

# 14<sup>th</sup> VESAL

INTERNATIONAL VISIBLE CONFERENCE ON  
EDUCATIONAL STUDIES & APPLIED LINGUISTICS

**ISBN 979-8-9890269-2-0**

October 23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024

TISHK INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
ERBIL, KURDISTAN REGION, IRAQ

## Balancing Acts: Harmony & Collaboration in Education

In accordance with the UN 17 SDGs

Edited by: Venera Ulker

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October 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Erbil, Iraq



# Exploring Alternative Assessment Approaches in EFL: A Selective Literature Review

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DOI: [10.23918/vesal2024v04](https://doi.org/10.23918/vesal2024v04)

## Abstract

Recently, many researchers in EFL classes have integrated alternative assessment. This study aims to review international perspectives on empirical studies on alternative assessment and its effectiveness in language learning in EFL contexts. The study used thematic analysis to analyze the studies on alternative assessment in EFL settings. There were many studies, but only five of them were chosen according to the criteria adopted in this study. The criteria were limited to exploring the methods, the limitations of the studies, alternative assessment strategies in the articles, and the findings of the chosen papers. The sources were selected from Google Scholar and Research Gate. This review found that in most articles, implementing alternative assessment methods was successful. It also found the qualitative method to be the main method among the revised articles. The study further included alternative assessment methods in EFL classes and the limitations of the study.

**Keywords:** Alternative assessment, systematic review, EFL Classes.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background Information

In English Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, traditional assessments such as standardized tests, quizzes, and written exams are used a lot to evaluate students' language proficiency. This approach only provides measurable and structured methods for testing and faces many limitations and challenges. While in the last decade, a new form of assessment field has been taken, the standardized test, as this examination, delivers a momentary assessment of the recall information. However, standardized tests fail to cover all aspects of learning, and many students are misunderstood and unchallenged. Alternative assessment is a new paradigm, a change in emphasis on concentration, application, and engagement rather than memorization and standardized methods. As Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018) defined it, alternative assessment has covered all the traditional methods of assessment.

Similarly, Worthen (1993) stated that alternative assessment is a broad term that includes various types of assessment, such as direct assessment, performance assessment, and authentic

assessment. Alternative assessment, which uses many assessment methods, engages the learners to apply critical thinking skills in the real world or different contexts (Al Rugeishi, 2015). Dung and Ha (2019) indicated that in alternative assessment, individual performance is assessed based on specific learning objectives and performance rather than compared to other performances at international or national levels. The alternative assessment has been utilized in the classroom. Teachers need to independently evaluate, design, and employ the questions and methods related to the objectives of the class (Jabbarifar, 2009). Thus, teachers receive feedback on the effectiveness of the alternative assessment methods and their evaluation in progress. In EFL/ESL instruction in the classrooms, alternative assessment obtained a greater degree of acceptance and significance attribution in the field. Since language learning is related to language testing, the testing and practice of the other disciplines are inevitably quite different. Both English language learning and its assessment are so complex that, to solve these complexities, EFL teachers employed diverse assessment methods (Al-Mahroogi & Denman, 2018). In the classroom setting, the main objective of the assessment is to provide an opportunity for the learners to demonstrate on their acquired knowledge rather than find the gaps that they haven't learned.

Many studies have been investigated on alternative assessment methods, but the experts could not reach a unified and reliable definition for alternative assessment. According to Gipps and Stobart (2003.) alternative assessment is a complete concept that includes multiple-choice testing, information technology testing, and a method that integrates assessment into learning and teaching progress. There are other terms for alternative assessment, like direct assessment, authentic assessment, and performance assessment. Alternative Assessment is characterized by some features. It focuses on problem-solving, critical thinking skills, and integrating simulations and real-world contexts, emphasizes both the process and product of the learning process and performs that teachers take on new roles in both assessment and instruction. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of providing feedback on the students' strengths and areas to improve. (Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters, 1992; Huerta-Macias, 1995).

Teachers used many types of alternative assessments in the EFL/ESL classrooms, reflection by students and teachers, portfolios, online assessments, projects, peer assessments, self-assessment, video recording, and workshops and conferences. All these types of assessments are integrated to assess four language skills, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In conclusion, alternative assessment can easily be integrated into EFL contexts.

