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## Combining Standardized and Authentic Assessment: On Getting A Clear Picture of Students' Language Competence

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### Abstract

Assessment is an activity that cannot be separated from teaching and learning process. To know the success or failure of the teaching and learning process, an assessment needs to be done. The result of an assessment can give beneficial information for students, teachers, schools, parents, and other related parties when it is done correctly.

There are different types of assessments that can be applied in the language classes. Each as its own weaknesses and strengths. Commonly, the assessment can be grouped into two: traditional vs alternative, or standardized vs authentic, or formal vs informal assessment. Traditional, standardized, or formal assessment is the type of assessment that is considered as old paradigm. It usually refers to pencil and paper test. On the other hand, alternative, authentic, and informal assessment is the type considered as a new paradigm. It refers to assessment that requires students to create, produce, or do something. Which type should be used in assessing the students' language competence?

This paper will discuss the importance of both old paradigm (Standardized) and new paradigm (Authentic) to be used in assessing students' language competences. Traditional assessment is practical, objective, and can cover large scope. However, it cannot portray the whole pictures of the students. Meanwhile, the authentic assessment shows the real language competence of the students, although it is quite often not practical. Therefore, to get a clear picture of the students' language competences the two types of assessment must be combined in its implementation.

**Keywords:** *authentic assessment, standardized assessment, combining*

# **Combining Traditional and Alternative Assessment: On Getting a Clear Picture of Students' Language Competence**

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## **An abstract**

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There are different types of assessments that can be applied in the language classes. Each has its own weaknesses and strengths. Commonly, the assessment can be grouped into two: standardized vs authentic, or traditional vs alternative, or formal vs informal assessment. Standardized, traditional, or formal assessment is the type of assessment that is considered as old paradigm. It usually refers to pencil and paper test. On the other hand, alternative, authentic, and informal assessment is the type considered as a new paradigm. It refers to assessment that requires students to create, produce, or do something. Which type should be used in assessing the students' language competence?

This paper will discuss the importance of both old paradigm (Traditional) and new paradigm (Alternative) to be used in assessing students' language competences. Traditional assessment is practical, objective, and can cover large scope. However, it cannot portray the whole pictures of the students. Meanwhile, the alternative assessment shows the real language competence of the students, although it is quite often not practical. Therefore, to get a clear picture of the students' language competences the two types of assessment must be combined in its implementation.

Key words: traditional assessment, alternative assessment, combining

## **Introduction**

One of important activities in the teaching and learning process is assessment. This activity must be done by the teacher to monitor the students' progress in learning as well as to judge their success or failure at the end of the teaching and learning program. Assessment can also be done to know how the teacher has conducted the teaching activity in the classroom so that he/she can always improve the teaching and learning process.

There are many ways that can be done to assess the language learning achievement, proficiency, and competence; however, the most widely used is by giving a test. Test is the common way to measure or to assess the learners' achievement or competence in learning language. Test only, actually, cannot completely show the learners' language competence. It must be completed with other ways of assessing students.

Assessment comprises test and non-test technique. Test is one subset of assessment (Brown, 2004: 252). It is usually considered as traditional assessment. The other subsets that are categorized in non-test comprise observation, journal, portfolio, etc. that are included in alternative assessment. Traditional and alternative assessment each has its own weaknesses and strengths. They complete each other to produce a good result of assessment. For that reason assessing language competence needs to combine traditional and alternative assessment.

This paper will discuss the importance of both traditional and alternative assessment in assessing the language competence of the students. The discussion is started with understanding the language assessment and is ended by showing the way how to combine both so that a clear picture of the students' language competences can be known.

## **Assessment**

Assessment is defined as a systematic approach to collecting information and making inferences about the ability of a student or the quality or success of a teaching course on the basis of various sources of evidence (Richards and Richard, 2002: 35). Similar with them, Brown (2004:4) stated that assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain than a test. Based on this definition we know that to assess using one evidence only is not enough. Various sources are needed. Furthermore, Richards and Richard explain that assessment may be done by test, interview, questionnaire, observation, etc. Thus, assessment

is started by collecting information (that can be done by testing, interviewing, giving questionnaires, observing, etc). The information collected then should be inferred. The inference becomes the information about the learners' achievement, ability, or competence.

