
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating the Writing Skills Alternative Assessment Strategies used in Moroccan ESP Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions and Prevailing Practices

Nabil EL OUARDI¹ ✉ Rachid BENDRAOU², Khalid HICHAM³ and Dr. Sana SAKALE⁴

¹Teacher of English and Certified Interpreter, CELTA, TESOL & TEFL Holder, Applied Linguistics, Language and Society Research Laboratory, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Morocco

²Teacher of English, CELTA Holder, Applied Linguistics, Language and Society Research Laboratory, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Morocco

³Teacher of English, Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Sultane Moulay Slimane University, Morocco

⁴Associate Professor, English Department, Language and Society Research Laboratory, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Morocco

Corresponding Author: EL OUARDI NABIL, **E-mail:** nabil.elouardi@uit.ac.ma

| ABSTRACT

Assessment is the backbone of the learning-teaching process. Several studies have proven that assessment goes hand in hand with learning. Classroom assessment can be either traditionally of learning or formatively an ongoing process for learning. The current study explores the writing skills alternative assessment strategies used by Moroccan English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers in their classrooms. To reach this, the study seeks to explore Moroccan ESP practitioners' perceptions and prevailing practices of writing skills alternative assessment strategies. Similarly, the study tries to identify possible challenges that impede the proper implementation of alternative assessment pedagogy in the Moroccan ESP context. Following a qualitative research design, the current paper deploys semi-structured interviews to collect data from 10 ESP instructors working in different higher institutes and universities in Morocco. The findings reveal that the participants possess favorable opinions regarding alternative assessment methods of writing skills. Nevertheless, these optimistic viewpoints are not clearly reflected in their assessment practices. The research paper can benefit both practitioners and policymakers in the field of education.

| KEYWORDS

Alternative assessment; writing skills; formative assessment; classrooms' assessment practices; ESP; teachers' beliefs

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 May 2024

PUBLISHED: 25 May 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ijels.2024.6.2.9

1. Introduction

Assessment is a crucial part of the teaching and learning process. It has long been a contentious topic, particularly in light of the question of whether the current assessment system accurately represents students' potential. Assessment of writing skills in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context is a complex operation. ESP has rapidly grown in significance since English is used as a lingua franca in many scientific, academic, and business fields. In Morocco, regardless of the dominance of French as a means of instruction, recently, there has been a segue into teaching the content of different subjects in English. However, applying alternative evaluation systems is difficult on several levels in a country like Morocco that values exams. Assessment in ESP programs generally yields important information about students' subject-matter mastery and helps professors evaluate their educational approaches. According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2009), assessment is the process by which individuals obtain data or knowledge purely for the intention of making a decision. In the same vein, Huba and Freed (2000) state "assessment is a process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve

subsequent learning" Furthermore, assessment have two primary functions: summative, which gauges students' academic progress, and informative, which enhances learning (Scriven, 1967: 41). However, the majority of educators, if not all of them, continue to follow the conventional orthodoxy that views assessment as a goal rather than as a way to reach that goal. This means that teachers use conventional methods and procedures to provide grades or marks to students as a means of evaluating their knowledge and level. Put another way, teachers gather data about their pupils through written exams and quizzes given in the class.

EFL teachers, in general, and ESP teachers, in particular, lack or fail to exhibit solid understanding in alternative assessments (Halali et al. 2017). Additionally, Lian and Yew (2016), argued that instructors had difficulty assessing their pupils accurately when they lacked awareness about alternate assessments. Students are not able to reach their full potential because teachers don't have a full understanding of alternate assessments. Additionally, a number of issues that prevent teachers from using the proper assessment technique to achieve successful learning outcomes for their students such as instructors' opinions and the focus placed on traditional assessment (Singh et al., 2017). There is a divergence between the types of assessment procedures advocated by educational reformers and what educators believe and do (Schildkamp et al., 2020). In order to teach and assess the English writing skills content effectively, it is necessary to examine how Moroccan ESP teachers see and implement diverse evaluation methodologies and procedures in their classrooms.