## **1.2 The Rationale of the Study**

This current and necessary systematic study focuses on the different alternative assessment methods for language acquisition. This review presents a concise overview of studies from 2017-2023 on

alternative assessment, highlighting gaps in knowledge, identifying key trends, and suggesting areas for further investigation. Secondly, it analyzes the effects of these strategies in various educational settings, providing valuable information for educators, policymakers, curriculum designers, and researchers. Furthermore, it serves as a valuable resource for adopting alternative evaluation methodologies to facilitate their broader application. This review provides a summary of the reviewed papers on the strengths and weaknesses of research concerning different assessment methodologies. It aids in informed decision-making in the field of education.

### **1.3 The Aim**

This review article aims to explore the use and effectiveness of alternative assessment as an innovative method in EFL classes from the five reviewed articles, especially focusing on their effectiveness in improving students' performance and outcomes. By investigating different types of alternative assessments such as self-performance, self-assessment, portfolios, and practice teaching. It seeks to deliver insights into how these methods affect students' motivation and academic performance through teachers' perceptions. Furthermore, to evaluate its efficacy and ascertain its impact based on the experiences of both teachers and students, empirical studies were selected. It makes the comparison and contrast among the articles concerning the methods. The objective of the study was to analyze the kinds of alternative assessments used in the EFL context. It also evaluates the effectiveness of alternative assessment methods on students' motivation and academic performance in learning the English language. To gain the study purpose these two research questions were scanned:

1. Which type of alternative assessment methods are used commonly in EFL settings?
2. How do alternative assessment methods affect students' learning English language and academic performance in EFL contexts?

### **1.4 The Structure of the Study**

The five major sections of this recent review article are as follows: introduction, body, methodology, discussion, and conclusion. The introduction provides an overview of the study's context, objectives, significance, and structure. Furthermore, a comprehensive overview of all five research studies is provided in the main body. The discussion section delivers comparisons and contrasts in terms of the aims, challenges, methodologies, and results of the five articles related to alternative assessment approaches. *The conclusion section summarizes the key findings and offers recommendations based on the strengths and weaknesses identified in the reviewed studies.*

## **2. Methodology**

In this review, the article focuses on the alternative assessment methods in English Foreign Language classes. The study's purpose was to provide authentic knowledge of alternative assessment methods

in EFL classrooms. To gain the studies, different techniques were used in searching like Google Scholar, Scopus, and Research Gate Taylor & Francis online open-access databases to name a few to ensure the reliability of the study. In this study, a thematic analysis was implemented. This method is used to analyze the types of alternative assessment types used in the EFL context to provide a comprehensive exploration of each type of assessment's effects on students' outcomes and learning the English language process. Different keywords were used including alternative assessment, portfolios, and authentic assessment in most of the studies did not meet the inclusion of the constraints. Concerning the selection criteria, those articles were addressed that stated the objectives of the study. The selection of the articles crossed some criteria. First, the articles need to be up-to-date, and they have been customized from 2017 to 2023 in terms of publication. Second, the articles investigated various perceptive of alternative assessment methods. Third, the procedure focused on the empirical studies to investigate their data collection and methods. Lastly, the articles need to be carried out in different nationalities and settings. Empirical studies clearly state the methods of the study, the participants, and the results in the requirements. On the other hand, many of the articles were excluded due to their publication in other languages rather than English, conference papers, and working papers. Finally, the five of these articles were eligible for the review article.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Summary of the Articles**

##### **3.1.1 Sefli@assessment:**

Technology investment and the facility of the internet made the researchers utilize mobile phones as a tool for the assessment form in the class or outside of the class. Tulgar (2017) aimed to propose a new modern method for self-assessment at the university level. The researcher presents a new concept, selfie@assessment, and a new approach to self-assessment through mobile phones, to enable students to assess individual or group self-assessment and do their tasks via self-video recording. It also aims to allow learners to assess their learning process and give feedback to other presentations freely. The study utilized a qualitative method. A written report and self-videos were used to collect the data from 71 participants who enrolled in the Teaching English to Young Learners class for a whole semester. A mini-presentation was required from the students on a covered topic in the course. The teacher, presenter-students, and other students in the class evaluated the recorded presentation. The students watched their videos and evaluated their own performances. The students submitted their self-assessments in the form of a self-video recording to their teachers. to evaluate their performance orally. A written report was submitted by the presenter-students in which they listed the pros and cons of self-assessment via video format.