Among ways that can be used to assess, testing is the most popular and widely used. However, there has been awareness that testing only is not sufficient to measure the learners' ability, knowledge, or competence in language. This has led to the emergence of alternative assessment in language teaching and learning. Thus, alternative assessment is usually contrasted with testing which is considered as traditional assessment. Traditional assessment refers to the traditional test which is commonly multiple choices. On the other hand, alternative assessment refers to the one that is more alternative in eliciting the language use. Alternative assessment is various types of assessment procedure that are seen as alternatives or complement to traditional testing (Richards and Richard 2002: 23).

There are several uses of assessment in language learning. O'Malley and Pierce (1996:3) identify six uses. First, assessment is used for screening and identifying. This is done to identify whether or not the students are eligible for special language program. Second is for replacement. Here assessment is done to determine the students' language proficiency so that a recommendation on appropriate language program can be made. The next use is for reclassification. This assessment is used to determine if a student has gained the language skills/competencies in certain grade. Monitoring student progress is the next use of assessment. This is done to review the student language. The use of assessment as program evaluation is to determine the effect of a program. The last use is for accountability. This assessment is done to guarantee that students reach the goals of the program.

Whatever the type or use of the assessment is, language assessment must apply some principles. They are practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback. Practicality means that the test is not expensive, easy to administer, has a specific scoring/evaluation

procedure, and stays within appropriate time constraints. The next principle, reliability, refers to the result of the test that is consistent and dependable. While principle of validity refers to the extent to which inferences made from assessment results are appropriate, meaningful, and useful in term of the assessment purposes. Next is the principle of authenticity. This is the degree of correspondence between the tasks in the test and the tasks in target language. The last principle is washback. It is the effect of the test on the instruction that is the way students prepare for the test (Brown, 20024: 19-29).

Assessment comprises different types that can be categorized into traditional and alternative. It is an activity that is done for several purposes, and there are procedure and principles to apply when doing it. All is meant to get clear information about student language ability, skill, or competence.

### **Different Types of Language Assessment**

Assessment can be categorized in many ways. Among the current issues is the categorization of assessment into traditional and alternative assessment. The traditional assessment is also termed as standardized/ formal assessment. Meanwhile, the alternative assessment is also termed authentic assessment and informal assessment. Armstrong (1994) and Balley (1998) in Brown (2004:13) highlight the differences between traditional and alternative assessment as follows.

<b>Traditional Assessment</b>	<b>Alternative Assessment</b>
One-shot traditional exams	Continuous long-term assessment
Timed, multiple-choice format	Untimed, free-response format
Decontextualized test items	Contextualized communicative tasks

Scores suffice for feedback	Individualized feedback and washback
Norm-referenced scores	Criterion-referenced scores
Focus on the right answer	Open-ended, creative answer
Summative	Formative
Oriented to product	Oriented to process
Non-interactive performance	Interactive performance
Foster extrinsic motivation	Foster intrinsic motivation

Brown reminds us that the concepts of differences above represent some overgeneralizations. Many forms of assessment can be categorized between the two. Therefore we should be cautious with them.

Alternative assessment is authentic because it represents what the students do when learning in the classroom and based on real-life settings (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996:2). From the explanation above it is known that test characterizes traditional assessment and authentic assessment characterizes alternative assessment.

### **Traditional Assessment**

The traditional assessment here refers to the traditional assessment. It is a test which has been developed from tryouts and experimentation to ensure that it is valid and reliable. This is norm-based and provides uniform procedures for administering and for scoring the test (Richards and Richard, 2002; Brown, 2004).

#### **a. The strengths and weaknesses**

A traditional assessment has its strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of it are, first, it has been tried out and validated so that teachers are free from creating a test. Next, this type of assessment is practical and reliable in scoring. As mentioned before, it is one-shot



exam. So, it is quite practical. Using this test, the teacher will save time, energy, and therefore this test is economical. As the test is usually in a multiple choice form, the score is objective and therefore reliable (Brown, 2004:68).

