statements 10 and 11 where most respondents positively agreed.

In conclusion it is clear that alternative assessment can strongly influence motivation through commitment,

encouraging interest in learning etc. Furthermore positive motivational beliefs and self esteem is established through peer dialogue and information about student learning.

- SA Strongly Agree
- A Agree
- U Undecided
- D Disagree
- SD Strongly Disagree

about greater validity through qualitative data.

Additionally quasi experiments could be used to verify reliability and validity of the items in the questionnaire conducted by the researcher who made the questionnaire to be used in the present study

A pilot study could be conducted to determine the participants understanding of the items in the questionnaire

Statement	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	8	40	10	54		2	1	4		0
2	8	42	7	36	4	18	1	4		1
3	5	26	12	60	2	11	1	3		0
4	4	20	12	62	3	15	1	3		0
5	11	58	4	20	1	4	3	13	1	5
6	15	76	3	16	1	3	1	5		0
7	5	27	8	41	4	21	3	11		0
8	6	31	8	40	4	18	1	6	1	5
9	9	47	9	39	1	6	1	5		3
10	10	52	7	37	1	6	1	4		1
11	12	60	5	27	1	3	1	5	1	5

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Concerning its findings, this paper politely recommends to;

Concern ESL learners psychological needs

Use varied easy-but-useful alternative tests to motivate ESL learners

Keep ESL learners updated to both the evaluation plan and their accomplished score

A larger sample size to conduct the research which will include a larger demographic

Use different locations of the site

Teacher interviews could be used to cross check the results which would bring

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