The qualitative method was used to analyze the written reports of students and self-videos that were submitted. The analysis highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of self-assessment and self-videos such as students having anxiety with recording videos, difficulties with technology's tools to send and record videos, and as the data was elicited from students, they preferred different places to record. The results of the study declared that selfi@ assessment is an appropriate technique for the group and self-assessment in the class. The primary result highlighted that self-assessment helped to the students' motivation, and made them comment on their educational practice and learning performance freely without students' and teachers' pressure. On the other hand, it is found that self-assessment can contribute to enhancing students' speaking skills in the target. In conclusion, selfi@assessment is one of the assessment methods that can be used as an alternative assessment and it is applicable and practical to assess self and group in the class performance. For further studies, self@assessment can be used with other methods and other English language learning skills.

### 3.1.2 Portfolio Assessment:

Suwaed (2018) conducted a study on using portfolio assessment in the writing classroom to get EFL student's perspectives in their second year in Libya. The study aimed to find out the Libyan EFL undergraduate students' perceptions toward portfolio assessment as an alternative assessment method in the writing class. It also investigated the challenges of implementing portfolios, the benefits, and their perceptions of the types of exams. The setting of the study was the English department at the Faculty of Art at Sabratha University. Thirty-eight Libyan second-year students who were enrolled in writing classes were the sample of the study. The study used a mixed method, both qualitative and quantitative. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview and an open-ended questionnaire to explore the students' perceptions toward portfolio assessment and their outcomes in the exam types. The questionnaire was designed with two parts: demographic information and an open-ended section reading the aim of the portfolio, the benefits, and the challenges of keeping the portfolio. The sample portfolio was utilized to support the questionnaire and interview data. The quantitative analysis was analyzed to categorize students' responses to the open-ended questions as the difficulties and benefits of using portfolios as an alternative assessment method in writing classes. The frequency of the responses was calculated. For qualitative data, three main themes were categorized from the students' interviews with the content analysis: students' performances from the exams, the benefits of a portfolio, and its advantages.

The result found that most of the students believed portfolios were a good assessment method for enhancing their writing and grammar skills, particularly. The students highlighted that portfolios helped them to improve their sentence structure and write them down accurately. The students also stated that they developed their writing performance compared to the traditional pen-and-paper tests. On the other hand, students expressed some discomfort with the portfolio assessment, as they were

more familiar with the traditional assessment strategies. Although implementing a portfolio has been beneficial for improving writing skills, the results highlighted the difficulties with implementing portfolio assessment, like its time-consuming nature and the lack of vocabulary and skills needed for the writing tasks. The study recommends providing e-training for the teachers and students To be familiar with integrating portfolios as alternative assessments in their classes.

### **3.1.2 Practice Assessment**

Practice of alternative assessment strategies and teachers reflection research was carried out within the context of English language instruction in Iran. Specifically, the research was conducted in a university, institute, and school in Iran. Naraghizadehiz, Azizmalayeri, and KhalKhalaji (2022) investigated the study on the EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of alternative assessment techniques and teachers reflections on this type of assessment. It also aimed to seek the connection between teachers' reflective practices. The study aimed to explore how practices of alternative assessment are related to the teaching practice reflection via teachers' perception and its impact on the teaching practices. A mixed method was implemented for collecting data and analyzing it. A convenient sampling method was used to select the participants of the study. Eighty-one (81) EFL teachers were the participants in the quantitative data. For qualitative data, 30 teachers were involved. The quantitative data was selected via a questionnaire with three parts: an introduction with demographic information, teachers' perspectives on the strategies of alternative assessment, and students' points of view on Alternative Assessment(AA). In addition, a semi-structured interview was used to collect the data on the teachers' perceptions and practices. The questionnaire was checked for reliability and validity. The Pearson correlation coefficient was utilized to see the relationship between teachers' experiences of applying the alternative assessment and their reflections in the qualitative data. The qualitative data was analyzed by thematic analysis and descriptive statistics in frequency and percentage format. The analysis delivers a more in-depth understanding of EFL perspectives and the practical session of alternative assessment.