1.1 The Research Purposes and Questions

This study aims to investigate the research questions that have been developed in order to accomplish the study's goals. The study paper's primary goal is to find out how Moroccan ESP teachers feel about using different assessment techniques to evaluate their students' writing skills. Next, the paper explores the prevailing writing skills assessment practices of Moroccan ESP teachers. Finally, it highlights the possible difficulties they may face while implementing alternative assessment techniques. This study will answer the three bellow research inquiries:

RQ1: How do ESP Moroccan teachers perceive the implementation of the writing skills alternative assessment techniques?

RQ2: What are the prevailing assessment practices of writing skills in Moroccan ESP classes?

RQ3: What obstacles do Moroccan ESP teachers face in implementing alternative assessment techniques in their writing classes?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Alternative Assessment

Before delving deeper into different definitions of alternative assessment, let us first define the word assessment. The definition of "assessment" has never been an easy task because after examining the literature, it is clear that this notion has several interrelated definitions. The word "Assessment" in the context of education refers to the procedure used to collect and analyze data regarding a student's performance, knowledge, skills, or talents. It is an organized approach to gauging a student's progress in a given subject or area of expertise. There are many other ways to assess students, such as through exams, projects, presentations, quizzes, observations, and more. Gronlund (1998) states that the term "alternative assessment" refers to "assessment methods that provide an alternative to the traditional paper-and-pencil tests." Moreover, McNamara (2001: 329) defines alternative assessment as "a movement away from the use of standardized multiple-choice tests in favor of more complex performance-based assessments". Besides, the word assessment is also described by Hancock (1994: 3) as "An ongoing process involving the student and teacher in making judgments about the student's progress in language using nonconventional strategies". Further, Linn and Miller (2005), argued that assessment of student learning is "a systematic process of collecting information about student progress towards the learning goals," The definitions given above uphold the notion that alternative assessment refers to the various non-traditional methods and approaches teachers employ to gauge their students' language proficiency. Stated differently, it encompasses the range of activities individuals may carry out by utilizing their linguistic, communicative, and strategic competencies.

2.2 Benefits and drawbacks of Alternative Assessment

Like any assessment approach, alternative assessment has both benefits and drawbacks. Some of them are listed in Table 2 below. (Abdurrahman, et al, 2019)

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of alternative assessment.

Advantages of Alternative Assessment	Disadvantages of Alternative Assessment
<p>It is used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - evaluate the process and the product of Learning besides other important learning behaviors. - evaluate and scrutinize instruction. -producing momentous results to various stakeholders. -connect cognitive psychology to other related fields. -to adopt a collaborative approach to learning. - provide support for students' psychology. - endorse autonomous learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is time consuming and costly for teachers. - Teachers need to be skillful enough - Learners need a great deal of guidelines and supervision. - It is open to criticism in terms of psychometric qualities of validity, reliability and practicality (Brown and Hudson, 1998). - Practitioners have doubts about the possibility of the true application of this kind of assessment to large-scale classes (Worthen, 1993).

It is possible to infer from the table above that proponents of alternative assessment see it as continuous, formative, and developmental in nature, which enables the teacher to regularly collect as much data as possible about the students. On the other hand, those who continue to support the test-based, summative orthodoxy see it as more convenient because of its higher degree of validity, reliability, and objectivity.

2.3. The status of English for Specific Purposes in Morocco

In Morocco, ESP is a developing field in Morocco. ESP programs have grown in popularity among Moroccan students in the last decade. One of the most important priorities of the Moroccan educational system these days is to shift and give more focus on language for specific purposes which seems to be the right choice when it comes to a multicultural society like Morocco. The teaching of a second or foreign language has historically been viewed as a discipline where the language itself is prioritized over any sort of specific knowledge or goal to be accomplished. However, more recently, with the growth of what is referred to as "content-based instruction" or "content and language integrated learning," the special language needs of learners who are not studying the language for its own sake has come to be considered as a genre of its own and is referred to as (ESP). In a country like Morocco, where the official political language and the instruction in the education system is primarily in Arabic and the second foreign language is French, the recently growing utilization of English for various professional and vocational needs marks a drastic change in language policy in the nation. The movement towards the insertion of English in the Moroccan market economy and the global professional environment assumes a sequence of consecutive stages within language teaching and focuses on the growth of speech acts specific to occupations. Moreover, the growing reputation and the power of English as a global and a specialist language have given way to new methodologies for teaching and administering second and foreign languages. Hence, the importance of English and the recent trends of using it to serve specific purposes, such as vocational aims, are day by day becoming critical and attracting attention to linguists and education specialists. It is also important to define the term ESP. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define ESP as "a language, which is taught as a means of satisfying well-defined and specific purposes", noting that the purpose of the learning is the main determinant of the content and methodology used. Robinson (1991) further adds that the learner's aim in the ESP class is to practice what is learned in the classroom in real life. Students do not learn English through English but they learn English and something else through English and that something else could be anything in relation to the student's future needs.

