TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS DISTINCTIVENESS AND DIFFERENCES

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Abstract: Assessment is an ongoing process of gathering and analyzing information to give judgments to test-takers' performance in given domain. Assessment is a broad term which includes tests and other methodological techniques that educators use to evaluate, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students. This article explores main differences between two types of assessments, focusing on particular characteristics and problems related to them. There are two main types of assessment according to what a test measures. The first one is traditional assessment and the other one is alternative assessment.

Keywords: assessment, standard - based, performance -based, testing, standardized test, alternative, measure, advantage, disadvantage, difference, evaluation.

INTRODUCTION. Assessment is "appraising or estimating the level or magnitude of some attribute of a person" (Mousavi, 2009, p. 36) [5]. In educational practice, an example can be given that the teacher is making a subconscious appraisal of the student's performance. While discussing assessment, one can come across to the term testing. These two concepts might seem quite similar for people who do not understand much about this field, however, assessment is broader than testing which encircles a wide range of methodological techniques and the testing is one of them. In other words, testing is a genre of assessment techniques and a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance. Some language tests measure a test- taker's knowledge about language: defining a vocabulary item, reciting a grammar rule.

On the other hand, there are another popular type of tests which designed to identify one's ability to perform language, for example, by speaking, writing, listening, or reading skills. According to that, assessments are divided into two types: standard- based and alternative.

I.   Standard-based assessment and Standardized Testing. Beginning of earliest formal examinations or tests have been tracked back almost 2000 years to the Han Dynasty in China for selecting higher officials. Throughout history, people have been tested to prove their capabilities or qualifications and today, we are even more deeply affected by tests, especially high-stakes standardized tests. For almost a century, schools, universities, businesses, and governments have looked to standardized measures for economical, reliable, and valid assessments of those who would enter, continue in, or exit their institutions. Proponents of these large-scale instruments make strong claim for their usefulness when great numbers of people must be measured quickly and effectively. Almost all university admissions offices around the world rely on the results of tests such as the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), SAT — the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL Test) to screen applicants, because, these tests have high reliability ratios (most ranging between 80 and 99 percent).

However, standards-based assessments are not without their share of problems. Although standards are implemented to improve education, negative consequences have been found (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; Linn, 2001; Wang, Becket, & Brown, 2006) [4]. Some studies have suggested that standards-based tests can narrow the curriculum, pushing instruction toward lower-order rather than higher-order cognitive skills. Further, lower test scores result in grade retention (encouraging low-scored students to drop out), which appears not to improve educational achievement for those students who are held back but rather prohibit them from making any progress. The gate-keeping role of those tests is another major challenge in standards- based education which is illustrated because of the high price test-takers are willing to pay to pass such test.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Standardized testing. As stated before, standardized testing offers several benefits, such as being pre-made, thus saving time, easy to administer - especially with large groups of students, quick to grade, and providing objective and reliable results. However, despite these advantages, there are significant drawbacks that cannot be ignored. Firstly, standardized tests are often given excessive authority, leading to labeling and categorization of students based on their test results which can have negative consequences. Additionally, these tests can be misused, assessing areas they were not intended to evaluate. Furthermore, they may not assess all learners equally well and are frequently given a gate-keeping role in educational settings.

III. **ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT. ALTERNATIVES IN ASSESSMENT.**

In the decade of the 1990s, when a number if educators questioned the notion thar all people and all skills could be measured by traditional tests, a novel concept emerged that began to be labeled "alternative" assessment. As teachers and students were becoming aware of the shortcomings and drawbacks of standardized tests, " an alternative to standardized testing and all the problems found with such testing " (Huerta-Macías, 1995. p. 8) was proposed [3]. Brown and Hudson (1998) noted that to speak of "alternative assessments" is counterproductive because the term implies something new and different that may be "exempt from the requirements of responsible test construction" (p.657) [1]. They proposed to refer to "alternatives in assessment" instead and aptly summed up the defining characteristics of the various alternatives in assessment that have been commonly used across the profession (TESOL Quarterly article, 1998, pp. 654-655) [8]. According to them, alternatives in assessment require students to perform, create, produce, or do something by using real-world contexts or simulations in order to improve higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills. They are nonintrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities and they allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day, while providing educators with required

information about both strengths and weaknesses of their learners. Moreover, Alternatives ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring which encourages teachers to open disclosure of standards and rating criteria [2].

Table 1. Contrast between Traditional and Authentic Evaluation.

Traditional assessment	Alternative assessment
One-shot, standardized	Continuous, long-term
Timed, multiple choice	Untimed, free-response
Inauthentic, inderect	Authentic, direct
Decontextualized	Contextualized
Scores only	Individual feedback
Norm-referenced score interpretation	Criterion-referenced score interpretation
Focus on "right" answer	Open-ended, creative
Summative	Formative
Oriented to product	Oriented to process
Non-interactive	Interactive performance
Fosters extrinsic motivation	Fosters intrinsic motivation

Adapted from Brown, 2010

V. CONCLUSION.

Assessment is the process of gathering, interpreting, recording and using information regarding students' performance on a task or test. It can be categorized into two primary types: standard-based and alternative assessment. Each type has its own advantages and disadvantages. A key distinction between them is that standard-based assessment can efficiently place a large number of test-takers onto a norm-referenced scale using pre-made materials in a limited time. On the other hand, alternative assessment is preferable for evaluating a small group of students' language abilities, creativity, or productivity over an extended period using authentic, open-ended tasks that which can possibly encourage intrinsic motivation of them.

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