

Programme

23rd July 2024 | Tuesday

- 8:00AM Registration / Breakfast
- 9:00AM **Keynote 1:** Dr Ho Shen Yong
Topic: Building (Global) Communities of Practice for Teaching in a Rapidly Changing World
- 10:00AM **Keynote 2:** AP Dr Chng Huang Hoon
Topic: Enabling our scholarly future: The challenges and promise of building and sustaining SoTL culture in institutions
- 11:00AM **Keynote 3:** Dr Sophia Tan
Topic: Is SoTL Enough? On the Power and Limitations of SoTL at a Research Intensive University
- 12:00PM Lunch/Break
- 2:00PM International Workshop and SoTL Symposium Forum:
Bridging Educational Inequities: Strategies, Challenges, and Future Directions
- Speaker 1 Prof Chen Chwen Jen
 - Speaker 2 Dr Sophia Tan
 - Speaker 3 AP Dr Chng Huang Hoon
 - Speaker 4 Prof Dr Ho Shen Yong
- Moderator: Chuah Kee Man
- 4:00PM End of day 1

24th July 2024 | Wednesday

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|---------|--|--------|-------------------------|
| 8:00AM | Registration / Breakfast | 2:00PM | Parallel Session 1,2,3 |
| 9:00AM | Keynote 4: Prof Dr Chen Chwen Jen
Topic: SoTLing in the AI era | 4:00PM | Closing Ceremony |
| 10:00AM | Break | 4.30PM | End of day 2 |
| 10:30AM | Parallel Session 1,2,3 | | |
| 1:00PM | Lunch/Break | | |



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Scholarship of Teaching and Learning *SoTL* INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

“Building Sustainable Futures in Higher Education through SoTL”

23rd - 24th July 2024

9:00AM - 5:00PM | DeTAR PUTRA, UNIMAS

Title: Educators' Perceptions Towards Their Roles and Their Experiences in Adapting Alternative Assessment

Project Leader

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Introduction

The use of alternative assessment has gained significant attention in recent years, especially so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditionally educators rely on written examinations to assess students' understanding of course content; however, it has become increasingly evident that written examinations alone may not fully capture the breadth and depth of students' learning. Alternative assessment has been used to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of students' learning in which students have the opportunity to learn mental skills, the ability to develop attitudes and the potential to acquire new physical skills. These three domains of learning are commonly known as Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) and learning is viewed as a process of human development and growth (Hoque, 2016). The role of educators is critical in deciding and setting the alternative assessment to ensure students' learning captures these domains. Undoubtedly, educators as academic knowledge experts are often prepared for the research role but they might have had little or no training for the teaching role (Kane, et al., 2002; Minter, 2010) which includes assessing students. Despite the crucial role educators have to play, very little is known about educators' perceptions and experiences regarding alternative assessment. Herein, this study delves into the adaptation of alternative assessment among educators, their perceptions and experiences. This study aims to shed light on the significance of alternative assessment as a means to inform practices in higher education.

Problem Statement

Many studies have been conducted to investigate alternative assessment from different perspectives and various disciplines by employing different research methods (Hamza et al., 2020; Juma & Patel, 2024; López-Pastor et al., 2013; Monib et al., 2020; Schildkamp et al., 2020). In this study, the terms 'traditional' and 'alternative' are used when it refers to the

assessment because they are the most frequently used terms in the literature. The above-mentioned studies either directly or indirectly highlighted the role of educators.

The role of educators in alternative assessment is undoubtedly crucial. Their knowledge, skills, and abilities to adapt to alternative assessment methods will determine their success. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of educators has become even more challenging due to the limited opportunities for face-to-face assessments. A thorough review of research conducted between 2008 and 2019 reveals a predominant use of quantitative methods in studies related to alternative assessment, with a primary focus on students (Monib et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to study the role and experiences of educators in adapting alternative assessments in depth, using qualitative methods. Educators are responsible for designing assessments that meet the demand of current needs for work-ready graduates. Phenomenological research was employed to address the study's aim: To understand educators' experiences in adapting to alternative assessments. Two sub-research questions follow this:

1. What is the context for educators in adapting alternative assessments?
2. How do educators adapt alternative assessments?

Research Design

This qualitative study adopts a phenomenological approach and comprises both a pilot study and a main study conducted at the Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The pilot study involved two educators, while the actual study included 20 educators. Phenomenological research focuses on detailing the experiences of individuals relating to a common phenomenon, emphasising the essence of 'what' and 'how' these experiences occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Exploring how educators adapt to alternative assessments is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of their implementation. This method allows for a deeper understanding of each educator's experience.

The study is designed independently of the assessment approaches used. Participant selection was carried out using purposive sampling, and data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Each interview was conducted online with an average duration of one hour. The interview guide was developed based on a review of existing literature and prior studies. To ensure data quality and reliability, in this study, researchers who were holding the insider status practised reflective bracketing to set aside their own experiences during the research process, an important step in phenomenological studies (Emiliussen et al., 2021). Additionally, researchers adhered to established criteria for trustworthiness and authenticity to ensure the findings' quality.