2.4. Profile of ESP teachers

It is expected from ESP teachers to be aware of the unique language needs of their students, to set objectives of instruction that support their students' academic or professional aspirations, to choose and modify instructional materials, to create lessons that meet the needs of their students, to establish a learning environment that is appropriate for adult learners, and to monitor their students' progress (Donna, 2000). But even having these qualities might not be enough to enable them to teach effectively. Therefore, in order to satisfy the needs of their specialized field, ESP practitioners have to receive the proper training and assistance. Two areas of training should ideally be provided to ESP teachers: one should concentrate on language and the other on the content area that interests their students.

The approach put forward by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) underscores the complexity of the ESP teacher's job and stresses the value of participating in a variety of activities to successfully support students' language development. In order to be successful, ESP practitioners have to be, teachers, material designers, developers, researchers, assessors, and collaborators. Researchers like Robinson (1991) and Jackson (1998) favor the term "practitioner" over "teacher" because of the variety of qualities that ESP practitioners should have. An effective ESP teacher must be flexible and collaborative in order to guarantee that the language

instruction matches the specific students' needs. To put it briefly, in order to make sure that language instruction is in line with the material being taught, ESP instructors ought to work in collaboration with content teachers, who are subject matter specialists.

2.5 Writing skills in ESP classes

Teaching writing skills in English for specific classes involves tailoring instructional methods and content to the specific needs and objectives of the particular discipline or profession. ESP teachers have to consider some points while teaching writing skills to their students. Whether it is business English, scientific writing, security English, or technical communication, the following strategies can be beneficial:

1. **Identify Writing Purposes:** Clearly define the writing purposes specific to the discipline. Whether the writings are reports, proposals, research papers, or technical manuals, understanding the goals of writing in a specific field is crucial.
 2. **Analyze Audience Expectations:** Teach students to be aware of their audience. Different disciplines often have distinct expectations regarding tone, style, and level of formality. Understanding the needs and expectations of the audience is essential.
 3. **Focus on Genre and Style:** Emphasize the importance of recognizing and mastering various genres. In business English, this might involve understanding how to write effective emails or reports, while scientific writing could involve mastering the conventions of research papers.
 4. **Teach Research and Citation Skills:** Depending on the discipline, students may need strong research and citation skills. Teach them how to find and evaluate relevant sources and how to integrate citations appropriately into their writing.
 5. **Practice Technical Writing Skills:** In technical fields, clarity and precision are paramount. Focus on teaching students how to communicate complex information in a clear and concise manner, avoiding unnecessary jargon and ensuring that technical terms are used correctly.
 6. **Provide Authentic Tasks:** Create assignments and projects that simulate real-world scenarios. For example, in business English, students could work on developing a business proposal or a marketing plan. In scientific writing, they might engage in writing a research paper.
 7. **Peer Review and Collaboration:** Encourage peer review and collaborative learning. Working with peers allows students to gain insights from others in their field, simulating the collaborative nature of professional writing.
 8. **Use Technology Effectively:** Integrate technology tools that are commonly used in the specific field. For instance, business students might benefit from learning how to create effective presentations, while science students might use software for data visualization.
 9. **Provide Constructive Feedback:** Develop a feedback loop where students receive constructive feedback on their writing. This could be from the instructor, peers, or even professionals in the field if possible.
 10. **Address Common Challenges:** Identify common challenges or pitfalls in writing for the specific discipline and address them explicitly. This could include common grammar or style issues, or challenges related to organizing information.
- Eventually, ESP teachers should remember that the key is to connect writing instruction directly to the needs of the students in their chosen field. By making the learning experience relevant and aligned with their future professional requirements, you enhance their motivation and the practical applicability of the skills they are developing.

