

# Applying Alternative Assessment to Endorse and Optimize Student Engagement and Student Performance in Second Language Learning

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**Abstract - Assessments are part and parcel of Teaching and Learning process as they play a pivotal role in evaluating and assessing student performance. Teaching and learning have become so engrossed with assessments and assessments have become so common nowadays as learners are often involved in various types of assessments throughout their entire study programme. The names of the assessments may vary, but the ways in which they are conducted remain traditional in most instances. This naturally triggers out a sense of detest among the learners, still they are compelled to complete what is assigned for them before the due dates, as failing to do an assignment will affect their final marks. As a result, the real potential of the learners remains hidden and intangible as their efforts are without passion. As an attempt to overcome this gap, the researcher attempts to apply a new mode of operation – the Alternative assessment methods, so that the new venture might open up new spirit in learners which ultimately functions as a catalyst to embark the real potential of the learners. The study has adopted mixed method approach -qualitative as well as quantitative methodology. The findings of the research are fruitful and the researcher is looking forward to apply the new intervention to sow the seeds of enthusiasm among the students.**

**Keywords - Adapt, alternative assessment, engross, enthusiasm, student engagement.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The role of assessment is decisive in teaching and learning process as assessment has become central to learning, especially to that of tertiary education. Assessment is a critical piece of the learning process which is integrated in the system of education and in the evaluation of student performance. Traditional methods of assessment consist mostly of written examination where the students play a passive role in which they memorize and write down what they have copied in the classroom in the examination hall and get grades. But these age old methods are no more appealing and attractive in the modern era. The paradigm shift which deconstructs the hitherto valued power relation between the teacher and student demands a change in everything and assessment was

not an exception to it. With the advent of student-centered learning the teacher is expected to be a guide by the side of the learner instead of a sage in the stage. The student centered learning trend along with it brought learner autonomy and apart from teaching and learning process it is experimented in the assessment process also.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research findings suggest that more the learner autonomy is, more the student performance will be as autonomy naturally triggers out enthusiasm and engagement. At this juncture, it is helpful to incorporate the research findings to prove the relationship and impact of learner autonomy which is triggered out by the Alternative assessment on student performance. Nguye indicated that learner autonomy was an increasingly important aspect of higher education because it met the purposes of developing Life long, autonomous learners [1]. He further suggested that teachers had a crucial role in fostering learner autonomy in language learning.

Little suggests that learner autonomy be seen as a successful way of better and motivated learning [2]. The findings here are also in line with the results of Guay, Ratelle Larose, Vallerand, and Vitaro who found that the learners, who are autonomous, show better academic achievement [3]. Hashemian and Soureshjani also found a significant relationship between autonomy and academic performance [4]. And the researcher is willing to experiment to what extent the alternative assessment which in turn propagates learner autonomy and student engagement maximizes student performance.

As far as Jaffna University is concerned, mostly paper pen method is in practice in assessment procedures and the stake holders are not satisfied with the outcome of it. Requests have been made to modify the manner in which assessments are being conducted, so that the real potential of the learners can be evaluated. Research findings also suggest the need to change the ways in which assessments are conducted and administered. According to Marzano, Pickering and McTighe since assessment and learning are closely tied, assessment practices need to change so that they reflect the learning process [5].

And at this juncture, the researcher feels it is the right time to introduce new ventures to fill the gaps, so that learner performance might be evaluated in a better way. The researcher is enthusiastic to implement alternative assessments as an alternate to traditional assessment method and to observe and assess the student engagement and student performance.

### III. MATERIAL & METHOD

The research question of this study is “Can Alternative assessments endorse and optimize Student Engagement and Student Performance in Second Language Learning classrooms?”

The study is attempting to find out the answer for this question. The design of the research is experimental and in order to carry out the research two groups of undergraduate students with the same level of proficiency were selected. One group serves the purpose of control group to whom traditional methods were utilized and the other group serves the purpose of experimental group to whom alternative assessment methods are employed.

Classroom observation, semi-structured interviews and discussions with the learners are also utilized as research tools to gather data to carry out the research. Considering the time constraints, three Alternative assessments were administered in a major scale for the experimental group. The three major Alternative assessment forms administered to carry out the research are:

1. Alternative Assessment 01- (AA1) Group Presentation: Describing an Exhibition.
2. Alternative Assessment 02- (AA2) Report writing: Learning through experience – a report based on the field trip.
3. Alternative Assessment 03- (AA3) Power point Presentation.
4. Alternative assessments have been designed for second year Media Studies undergraduates of Jaffna University. The proficiency level of this group is between band four and five according to the UTEL bench mark.

