



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

**Submitted by**

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## **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.

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## List of Abbreviations

AA	Alternative Assessment
AAs	Alternative Assessment types, methods, activities, practices, and strategies
ALP	Advanced Language Proficiency
CALPER	Centre for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research at Pennsylvania State University, USA
CALx	Critical Applied Linguistics
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELL	English Language Learner
ELP	English Language Proficiency
ELTPN	English Language Teaching Professional Network
ESL	English as a Second Language
HCDP	Human Capacity Development Programme
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
L2	Second Language
MHESR/KRG	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research – Kurdistan Regional Government
(Name, Int1)	(Name of the interviewee, interview 1, the number denotes the first phase)
(Name, Int3)	(Name of the interviewee, interview 3, the number denotes the third phase)

(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