2.6 The writing skills alternative assessment strategies

Alternative assessment of writing skills refers to the use of non-traditional or unconventional methods to evaluate and measure a person's ability to write effectively. Unlike traditional assessments, which often rely on standardized tests or closed-ended prompts, Alternative techniques for evaluation seek to give a more thorough and accurate picture of a person's writing ability. Alternative assessment strategies are often praised for their ability to capture a more authentic representation of a learner's writing skills. They focus on the application of writing in real contexts, fostering a deeper understanding of language use and communication. Here are some common types of alternative assessment methods for writing skills:

1. **Performance-Based Assessment:** This involves evaluating a person's writing abilities through real-world tasks or projects. For example, asking students to write a persuasive essay, create a business proposal, or draft a research paper can be considered performance-based assessments.
2. **Portfolio Assessment:** This method involves collecting and evaluating a compilation of a person's written work over time. Portfolios may include drafts, revisions, and final versions of various writing assignments, providing a holistic view of the individual's progress and development as a writer.
3. **Peer Assessment:** In this approach, students assess and provide feedback on each other's writing. This not only helps in evaluating individual writing skills but also promotes collaboration and peer learning.
4. **Self-Assessment:** Encouraging individuals to reflect on and assess their own writing enables them to gain a better knowledge of their strengths and areas for improvement. This can involve setting personal writing goals, reflecting on their writing processes, and evaluating the effectiveness of their written communication.

5. Rubrics and Checklists: Creating and using detailed rubrics or checklists can be a form of alternative assessment. These tools provide explicit criteria for evaluating different aspects of writing, such as content, organization, style, and mechanics. Alternative assessment methods collectively emphasize the multifaceted nature of writing, recognizing that effective communication involves more than just grammar and syntax. These methods provide educators with a toolkit to assess various dimensions of writing skills, fostering a more holistic and authentic understanding of an individual's capabilities. Furthermore, they enable learners to take an active role in their own educational process, promoting self-awareness and a sense of ownership over their writing development.

2.7. Teachers' beliefs on alternative assessment

Teachers' beliefs on alternative assessment can vary based on their experiences, educational background, and the context in which they work. Many teachers believe in the authenticity of alternative assessments. They see these assessments as more reflective of real-world applications and, therefore, more meaningful for students. In addition to that, some teachers hold the belief that alternative assessment allows for a more holistic view of students' abilities. Instead of focusing solely on test scores, alternative assessments capture a range of skills, including critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. Also, teachers who value student-centered and constructivist teaching philosophies often see alternative assessment as a natural fit. They believe in aligning assessment practices with their broader instructional approaches.

Alternative assessment often emphasizes the process of learning, including drafts, revisions, and reflections. Some teachers believe in the importance of understanding how students arrive at their final products rather than solely evaluating the end result. Teachers who advocate for student engagement often appreciate the interactive and engaging nature of alternative assessments. These assessments can involve students in project-based learning, collaborative tasks, and self-assessment, fostering a more active learning environment. Teachers may believe that alternative assessments cater to diverse learning styles. By offering a variety of assessment methods, teachers can tap into different strengths and preferences among students. While many teachers support the principles of alternative assessment, some may express concerns about the practical challenges of implementation. This could include issues related to time constraints, grading complexity, and standardized testing pressures. Teachers who are strong advocates for alternative assessment might express a need for ongoing professional development. They recognize the importance of staying informed about innovative assessment methods and refining their skills in implementing them effectively. Some teachers see value in striking a balance between alternative and traditional assessments. They believe that a combination of methods can provide a comprehensive understanding of student learning. Teachers may believe that alternative assessments can positively impact student motivation. By offering tasks that are more personally relevant and engaging, these assessments might encourage greater student involvement in the learning process.

