

EFL Primary School Teachers' Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills in Alternative Assessment

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Abstract

The study investigated female EFL primary school teachers' attitudes as well as teachers' knowledge and skills in alternative assessment. Data was collected via a questionnaire from 335 EFL primary school teachers randomly selected from six educational zones. An interview with principals and head teachers and a focus group interview with EFL primary school teachers were conducted along with document analysis of ongoing assessment obtained from the ELT General Supervision at the Ministry of Education (MOE). Descriptive statistics were employed including a t-test and a one-way ANOVA Test. Results showed that teachers perceived themselves knowledgeable and skillful in alternative assessment. Nonetheless, some reported the need for workshops and training courses on alternative assessment. Teachers further expressed their preference for traditional written tests over alternative assessment. Teachers' attitudes, however, were found to be at a medium level. They reported that alternative assessment is time-consuming and ignores pupil writing skills. Significant differences were found in teachers' knowledge and skills in relation to their age, undergraduate major, and experience. Significant differences were further found in teachers' attitudes in relation to their educational zone and experience. Limitations of the study as well as recommendations were further discussed.

Keywords: alternative assessment, EFL teachers' attitudes, primary school teachers, portfolio assessment

1. Introduction

Assessing pupil performance is one of the most critical skills any teacher must have. A teacher spends thirty to fifty percent of classroom time assessing her/his pupils (Stiggins, 1999); thus, policy makers and teacher educators realized the need for professional training of teachers in assessment skills. Assessment refers to "a process of inquiry that integrates multiple sources of evidence, whether test-based or not, to support an interpretation, decision, or action" (Moss, Girard, & Haniford, 2006, p. 152). According to Adanali and Doganay (2010, in Oren, Ormanic, & Evrekli, 2011), assessment reflects pupil knowledge and skills in cognitive, kinesthetic, and affective domains in different ways. The present study is interested in classroom-based assessment, which refers to local non-standardized assessment carried out by classroom teachers (Leung, 2005). There are two kinds of assessment: formative or alternative assessment and summative or traditional assessment (O'Leary, 2006; Yang, 2007). Formative or alternative assessment is collecting information on regular basis and using it to improve teaching, learning, and student outcome. Example activities are oral questioning, teacher observation, student self and peer-assessment, role-plays, oral presentations, and portfolios. Summative or traditional assessment, on the other hand, involves collecting information on student progress at specific points in time to sum up what has been learned (Yang, 2007; Irish National Teachers' Organization (INTO), 2008). Example activities are selected-response items (e.g., multiple-choice), brief constructed-response (e.g., short answer questions), and essay questions.

In the 1990s a worldwide trend started by introducing foreign language instruction at the primary schools in many countries in Europe, Asia, and the United States (Nikolov, 2000). Since then, teacher educators and policy makers have been searching for the best methods to assess young learners' abilities. Watt (2005) states that assessment methods are more frequently used with young language learners. The reason behind the interest in assessment is to help in addressing children's uniqueness and varied strength. Language ability is a broad and

complex phenomenon that cannot be accurately measured by traditional tests alone. According to Chroinin and Cosgrave (2013), assessment helps teachers in planning their instruction to suit their learners' needs.

Educational reform started in the 1980s with a shift from reliance on traditional test formats to using a mixture of formats including behavior assessment (Metin, 2011). To implement educational reforms successfully, there is a need for competent teachers. However, teacher educators and school administrators worldwide complain that teachers are not implementing assessment efficiently (Fan, T. Wang, & K. Wang, 2011). Teachers also complain about assessment and the factors that hinder its implementation (Mertler, 2003). Some of those factors are related to teachers' attitudes towards assessment. Indeed, some teachers believe that assessment is subjective and hard to use. Others say it is time consuming, especially in large classrooms. In addition, others lack knowledge of how to assess their students.

In-service teacher training plays a pivotal role in providing teachers with the skills, knowledge, and ways to assess young learners, especially with the shift in assessment from a focus on traditional assessment in which learners display what they have memorized to assessing learners' creativity and use of language in contexts of their own (alternative assessment). This new trend in assessment requires well-prepared teachers who are able to implement assessment successfully (Faizah, 2011).

Training teachers is one step towards professionalism; being the implementers of a curriculum, teachers' attitudes are as crucial as their performance. Attitudes reflect deep-rooted beliefs. Teachers' beliefs about assessment affect their classroom assessment practice (Brown, 2009). For teachers to implement assessment successfully, their positive attitudes towards assessment should be acknowledged and invested. According to Ogan-Bekiroglu (2009) teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards educational assessment should be considered when introducing reforms in the educational systems, and Popham (2009) adds that if teachers lack the knowledge and positive attitudes towards assessment, it will affect the quality of assessment outcomes. Thus, the present study intends to expand the current research on classroom-based assessment by investigating EFL primary school teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills in alternative assessment in relation to their age, nationality, degree, major, teaching experience, in-service training, and educational zone.