The study of Naraghizadehiz, Azizmalayeri, and KhalKhalaji (2022) revealed that there is a great connection between teachers' experience of implementing alternative assessment and their reflections. For example, years of teaching experience helped them understand that assessment has been reshaped over the years. Teachers also highlighted the time and training for alternative assessment (AA) strategies. The finding also presented that the EFL teachers had a positive view because (AA) is more flexible than the traditional assessment in that teachers understand the students' competencies better. A qualified teaching atmosphere is another reason that teachers were positive about the AA strategies. These alternative assessment strategies helped to make students more engaged, and they analyzed their needs and peer assessment. The conclusion emphasized the

significance of the relationship between EFL teachers and their reflections on the AA strategies. Providing professional development training for teachers, integrating AA into the curriculum, and supporting the resources like teaching materials and facilities are the recommendations for further implications. 3.1.4 Performance Assessment

Ismael (2023) conducted a study that aimed to investigate the challenges of applying performance assessments in three university English departments in the Kurdistan Region universities and to address the solutions to the difficulties of implementing performance assessment in terms of practice and technicality in English departments. The study also aimed to explore the perceptions of 16 EFL teachers and reveal solutions to the challenges related to conducting performance assessments in Kurdistan university contexts. The interpretivism method adopted in the study aims to gain social and cultural meanings from the participant's behavior, thoughts, beliefs, and norms, through the interpretation of the collected data. The interpretivism method is used due to attempt human and social reality differently. experience in the English language and their awareness of performance assessment were two key items in selecting the participants. The interviews were transcribed, and analyzed by utilizing NVIVO software. In addition, a focus group interview was carried out with the aforementioned participants as part of the research process to reach a conclusion and determine the proposed solutions for the challenges associated with implementing performance assessments in the Kurdistan Region. The research employed thematic content analysis to examine the data and discover recurring themes that were associated with the challenges and suggested resolutions.

The study found six main results related to the challenges of implementing performance assessment in the English contexts of Kurdistan universities and addressed some solutions to the difficulties. The first difficulty was the lack of resources, technical, and infrastructure. Another finding is that students were not interested in the type of assessment and lack of motivation were the difficulties faced during implementing performance assessment. Curriculum difficulties as implementing performance assessments were not a part of curriculum design was another finding in this reviewed study. There was lack of training for teachers and student t. They suggested a solution by providing training regarding implementing performance assessments. Traditional assessment methods were a challenge in applying the performance assessments, as the departments designed their curriculum and courses on it Finally, teachers' beliefs found a lack of confidence in their skills regarding implementing performance assessment in the English departments of the region. The implementation of performance assessments in the English departments of universities in the Kurdistan Region presents benefits as well as challenges.

### **3.1.3 E-assessment**



Jalilzadeh et al.(2023) conducted a study on the challenges and clarification of the E-assessment in one of the preparatory language schools in Turkey, a part of Asia, The study aimed to investigate the main difficulties that English foreign language teachers face in their classes during COVID-19 and their perceptions. The study also sheds light on the e-assessment details in terms of teachers' challenges during the implementation of e-assessment. It enhances the efficacy of the e-assessment practically in Turkish contexts and generalizes to global contexts. The phenomenology research method was utilized. The study looked into the teachers who had prior experience teaching in a Turkish preparatory school. The sample size of the study was 56 PhD and MA holders. Open-ended questionnaires, analyzed using MAXQDA 2022, and purposive e-sampling were used to collect the data to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges and perceptions. The data was analyzed through quantitative content analysis. The analysis was categorized based on the two types of coding, such as descriptive coding and in vivo coding. These systems were utilized mainly in the coding phase to develop more general and important themes in the data. The study revealed that EFL teachers in Turkish language schools faced numerous challenges during the implementation and design of the e-assessments. Individual differences in learning and skills, department and unit policy power to implement e-assessment in learning at that lockdown time, mediating, teacher and student assessments, feedback, students, and teacher technological knowledge are these challenges faced by the teachers. It also highlighted the necessity of training teachers and students, integrating technology, redesigning assessment tools, adapting curriculum, increasing student engagement, and organizing improvements to address these gaps.