It is crucial to remember that teachers' beliefs on alternative assessment can evolve over time and may be influenced by professional development opportunities, collaboration with colleagues, and experiences in the classroom. Effective implementation often requires ongoing support and a reflective approach to assessment practices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current study follows a qualitative research methodology, which includes semi-structured interviews to investigate, comprehend, and gather data regarding the implementation of writing skills alternative assessment techniques by Moroccan ESP teachers. "Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data to make statistical inferences about the social world, qualitative research contributes to empirical and theoretical understandings of society by examining and explaining how and why people think and act as they do through the use of non-numerical data. In other words, qualitative research uncovers social processes and mechanisms undergirding human behavior" (Elliott, S., Christy, K., & Xiao, S. (2023). Therefore, the qualitative research design is the suitable choice for the current study. Because it allows for an examination of how alternative assessments of writing skills are carried out through rich experiences that are based on the teaching of Moroccan ESP teachers. The opinions of ESP instructors regarding alternative assessments are grounded in their actual teaching experiences and values.

3.2 Research Instrument

According to (Gill et al., 2008) there are various data gathering techniques available to qualitative researchers such as focus group discussions (FGD), observations, interviews, and textual and visual analysis are some of the data gathering techniques available to qualitative researchers. In the fields of social science and education, focus groups and interviews are often employed techniques (Patton, 2015). Three different kinds of interviews can be utilized in qualitative research design: semi-structured, unstructured, and structured. Further, Cohen et al. (2002), view the semi-structured interview as a technique that facilitates direct verbal communication and more in-depth, thorough discussions between people. The researchers opted for semi-structured one-on-one

interviews approach with ten ESP teachers, who work in different Moroccan higher institutes and universities. It was chosen for this study because of its value in offering insights into the actual practices of teachers. Besides, semi-structured interviews allow for free, unstructured responses.

3.3. Sample

Purposive sampling is used in this study because the researchers find it helpful in examining the perceptions and beliefs of participants regarding alternative assessment. The sample was chosen on purpose because those ESP practitioners have important information pertaining to the research topic. Nevertheless, there's a potential that applying this technique will expose researchers to prejudice. Therefore, they should make sure their sample is appropriate for addressing research issues and it is representative by taking the necessary precautions. Because it allows the researchers to choose ESP professors working in five Moroccan higher education institutions, purposeful selection is ideal for this study. This allows for the collection of rich, detailed data regarding the opinions of the teachers and the prevalent assessment techniques.

3.4. Participants

Ten ESP instructors from Morocco agreed to participate in this study. Four of them have master's degrees, five have doctorates, and one is working on her thesis for her doctorate. The ages of the ten ESP practitioners range from 32 to 62. Six of them have worked as English teachers in junior high or public high schools in Morocco. Four had worked as English teachers in various language centers and private schools. All of the interviewees' background data is shown in the table below.

Table1: The interviewees' background information.

INTERVIEWEES	AGE	GENDER	ACADEMIC LEVEL	WORKING EXPERIENCE	WORK PLACE
T1	60	Male	Master holder	36 years	Defense Language Institute
T2	62	Male	Master holder	38 years	Defense Language Institute
T3	45	Female	PhD holder	15 years	Business School
T4	48	Male	PhD holder	25 years	Business School
T5	37	Female	Master holder	12 years	Higher Institute of Tourism
T6	39	Female	PhD (ongoing)	15 years	Higher Institute of Tourism
T7	50	Male	PhD holder	30 years	Aviation Academy
T8	35	Male	Master holder	8 years	Aviation Academy
T9	32	Female	PhD holder	3 years	Almohamadia Engineering School
T10	52	Male	PhD holder	23 years	Almohamadia Engineering School

3.5 Data collection and analysis procedures

The transcription and analysis of the qualitative information obtained from the semi-structured interviews are treated using thematic analysis, which is widely used in qualitative research to identify patterns or themes in the data and interpret their meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A methodical and thorough way to analyzing qualitative data is provided by theme analysis, which helps researchers find and understand patterns in the data and come to relevant conclusions. The four interrelated steps that Creswell (2013) introduced are followed in the analysis process: first, the researchers familiarize themselves with the data by reading through the transcribed interviews; second, they code the data by choosing segments that correspond with the research questions; third, they identify and categorize the codes; and finally, they organize the codes into themes and report the data. In order to graphically convey the key conclusions of the interview, a table has been created in this phase. The main conclusions from the data analysis are thoroughly summarized in a narrative discussion that follows. Participants' quotes provide validation for the data representation. The researchers provide an explanation of the themes in order to determine how ESP instructors perceive the use of alternative evaluation techniques as well as to highlight any challenges they might face while the implementation of the new assessment strategies.