Learners were given freedom to select an event on which they need to do an oral presentation. They were also told that it is them who are going to decide on which category their presentation should be judged and how to allocate and give marks for their performance.

Since the target group consists of Media undergraduates, writing report is not a difficult task for them as they write reports in Media studies frequently. What is new and difficult

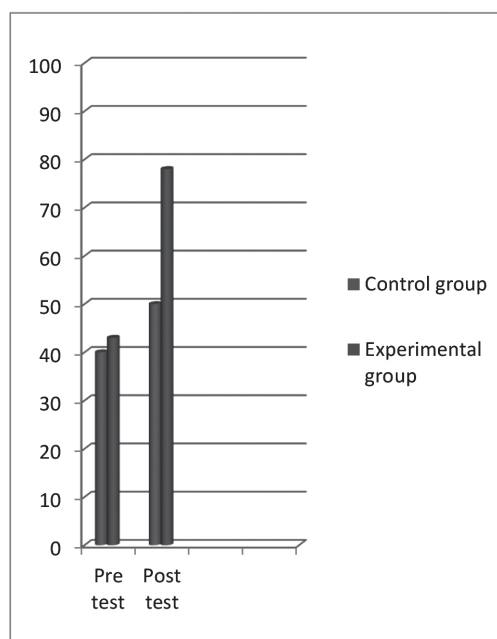
for them is to write in English. To make them confident in writing reports, learners were requested to search on how to write reports via search engines and refer some books to find out the structure and certain phrases to be used in report writing. After learners put some effort, teacher explained and taught them how to write report.

Since the learners were already prepared for an AA beforehand, it seemed easier for the teacher to administer AA3 with them. Learners were informed that they have to do a power point presentation. They were given the freedom to select a topic of their own interest and prepare a PowerPoint presentation. Learners were encouraged to search and find how to do power point presentation in an effective manner and later on taught in the class room about the characteristics of a good power point presentation. They were put in pairs and requested to prepare checklists and rubrics to evaluate their power point presentation. As for the previous assessment, they were informed that they too will be incorporated in the evaluation process.

### IV. RESULTS, DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION.

The intervention was carried out for four weeks and at the end of the time period a post test was conducted for both the experimental and control groups. The grades were analyzed and the following results were obtained as presented in the graph below:

Figure 1  
Average of Student Performance



As the graph indicates the score obtained by control and experimental groups in the pre test are almost same. And this

fact brings to light that the proficiency level of the learners in control and experimental groups is almost same. Still, a significant difference could be found out between the results of pre and post tests of experimental group, whereas the difference between the pre and post tests of experimental group is not significant. The improvement which could be noticed in the experimental group is dramatic and it is crystal clear that the new venture which was administered – that is the Alternative assessment was the reason behind the scene. Based on the data analysis, answers could be drawn for the proposed research questions. The addressed research question is “Can Alternative assessment endorse and optimize Student Engagement and Student Performance in Second Language Learning classrooms?”

As the marks of the post-test illustrates, Alternative Assessment method is the key for the dramatic increase in the performance level of the experimental group. As far as student engagement is concerned, the answer could be obtained via the semi-structured interview, and classroom observation. The responses collected revealed that the learners are fully engaged in the teaching and learning process as a result of Alternative assessment method.

Hence, it could be concluded that the application of alternative assessment endorsed and optimized student engagement and student performance in Second Language Learning classrooms. As per research The increase in calls for alternative assessment has changed the face of assessment and evaluation [6].

#### V. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Alternative assessments are more learner-centered and hold great promise for ESL students. Although the challenge to modify existing methods of assessment and to develop new

approaches is not an easy one, the benefits for both teachers and students are great. The ideas and models presented here are intended to be adaptable, practical, and realistic for teachers who are dedicated to creating meaningful and effective assessment experiences for ESL students. The present study strongly recommends Alternative assessment to traditional assessment if desirable outcomes are to be gained as Alternative assessments not only encourage and optimize student performance, they also create autonomous self-regulated learners who could manage and monitor their own learning in long run.

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