Data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using a thematic approach, which includes six phases: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study only considered the setting in which it took place. Excerpts from the interviews are utilised to enhance the clarity of the reported findings.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the participant profile, educators' experiences, support and adaptation of alternative assessment. The findings are discussed in the light of the existing literature. Subsequently, the implications, recommendations, limitations and directions for future research are also presented in this section.

Participant Profile

This study involved 20 educators from the Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Table 1). These educators can be divided into two groups: 13 lecturers and seven language teachers. A total of 13 females and seven males participated in the interviews. The data show that the majority of educators have a formal teaching qualification and nine educators hold a PhD in their disciplines.

Table 1: Profile of participants ($n = 20$)

Demographic Characteristic	<i>n</i>
Discipline	
Language and Literature	7
Language and Education	9
Communication	4
Employment load	
Full-time	20
Employment status	
Permanent	20
Employment level	
Professor	1
Associate Professor	1
Senior lecturer	7
Lecturer	4
Language teacher	7

Table 1: Profile of participants ($n = 20$) (continued)

Teaching experience	
More than 20 years	7
15-20 years	7
10-14 years	2
5-9 years	3
Less than 4 years	1
Gender	
Male	7
Female	13
Age	
More than 50 years	4
40-50 years	9
30-39 years	7
Job qualification	
PhD	9
Master	9
Degree	2
Formal teaching qualification	
Yes	18
No	2
Industrial experience	
Yes	9
No	11

Educators' Experiences: 'My Job' or 'Beyond My Job'

All participants in this study had experience in adapting alternative assessments amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, the educators perceived their experiences in adapting alternative assessment as 'My Job' or 'Beyond My Job'. 'My Job' refers to those who are adapting alternative assessment as their duty. The majority of educators had this view.

... because it's a responsibility, we have to do our duty, be honest and trustworthy, we have no choice. (Participant 20)

Not surprisingly, alternative assessment was viewed by the great majority of the participants as their responsibility. A few stressed that they have no option, this may be due to they have to report their practices in the Curriculum, Learning and Assessment Support System (MyCLASS). In general, educators supported a move away from a 'test culture' to an 'assessment culture'. Test culture refers to summative assessments such as written tests which focus on grades whereas assessment culture refers to formative assessments such as projects which focus on the learning process (López-Pastor et al., 2013). Alternative assessment does not completely exclude summative assessment but pays much attention to the learning process where students' performances are no longer merely relying on grades as the outcomes. Thus, assessments are not only about measurements but a culture associated with assessments needs to be considered in the transformation process (Di Stasio, et al., 2019). Lack of alignment is a challenge when shifting from a test culture to an assessment culture (Juma & Patel, 2024) because educators may prefer the traditional approaches (Çalışkan & Kasıkçı, 2010; Kaur et al., 2022) over the contemporary approaches. Moving away from a test culture to an assessment culture calls for a clear understanding of alternative assessment by both educators and students. Although educators might have variations of understanding (Juma & Patel, 2024), a shared understanding of the nature and purpose of alternative assessment between students and educators is important to successfully adapting the alternative assessment.

In addition, those who were newly appointed as educators emphasised that they need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and abilities through formal learning such as training and non-formal learning such as knowledge sharing with colleagues. Educators also recognised the importance of students' role in successfully conducting alternative assessments. Dervan (2018) asserted that students' participation in the assessment process can enhance their learning and improve their motivation.

In contrast 'Beyond My Job' refers to those who are adapting alternative assessment beyond the call of their duty. A few educators in this study devoted their time, energy and finances to adapting alternative assessments.

... I do this for my students. I don't care about recognition, a lot of work but I don't ... don't mind. (Participant 3)

It is appropriate to conclude that their views might be influenced by the culture of giving back to society and religious principles. Although adaptation of alternatives poses a heavy demand on educators its potential impacts on student learning outcomes might drive these educators to adapt alternative assessments in their teaching. In comparison to traditional approaches, alternative assessment has a greater impact (Juma & Patel, 2024; Rojas Serrano, 2017). Despite its advantages, alternative assessment may pose some issues that cannot be ignored by educators. Issues related to alternative assessment are not new and educators have had to deal with the issues over the last 40 years or so, in particular since moving from 'conventional' to a 'new' teaching and learning environment (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; López-Pastor et al., 2013). Similar to the previous studies (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Al-Ruqeishi & Al-Humaidi,

2016; Libman, 2010; Nasri et al., 2010), this study found the adaptation of alternative assessment is demanding and time-consuming. Thus, more efforts are needed in adapting the alternative assessment and it is expected that this group of educators be committed towards these efforts.

The findings can be summarised into two critical aspects: adaptation and personal beliefs; and financial and non-financial support.