#### **4. Discussion & Recommendations**

The review articles were analyzed about alternative assessments in EFL classes as innovative methods of assessment. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the review studies and their effectiveness on language learning skills.

In these five articles, the methods implemented were qualitative and mixed. Of these, three were qualitative methods with different designs among the reviewed studies, including individual and online interviews, focus group interviews, written reports, and self-video recordings. Two of these implemented the mixed method, including an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The analysis of these five articles shows that quantitative analysis has not been used alone as a single method.

It will be great to provide a comprehensive result. As quantitative deals with numbers, it will show how alternative assessment affects the student's performance and learning skills effectively as it presents numerically.

As this review focuses on the perspective from different settings on alternative assessment methods, the setting of the studies is localized to different countries and regions. Jalilzadeh et al. (2023) conducted the study in Turkey at one of the language preparatory schools to investigate the challenges and clarification of E-assessment. The second setting was the Kurdistan Region, where Ismael (2023) investigated the EFL teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment at the English departments of Kurdistan universities. The last study that was conducted in Iran regarding teachers' perceptions by Naraghizadehiz, Azizmalayeri, and KhalKhalaji (2022) the study highlighted English Language Instruction in three different settings, like schools, institutes, and universities was investigated to explore the teachers' perceptions and practices of alternative assessment strategies. These different settings provide a comprehensive view of the effectiveness of alternative assessment methods and the challenges of implementation. The variety of settings gives vital insights into the alternative assessment with different participants, time, and the way of integration.

The last two studies focused on the students' perceptions of alternative assessment, its effectiveness in language learning, and the content of the course. Suwaed (2018) aimed to examine the Libyan EFL undergraduate students' perceptions of using portfolios as an alternative assessment in the English Department/Faculty of Art at Sabratha University. Finally, Tulgar (2017) investigated undergraduate perceptions in the English department, specifically those students who enrolled in the Teaching English to Young Learners course for one semester in Erzurum, Turkey. It aimed to explore a new concept of assessment, like selfie@ assessment. Overall, the studies could investigate on the students' perspectives more rather than teacher's perceptions.

In international literature, assessment in EFL/ESL has been debated widely, particularly alternative assessment. Regarding the strategies of alternative assessment and their effects on the language skills assessment, these strategies of alternative assessment were used in this review article: portfolios, e-assessment, self-assessment through mobile phones, interpretivism methods to gain social and cultural meaning through interviews, a semi-structured interview, an open-ended questionnaire, and a written report. For example, Tulgar (2017) explored a new concept of alternative assessment through phone on speaking skills. It was found that the alternative assessment helped students to be motivated and comment on their educational practice. It also helped students to improve their speaking skills and use self-reflection techniques by teachers and students to assess individuals and groups. Similar to the student's performance, Suwaed (2018) used portfolios as an alternative assessment method in writing classes to compare the traditional assessment. It was reported that most of the students were positive about assessing their writing skills via portfolio. They developed their sentences, patterns of sentences, and structure of essay writing. It highlighted that their portfolio highly improved their writing skills and helped them to be independent writers in their tasks.

The other three studies investigated teacher perceptions of alternative assessments. Naraghizadehiz, Azizmalayeri, and KhalKhalaji (2022) investigated the teachers' perceptions and practices of alternative assessment techniques in the EFL context. The teachers reported that there are countless links between teachers' experience of implementing alternative assessment and their reflections. It also reported that years of teaching experience helped them understand that assessment has been reshaped over the years. Teachers also emphasized the time and training needed for the AA strategies. These alternative assessment strategies are helping to make students more engaged and better suited for analysis and peer assessment in the class. The study could use more than the teacher experience method to see how these experiences and training the teachers on the alternative assessment method affect student's outcomes in the language learning process.