Besides its strengths, traditional assessment possesses weaknesses. The first weakness is that sometimes it is inappropriate; for example, testing language ability by giving a multiple choice grammar test. It does not really test the ability to use language. This just assesses a discrete skill of a language. So, it does not reflect what the students do with the language in real-life activities. To add, O'Malley (1996:4) also states that traditional test mainly assessed reading and vocabulary knowledge and ignored oral and written activity. The next weakness is that traditional test is often summative in nature. It is used to decide the success or failure of the students without considering what the students learnt every day or what is the students' progress during their learning activities.

Brown (2004:84-86) gives four examples of traditional proficiency test. They are Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). All the four types of test use multiple choices in it. They also require students to respond in an essay form and only IELTS that includes oral production. The tests are meant to test the overall language ability. However, if seen from the principles of alternatively they still lack of it.

### **Alternative Assessment**

Alternative assessment is the multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, attitude or instructionally-relevant classroom activities (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996:4). As examples of this assessment they mention performance assessment, portfolios, and student self-assessment. Similar with them Richards and Richard

define alternative assessment as various types of assessment procedure for evaluating test takers' achievement or performance using test task that resemble real-life language use as closely as possible (2002: 41-2). Thus, assessment that is done through asking students choosing the correct answer from the options is not alternative. The differences between alternative assessment and traditional assessment can be seen from understanding the characteristics of alternative assessment

The characteristics of alternative assessment share the ones of various alternatives assessment summed by Brown and Hudson (1998) in Brown (2004: 252). They are:

1. require students to perform, create, produce, or do something;
2. use real-world contexts or simulations;
3. are non intrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities;
4. allow students to be assessed in what they normally do in class every day;
5. use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities;
6. focused on processes as well as products;
7. tap into higher-level thinking and problems-solving skills;
8. provide information both the strengths and weaknesses of the students;
9. are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered;
10. ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgments;
11. encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria; and
12. call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles.

Based on the characteristics above, the alternative assessment is totally different from the traditional assessment. Alternative assessment is not a paper-and-pencil test, but requires students to perform. It represents what the students do in classroom activities. Higher level-thinking is encouraged in this type of assessment for students do not merely choose the best

answer from the options. Another obvious difference is that in an alternative assessment the scoring is not done by machine, but by human judgment.

Just like a traditional assessment, alternative assessment also has some strengths and weaknesses. Considering the characteristics of alternative assessment mentioned above, the strengths of it can be identified as follows:

1. it is valid and alternative because it measures what the students do when learning the language;
2. it is comprehensive because it focuses on process as well as products;
3. it gives a chance for students to apply higher-level thinking.
4. it gives the real picture of the students' competence.

Meanwhile, the weakness of alternative assessment is that it is not practical. It is time consuming as the assessment cannot be done one shot. In addition, the scoring is also not simple. As it is less reliable than the multiple choice test, the scorer needs to prepare rubrics and sometimes do inter rater scoring. As illustrated by Brown (2004:253), portfolio, journals, conferences belonging to alternative assessment is low in practicality and reliability.

### **Language Competence**

According to Bachman in Fulcher and Davidson, components of language competence are organizational competence and pragmatic competence (2007:43). Organizational competence consists of grammatical competence and textual competence; pragmatic competence consists of illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. The detailed components are as follows:

Language Competence:

1. Organizational competence

- a. Grammatical competence: vocabulary, morphology, cohesion, syntax, and phonology/graphology.
- b. Textual competence: cohesion and rhetorical organization

## 2. Pragmatic competence

- a. Illocutionary competence: ideational functions, manipulative functions, heuristic functions, and imaginative functions.
- b. Sociolinguistic competence: sensitivity to dialect and variety, sensitivity to register, sensitivity to naturalness, cultural references and figures of speech.

On getting the clear picture of the students' language competence, the assessment can be done on the components above. Although the components above is part of a model of language knowledge, they need to be assessed based on the alternative assessment besides traditional assessment. The combination of both traditional and alternative assessment will complete each other in giving a clear picture of the students' language competence.

## **Combining Traditional and Alternative Assessment**

Assessing students in learning language is done to know their language competence, ability, or proficiency. Traditional test/assessment has played an important role in the attempt to measure the students' language competence. It is now realized that traditional test only is not sufficient. It must be added with alternative assessment that can portray the real ability of the students in learning the language. Alternative assessment will triangulate the data about the students (Brown, 2004:251).