Adaptation and Personal Beliefs

All educators' responses regarding their adaptation of alternative assessment reflected their personal beliefs which showed their positive or negative attitudes towards alternative assessment.

No. I don't go around chasing after all these labels [names of alternative assessment], people keep introducing new things, just you know, just because it's new and different. If I want to do alternative assessment, I choose projects that are not pen and paper-based - final exam, and I know what I'm going to do. My role as an instructor so I look at the learning outcomes, I find the assessment that will test whether achieve the learning outcomes so I can use the assessment. (Participant 18)

Most educators in this study had positive attitudes towards alternatives with very few educators still showing preference for traditional assessment. As mentioned earlier, the alternative assessment does not merely exclude the traditional assessment but both could be integrated into the learning space to achieve the intended learning outcomes. When it comes to teaching and learning, much evidence from previous studies (De la Harpe & David 2012; Kuzborska, 2011; Meor Osman, 2017; Meor Osman et al., 2012; Santos & Miguel, 2019, Schildkamp et al., 2020) found that personal beliefs are critical in determining the behaviour of educators. Although it appears that the relationship between beliefs and practices may not be straightforward, the interaction could be influenced by various factors but considering the potential interaction between these two factors is important for teacher education to inform frontline practices (Santos & Miguel, 2019). This notion about educators' beliefs could then be followed by their willingness and confidence levels and subsequently, the emphasis educators placed on alternative assessment. In previous work, De la Harpe and David (2012) found that willingness and confidence levels are the most significant predictors of emphasis educators place on teaching and assessing graduate attributes. Reid et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of connecting assessment to educators' beliefs and values regarding learning, roles, and relationships to successfully implement assessment for learning. They also stressed that this goes beyond learning the new assessment approaches.

Support: Financial and Non-Financial

Adaptation of alternative assessment calls for financial and non-financial support.

... it depends on the environment okay as I said earlier, meaning that we need to have support. (Participant 6)

In this study, educators' responses related to financial support include monetary support to conduct students' projects and activities on campus or off campus to help students' learning.

Funds for facilities and infrastructure to improve academic outcomes and initiatives including internet access to online educational materials and transportation for field trips; and resources and equipment including crucial materials are needed to foster a positive learning environment. Non-financial support highlighted by educators includes educators' professional development such as in-service training; and recognition of their contribution through acknowledgement and appreciation which goes beyond monetary. Educators in this study emphasised the need to conduct continuous training to enhance and improve their capability in assessing their students. Although they are experts in their subject areas but often have limited training as teachers. The importance of training has been highlighted in previous studies (Al-Ruqeishi & Al-Humaidi, 2016; Singh et al., 2017; Singh, et al., 2022). Training of educators could have an impact on their beliefs and practices (Santos & Miguel, 2019). By undergoing training, educators will be well-equipped and more confident, especially in preparing graduates with knowledge, skills and abilities for the rapidly changing world of work. Adequate facilities and infrastructure followed by rich resources and advanced equipment will support a new learning environment.

The implications of this study in terms of their potential to improve the quality of learning in higher education are discussed, paving the way for possible future research. The adaptation of alternative assessment involved moving away from a test culture to an assessment culture, aligning alternative assessment practices with traditional testing culture will support the transformation. The adaptation also has to consider educators' beliefs because these beliefs are associated with their attitudes and practices. In addition, support from other parties is needed since educators are partners in any process of educational reform. Students' participation in a learning space; and financial and non-financial support provided by faculty, university and other decision makers are crucial to successfully adapt alternative assessment. Further studies are necessary to go deeper in the understanding of educators' practices for each type of alternative assessment as this study only focused on the alternative assessment in general rather than specific and future research should be developed to clarify how innovative assessments could be carried out in the context of technological change.

Conclusion

This paper explored the experience of educators in adapting alternative assessments by focusing on the context of educators and looking at the process involved. It has been shown that educators' experiences can be categorised into two groups: those who view alternative assessment as their job and those who view alternative assessment as beyond their job. The differences between these two groups are the effort and commitment they placed on the adaptation of alternative assessments. Regardless of the group they belong to, transformation calls for the alignment of alternative assessment approaches with traditional testing culture. Educators' beliefs and support can be linked to their adaptation to alternative assessment. Although the relationship between beliefs and practices might not have a direct link, investigating their beliefs is important for teacher education. Support from the university is crucial, especially in conducting professional training for educators. Educators are partners in any process of educational reform and continuing to rely solely on educators will not lead to the success of alternative assessment adaptation. Other stakeholders such as students, faculty, university and other decision-makers have also an important role to play. This study contributes to the body of literature on alternative assessment in higher education by building a foundation

for understanding educators' experiences and perceptions in adapting contemporary practices for students to achieve their full potential. The insights discussed in this paper hold great promise for alternative assessment becoming central to the teaching and learning experience for all involved especially in facing the demands of the modern world.

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Keywords

Alternative Assessment, Teaching and Learning, Higher Education, Educator

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