The Assessment Practices of In-service Kurdish Tertiary TESOL Teachers and their Cognitions of Alternative Assessment

Submitted by

Dler Abdullah Ismael Ismael

to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in TESOL

September 2016

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.
Abstract

Assessment, measurement, testing, and evaluation are similar procedures for collecting information (Bachman & Palmer, 2010), having the same objective of making inferences about students’ proficiencies (Schmitt, 2002). However, assessment differs from testing significantly because of the wide range of aspects that the former includes. This is closely related to alternative assessments (AAs), which are ongoing processes that involve teachers and students in making judgments on the latter’s progress by using non-conventional strategies (Hancock, 1994).

This study is about the current assessment practices and AAs of in-service Kurdish tertiary TESOL teachers and their cognitions of AAs. It was a piece of action research informed by critical theory, and used questionnaires and interviews with 90 survey participants and 12 interviewees. It was conducted in the 18 English departments of the public universities of the Kurdistan Region. It had five research questions divided into two phases. The first-phase questions concerned the current assessment practices and AAs of the participants, their knowledge of AA, and their beliefs about whether AAs are beneficial. The first phase was used as a rationale for a second-phase action research intervention, in which I presented two seminars in two English departments. The third-phase questions examined the influence of the intervention on increasing the participants’ knowledge of AA, changing their beliefs on AA, and their beliefs about the feasibility and challenges of AAs in their professional context.

The study revealed several important findings. Firstly, the assessment practices of the participants included various AAs, but they needed development in terms of using criteria in marking and implementing them more frequently in a longer time. Secondly, the participants’ knowledge of AA needed to be increased due to four factors: (1) AA was not included in their MA or PhD courses; (2) the limited number of resources on AA; (3) the limited number of training courses in assessment or AA; and (4) the participants’ limited knowledge about the recent teaching, learning, socio-cultural and critical theories that underpinned AA. Thirdly, the participants believed that AAs are beneficial but they could not use the full potential of them, mainly due to: (1) their need of more knowledge about AA; (2) their need for training courses to acquire the necessary skills to do AAs; (3) the limited time spent conducting AAs; and (4) the large number of students in their classes. Fourthly, the participants believed that if more AAs were implemented in the classroom, this would
decrease the time spent marking test papers at home. Fifthly, the participants believed that the main challenges to AAs were related to: (1) the English departments’ assessment system; (2) teachers and students’ subjectivity; and (3) managerial and technical challenges such as limited time, high number of students, and provision and maintenance of classroom technical facilities. The findings and conclusions of this study could have pedagogical and teacher development implications for a wider implementation of AAs.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my profound thanks to my primary supervisor, Dr Salah Troudi, who gave me detailed and constructive feedback on soft copy files, valuable comments during face-to-face meetings, and consistent guidance and support. Significant thanks should also be given to my second supervisor, Dr Susan Riley, who gave me vital feedback on all chapters of my research, which was extremely constructive and helpful. I am also profoundly grateful to my mentor Dr Andrew Richards, who encouraged me a lot in our meetings and who was interested to know how my research was progressing. I am really grateful to all my module tutors, who taught me about TESOL subjects and issues during my first-year EdD studies (2012-2013). I appreciate greatly the help of the staff of St Luke’s Library of the University of Exeter in locating numerous resources, and I also thank the David Wilson library at the University of Leicester, at which I used numerous resources. I am immensely grateful to my sponsor, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research – Kurdistan Regional Government, for fully sponsoring me to complete my EdD studies at the University of Exeter. Special thanks go to my friends Sarbaz, Qadir and Ali for helping me in obtaining many resources. I am really thankful to my friends Omer Fatehulla, Esmat Khabur, and Karmand, who helped me a lot with the technological requirements of my study and repairing some PC programs. I am tremendously grateful to my colleague and fellow student Khadija Balouchi for helping me perform the Cronbach’s Alpha test for the questionnaires. I greatly thank my friend Hogr for checking the statistical data of the questionnaires. I also warmly thank my close friends Soran and Barham for their continuous encouragement. Very special thanks to all the teacher participants and the heads and deputy heads of the 18 English departments in which this study was conducted for their great cooperation and encouragement. Last but not least, I would like to thank my whole family for continuously supporting me from my home country throughout the duration of my EdD studies at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Alternative Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAs</td>
<td>Alternative Assessment types, methods, activities, practices, and strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Advanced Language Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALPER</td>
<td>Centre for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research at Pennsylvania State University, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALx</td>
<td>Critical Applied Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>English Language Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELP</td>
<td>English Language Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELTPN</td>
<td>English Language Teaching Professional Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCDP</td>
<td>Human Capacity Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KRG</td>
<td>Kurdistan Regional Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHESR/KRG</td>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research – Kurdistan Regional Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Name, Int1)</td>
<td>(Name of the interviewee, interview 1, the number denotes the first phase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Name, Int3)</td>
<td>(Name of the interviewee, interview 3, the number denotes the third phase)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Name, Foc3) (Name of the interviewee, focus group interview 3, the number denotes the third phase)

RAND Research and Development. The RAND Corporation is a non-profit institution that helps improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis (Vernez et al., 2014).

SP Survey Participant

TEFL Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TESL Teaching English as a Second Language

TESOL Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

TFK Translated from Kurdish

TKT Cambridge Teaching Knowledge Test

ZPD Zone of Proximal Development