How to combine the two types of assessment in the classroom? The traditional test is usually large scale and expensive. It is usually taken annually and rarely applied in the classroom. However, some schools use local traditional test to assess the students as summative assessment that will be used to judge the students' success in learning the



language. It is not fair. It must be combined with the data that the teacher gets from observing, interviewing, monitoring, etc. that characterize the alternative assessment. Otherwise, the information about the student will not be valid.

The combination of the two types of assessment can be done by using teachers-made traditional test to assess language elements and using alternative assessment to assess language skills. Whenever the teacher wants to assess language element such as vocabulary and grammar the teacher can use traditional test made by a team of English teacher. Testing vocabulary and grammar comprises large scope. So, it needs assessment that is practical and easy to administer. Traditional assessment that commonly uses multiple choice forms is appropriate for that situation. Then, for the language skills, in which the students will be assessed in their listening, speaking, reading and writing ability alternative assessment is appropriate. As the main characteristic of alternative assessment is that the students do, create, or produce something, in listening, speaking, reading, and writing the students need to do that. The language skills cannot be assessed just by choosing the best from the provided answer. To assess speaking for example, the teacher can use teacher-made traditional test to assess the students' knowledge of grammar and structure. However, the teacher also needs to know how the students speak using the language. This is can only be done by using alternative assessment. So, both traditional and alternative assessment needs to be applied. Assessing in this way will help the teacher get the precise information about the students' language competence.

## **Conclusion**

Assessing students' language competence is done to get the precise data about their competence. For that reason the data collection must be done correctly. For language learners, the data about their language competence needs to prove that the learners are really

competent. To get the data, various sources are needed. Traditional test as a single data is not enough. It still lacks of data about the students' competence in using the language. It must be completed by assessing the students' performance. It can be done through applying alternative assessment.

Traditional and alternative assessment has its own strengths and weaknesses. Traditional test is practical and reliable. However, it cannot measure the real competence of the students. Alternative assessment, on the other hand, is based on the real-life activities. So, it is valid and alternative. Unfortunately, alternative assessment is not practical and not quite reliable. It is also time consuming that it is not economical.

Combining the two types of assessment will complete each other. For language assessment, the traditional assessment is appropriate for assessing language element. While alternative assessment is appropriate for assessing language skills. The combination of the two types of assessment will be the complete data about the learners so that the inference about the student language competence can be made precisely.

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# **Certificate of Appreciation**

**This is to certify that**

**Umi Rokhyati**

**has presented a research paper at**

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**Suchada Rattanananitpun, Ph.D.**

**Department Head, Burapha University**



**LEMBAR**  
**HASIL PENILAIAN SEJAWAT SEBIDANG ATAU PEER REVIEW**  
**KARYA ILMIAH : DISAJIKAN DALAM SEMINAR INTERNASIONAL**

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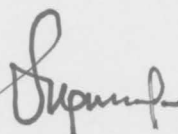
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Komponen Yang Dinilai	Nilai Maksimal Prosiding 5		Nilai Akhir Yang Diperoleh
	Internasional <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nasional <input type="checkbox"/>	
e. Kelengkapan unsur isi tulisan (10%)			0.3
f. Ruang lingkup dan kedalaman pembahasan (30%)			0.8
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h. Kelengkapan unsur dan kualitas penerbit (30%)			1.3
<b>Total = (100%)</b>			<b>3.1</b>

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Reviewer,



Prof. Sugirin, Ph.D.

NIP. 194911271984031001

Unit Kerja : Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

Jabatan Fungsional: Guru Besar

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**LEMBAR**  
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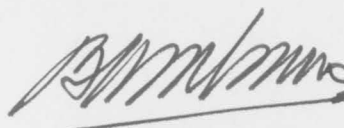
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n. Ruang lingkup dan kedalaman pembahasan (30%)			1,5
o. Kecukupan dan kemutahiran data/informasi dan metodologi (30%)			0,9
p. Kelengkapan unsur dan kualitas penerbit (30%)			0,8
<b>Total = (100%)</b>			<b>4</b>

Magelang, 17 April 2015

Reviewer,



Prof. Dr. Sukarno, M.Si.

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