4. Results and Discussion

After the conduction of interviews the following themes are elicited by researchers when they asked ESP practitioners about their perceptions and practices of using alternative assessment tolls to assess students' writing skills.

4.1 The ESP teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of the alternative assessment tools to assess writing skills.

The majority of interviewees displayed positive attitudes towards the use of alternative assessment tools to assess writing skills in ESP classes. This assessment methodology has the potential to improve the quality of education and enhance ESP students' academic writing outcomes. Interviewee 3 stated that teachers in his school used to have problems understanding alternative

assessment principles, but once they have undergone trainings and workshops on how to use these alternatives to assessment in the ESP class the challenges have been reduced. Further, interviewees 2 and 9 admitted that implementation of alternative assessment strategies in the ESP classes fosters critical thinking and argumentative writing skills. In the same vein, Interviewee 5 expressed that self and peer assessment lower students' test anxiety and enhances their learning autonomy. However, interviewees 8 and 10 showed a strong rejection of alternative assessment strategies. T8 said: " I don't use alternatives to assess my students' writing because they don't fulfil the objectives behind creating students' assessment, furthermore, assessing writing needs a summative grade at the end of the semester to measure the students' achievement". T10 clearly mentioned that alternative assessment pedagogy is challenging in Morocco because of its culture which is an exam-oriented one. Interviewees 1, 4, 6, and 7 argued that despite the limitations of alternative assessment in the ESP context, this innovative methodology increases students' problem-solving skills and motivation. Therefore, this theme suggests that some ESP practitioners support the adoption of alternative assessments techniques as it is a viable option for improving the quality of writing skills output in Moroccan ESP schools.

In a nutshell, the majority of interviewed ESP teachers have positive attitudes toward writing skills alternative assessment strategies as a method to enhance writing skills in the subject matter.

4.2 The ESP teachers' writing skills prevailing assessment practices

Data from the interviews revealed a number of techniques to assess ESP students' writing. These assessment strategies were gathered and arranged in the following categories.

Table 2: The prevailing assessment practices of writing skills in Moroccan ESP classes

ESP practitioners writing skills assessment practices	N	Percentage
Summative tests (traditional writing essays/paragraphs at the end of the semester)	8	80%
Rubrics and Checklists	2	20%
Self-Assessment	1	10%
Peer Assessment	1	10%
Performance-Based Assessment (projects, real-world tasks...etc.)	2	20%
Portfolio Assessment (reports, writing journals, collections of writing assignments)	2	20%

One can easily conclude from the table 2 above that most teachers (80%) are still influenced by the traditional method of assessment, which is the summative assessment to confirm students' achievement. Eight ESP teachers showed their preferences for summative assessment as a way to assess their students writing skills. Out of the ten interviewed teachers, only two of them embedded alternative assessment in their learning evaluation product. It was clear as two teachers carried out alternative assessment to assess their ESP students writing skills in an on-going manner to confirm learning. These two teachers deliberately expressed their alternative assessment strategies namely portfolio assessment, performance-based assessment, peer-assessment and self-assessment to assess students in a holistic manner. Although the findings revealed teachers' different strategies and practices on assessment, their distribution across teachers was irregular with some teachers showing preferences toward other types of assessments. Teachers need more exposure in terms of in-house training to assist them to interpret data obtained from the students' assessment to make judgment or decision regarding the students' accomplishment in learning. Alternative assessment can be used as mechanisms for encouraging active learning and self-reflection as it would guide students to monitor and chart their own progress in learning (Hamayan, 1995).