On the other hand, Ismael (2023) probed the challenges of applying performance assessments in the English departments of Kurdistan universities and addressed the solutions to the difficulties too. Teaching experience and teachers' awareness were two key terms to use in this study via the interpretivism method, which focuses on the subjective meaning of human experience and social phenomenon. It was reported that teachers faced many difficulties: technical difficulties, lack of resources, student disinterest, and lack of motivation were the difficulties faced during implementing performance assessment. Surely, these difficulties affect the student's performance in English language learning. The researcher could highlight only the main challenges regarding technology. The study also reported teachers and students lacked professional training regarding the performance assessment that they faced. Like this, Jalilzadeh et al. (2023) investigate the key problems that English foreign language teachers face in their classes during COVID-19 through the e-assessment method. The study reported that EFL teachers faced many challenges, such as individual differences, teacher and student assessment, feedback, and student and teacher knowledge. It revealed that these difficulties affect student performance in the learning process. It addressed the fact that teachers and students need training, increasing students' engagement in the class, and organizing improvements to find solutions to these gaps. Regarding the limitations of these five articles, the articles by Jalilzadeh et al. (2023), Naraghizadehiz, Azizmalayeri, and KhalKhalaji (2022), and Ismael (2023) all found some results and tried to fill a gap in the field of implementing alternative assessment in English language learning. First, the sample size of all these abovementioned articles were not sufficient for collecting the data and getting in-depth results. This sample may not reflect the whole EFL teacher population in Turkey, Iran, and Kurdistan. As the studies were conducted in different countries, they were limited to a small sample size purpose of the studies, duration of the study, and implication of the study's purpose in the settings. It affects the generalizability of the study's findings and cannot contribute to other courses and cultural backgrounds in these different contexts. These studies

(Jalilzadeh et al., 2023; Ismael, 2023; Naraghizadehiz, Azizmalayeri, & KhalKhalaji, 2022) relied on the experience of teachers, and participants' self-reported experiences may be vulnerable to bias. The studies did not include other stakeholders, such as students, that may provide great information about the challenges of online assessment. In addition, the studies did not focus on the effectiveness of alternative assessments on students' performance.

On the other hand, Suwaed (2018) revealed many insights into the effectiveness of alternative assessment on Libyan students' learning skills through portfolio assessment. The study had some limitations regarding sample size and the specific context, which could be addressed in future studies by integrating it into other courses to gain different results.

Although Tulgar (2017) found vital results in the study such as selfi@asseemnet is a suitable technique to for group and self-assessment in the class, it helped students motivation and helped students to enhance their speaking skills. There are some limitations: the implication and finding were limited to one limited course in the EFL context. The study integrated only one video and a written report, while it could use other tools to have different data and results. It affects the generalizability of other contexts and subjects.

Overall, these five studies found great results, but these limitations may affect their contribution and generalizability to other contexts and subjects.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper tries to report a thematic review of the different perspectives of the alternative assessment method in EFL classes published in 2017–2023, its effectiveness on the student's performance, and the challenges of the integration of alternative assessment. Based on the articles, there is a high positive perception and effect of integrating alternative assessment in the EFL context. It provides more opportunities for teachers and students. There were some challenges in employing alternative assessments in some settings.

The reviewed methods of alternative assessment from the chosen articles were considered useful based on the student's achievement in language learning skills. The reviewed studies' result presents a significant result. The students developed all their basic language skills. In addition, in terms of methodology, the qualitative method was the main method used mostly in the reviewed articles.

It is very important. Some limitations impact the findings of this review paper. This study is not an empirical study, as the relevant studies have been missed due to the selection criteria. This presents the comprehensive studies reviewed on the alternative assessment in EFL settings. The reviewer expected the selection of publications to reflect recent studies that have been investigated

on the alternative assessment in EFL classes. Future researchers may include various numbers of studies and different alternative assessment methods in EFL settings. The purpose of this review was to provide a summary of the reviewed papers in terms of year of publication, types of methods, different perspectives in different settings. It also highlighted how this method has integrated into English language learning process. It is a kind of source for educators, researchers, and teachers in the field.

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