4.3 The possible hinders that ESP practitioners might face when implementing alternative assessment strategies.

Despite the positive attitudes of the participants towards the implementation of alternative assessment strategies to assess writing skills in ESP classes, the majority are hesitant about shifting from the summative traditional way of assessment to alternative assessment techniques. This is due to some obstacles related to personal and contextual factors. Interviewee 3 stated, "It is a good idea to try something new where student can be tested in an anxiety free atmosphere, but I don't think that the school administration will allow us to evaluate our ESP students using only alternatives to assessment". Interviewee 2 expressed reluctance to use of alternatives to assessment, saying, "I'd love to use alternative tools to assess my ESP student writing skills such as portfolio, projects, peer/self-assessment...etc. However, by doing that I will waist a lot of time on a daily basis to judge the level of my students, and I am bound by time to finish the curriculum and prepare ESP students for the final exam". Interviewees 1 completely rejected the idea of using alternatives to assess students' writing. They stated, "alternative assessment cannot be a useful method as teaching and learning is characterized by numerical grades to reliably prove the progress of students". However, Interviewee 5 displayed a readiness to implement alternative assessment tools to both assess and support students' writing skills. He said, "If I have the opportunity to adopt alternative assessment strategies, I will be delighted to do that. Both myself and my students would benefit from this experience at all levels."

Most ESP practitioners are reluctant to adopt alternative assessment strategies to assess writing skills in their classrooms due to administrative, personal, and pedagogical factors. It is obviously elicited from the interviews carried out that ESP teachers who participated in this study are very positive about all types of alternative assessment tools, yet they are hesitant to try the new assessment pedagogy. No one can deny that these reasons such as, full schedule, administrative constraints, and sometimes personal factors obstruct teachers from a successful implementation of alternative assessment strategies in their ESP classes. However, this unwillingness to apply writing skills alternative assessment techniques can also be interpreted from a psychological perspective. Some ESP practitioners believe that the harder the test is the better he or she feels. To sum up, Assessment for learning is not achievable for Moroccan ESP practitioners due to various personal, pedagogical, and administrative factors. Despite the potential benefits of alternative assessment tools, it is simply not feasible within the Moroccan ESP context, given the various constraints at play.

The implication of this study is that teachers' use of alternative assessment tools like self-assessment, peer-assessment, performance-based assessment can complement teachers' strategies of employing different pedagogical approach focusing on students' learning. The study showed that student involvement in authentic activities and writing tasks can provide some hints to the teachers to assist students accordingly to look into their strengths and weaknesses in learning. By doing so, teachers can then plan accordingly to provide remedial activities for weak students and enhanced activities for strong students

5. Limitations of the study

While this study has provided valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. One of the limitations is the research design that was implemented, which typically involves a small sample size. As a result, the findings may not be representative of the larger population. Additionally, the study did not include perspectives from ESP students, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits and limitations of implementing alternative assessment strategies in ESP writing skills classes. Including student feedback on the effectiveness of the new assessment approach could have provided insight into the practical implications of the findings. The limited generalizability of the findings in terms of only five Moroccan ESP institutes questions the validity and reliability of this study's results. Therefore, it is crucial to interpret the findings of this study with caution and to consider the potential biases and limitations associated with the research design.

Based on the limitations identified in this study, further research is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of writing skills alternative assessment techniques. Specifically, more research is needed to explore students' beliefs about the adoption of new alternatives to assessment in the Moroccan ESP context to gain a clearer view of the effectiveness of this new pedagogical assessment approach. Methodologically, a mixed approach based on triangulation could provide more valid and reliable results to enrich the ESP domain. Further research is necessary to address these important questions and to build upon the findings of this study.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, assessment of writing skills in Moroccan ESP classrooms is characterized by its summative nature. The findings show that almost all the interviewees have positive attitudes towards alternative assessment of writing skills in the ESP environment. However, these optimistic viewpoints are not clearly reflected in their assessment practices. The study, therefore provides recommendations for EFL teachers in general and ESP ones in particular to employ different assessment strategies to assess their students' writing skills so that they can be supported and be accountable for their own learning. Assessment is not about giving a single grade or score to students but it has to be viewed in a broader sense whereby assessment can expose students to the 21st century skills needed to survive challenges outside the classroom especially in the ESP context. This study also suggests that ESP practitioners should not put much focus on summative assessment to determine students' accomplishment in learning; instead, teachers should expand their perspectives and conduct assessment not solely for ranking and achievement but to make important decisions regarding student learning. The findings obtained from this study are in line with classroom assessment strategies and practices whereby the main purpose of assessment is to ensure learners master the content taught, are guided toward the values and skills required for life rather than focused only on test scores.

Statements and Declarations

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments: I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues: Professors Rajae EL YAMRI, Rachid BOUDRA and Said HAMZAOUI for their effective help while collecting data. A special thank you goes to my supervisor Dr. SAKALE Sana for her continuous encouragement and support.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6484-3017>

References

- [1] Abderrahmane, B. A. B. N. I. (2019). *Alternative Assessment and English Language Teaching and Learning in Morocco: High School Teachers' Perceptions and Favourite Methods and Techniques*. *مسالك التربية والتكوين*, 2(2).
- [2] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- [3] Brown, J. D., & Hudson, T. (1998). *The alternatives in language assessment*. *TESOL quarterly*, 32(4), 653-675.
- [4] Cresswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*.
- [5] Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2002). *Research methods in education*. routledge.
- [6] Donna, S. (2000). *Teach Business English*. Cambridge University Press.
- [7] Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes*. Cambridge university press.
- [8] Elliott, S., Christy, K., & Xiao, S. (2023). *Qualitative Research Design*. In A. L. Nichols & J. Edlund (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Research Methods and Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Volume 1: Building a Program of Research* (pp. 420-440). Chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [9] Gronlund, N. E. (1998). *Assessment of student achievement*. Allyn & Bacon Publishing, Longwood Division, 160 Gould Street, Needham Heights, MA 02194-2310; tele.
- [10] Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). *Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups*. *British dental journal*, 204(6), 291-295.
- [11] Hutchinson, Tom and Waters, Alan, 1987, *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-centered approach*, Cambridge University Press., Cambridge.
- [12] Halali, A. A. S., Singh, H. K. D., Saeed, I. M., & Making, Z. (2017). Teachers' perception towards the use of classroom-based assessment in English reading. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 5(11), 153-168.
- [13] Huba, M. E., & Freed, J. E. (2000). *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning*. Allyn & Bacon, 160 Gould St., Needham Heights, MA 02494.
- [14] Hancock, C. R. (1994). *Alternative Assessment and Second Language Study: What and Why?* ERIC Digest.
- [15] Hamayan, E. V. (1995). Approaches to alternative assessment. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 15, 212-226.
- [16] Jackson, J. (1998). *Reality-based decision cases in ESP teacher education: Windows on practice*. *English for Specific Purposes*, 17(2), 151-167.
- [17] Lian, L. H., & Yew, W. T. (2016). *A framework for examining assessment literacy of preservice teachers*. *US-China Education Review*, 6(5), 294-300.
- [18] Linn, R. L. & Miller, M. D. (2005). *Measurement and assessment in teaching (9th Eds.)* Upple Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- [19] McNamara, T. (2001). *Rethinking alternative assessment*. *Language Testing*, 18(4), 329-332.
- [20] Ornstein, A. C. & Hunkins, F. P. (2009). *Curriculum foundations, principles, and issues*, 5th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- [21] Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.)*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage
- [22] Robinson, P. (1991) *ESP Today: A Practitioner's Guide*, Hertfordshire, Prentice Hall.
- [23] Schildkamp, K., van der Kleij, F. M., Heitink, M. C., Kippers, W. B., & Veldkamp, B. P. (2020). *Formative assessment: A systematic review of critical teacher prerequisites for classroom practice*. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 103, 101602
- [24] Scriven, M. (1967). The methodology of evaluation. In R. W. Tyler, R. M. Gagné & M. Scriven (Eds.), *Perspectives of curriculum evaluation* (39-83). Chicago, IL: Rand McNally
- [25] Singh, C. K. S., Lebar, O, Kepol, N., Rahman, R. A., & Mukhtar, K. A. M. (2017). An Observation of Classroom Assessment Practices Among Lecturers in Selected Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, 14(1), 23-61. DOI: 10.32890/mjli2017.14.1.2
- [26] Worthen, B. R. (1993). Critical issues that will determine the future of alternative assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74(6), 444-453.