2. Primary School English Education in Kuwait

In parallel with overseas progress and to maintain curriculum reform and change elsewhere, the Ministry of Education (MOE) decided to introduce English language as a subject to be taught at primary schools in Kuwait in 1993 (International Bureau of Education of UNESCO, 2010-11). This decision to teach English language at primary school was based on the belief that teaching English at an early age provides pupils with more time to learn English (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2004).

Education in the State of Kuwait is a right for all citizens. One of the long-term goals of formal education is improving the school system to prepare young people to be active members of society. Other objectives include developing free scientific thinking, critical thinking skills, and lifelong learning. According to the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO (2010), the constitution of Kuwait (1962) states that education is a right for all citizens to be provided by the State in accordance with the law and in keeping with the general system and ethics. Education is compulsory and free of charge in its primary stages, according to the law.

Based on the Ministerial Decree No. 76 of 2003, the new educational ladder consists of five years of elementary education, four years of intermediate education, and three years of secondary education. The education system is managed by the MOE, which supervises schools, and the Ministry of Higher Education, which supervises higher education. In the late 1970s and early 1980s and in answer to the increasing demand for education in new residential areas, the need for educational zones arose. These are responsible for assessing the competence of school performance. At the time, there were five educational zones: Al-Asema, Hawally, Al-Farwaniya, Al-Ahmadi, and Al-Jahra. Mubarak Al-Kabeer was formed at the end of 1999 (International Bureau of Education of UNESCO, 2010).

The goal of teaching English at the primary stage is to introduce learners to the basics of the language and tune their ears to the English sound system. The aim is to help them create a new system and use it as another means of communication through practicing the four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) (ELT General Supervision, 2010-11).

English is taught as a subject five periods per week (i.e., 151 periods per year) for 40 minutes a day. The scholastic year is divided into four-evaluation periods. There are seven- to eight-week intervals between one evaluation period and the next. (ELT General Supervision, 2010-11).

3. Assessment of English in Primary Schools

When English was first introduced to the primary stage, assessment was divided into daily assessment, which consists of oral assessment plus short quizzes and written exams every evaluation period of four evaluation periods. This is applied to first through fifth grade.

In 2005-2006, the MOE introduced portfolio assessment in the primary stage (ELT General Supervision, 2009) for first, second, and third grades. This measures learners' mastery of the main language skills and sub-skills. It consists of selected samples of pupils' work experiences related to the outcome being assessed, and it is directed to and fosters development towards achieving academic goals set by ELT General Supervision (ELT General Supervision, 2010). In grades four and five however, assessment varies: in addition to the regular ongoing assessment, pupils are assessed at the end of the period exams in vocabulary, grammar, language functions, and set book.

However, complaints from teachers and parents about their pupils' low level of performance in grades four and five have drawn educators and policy makers to rethink assessment methods. Hence, in 2013-2014, the ELT General Supervision decided to return to traditional assessment methods in which the emphasis is on written tests. Teachers are expected to give quizzes, class work, and end-of-period tests to assess pupils in listening, reading, and writing. For third-, fourth-, and fifth-year pupils, assessment includes, in addition to the previous skills, vocabulary and grammar. Speech, however, is not included in the new assessment for all grades, and listening comprehension is not included for grades four and five.

4. Statement of the Problem

Assessing pupil performance is one of the major responsibilities of teachers; yet, many teachers do not feel adequately prepared for carrying out this responsibility (Ogan-Bekiroglu, 2009). In the last two decades, research has reported that teachers' assessment skills are generally weak (Campell, Murphy, & Holt, 2002; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Brown, Lake, & Matters, 2009; Herman, Osmundson, & Silver, 2010; S. Brookhart & E. Brookhart, 2011; Fan et al., 2011). This has detrimental effects on pupil achievement and motivation. Likewise, teachers' attitudes towards assessment play a major role in their willingness to implement reform.

To cope with the development of assessment measures around the world, Kuwait introduced portfolio assessment to the primary stage in 2005-2006 for first, second and third grades. Knowing that they do not need to pass exams and they eventually move to the next grades, pupils and parents did not take education as seriously as they had before. In addition, pupils were not motivated to study. As a result, when pupils moved to grade four, they were unable to cope with the material. The MOE saw that pupil performance was unsatisfactory and realized the need to change the present assessment and replace it with written, periodical exams for all grade levels (ELT General Supervision, 2013). Driven by concern about the role of alternative assessment in pupil learning, this study seeks to find out about teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills in alternative assessment. Finding out about that will help in planning suitable training in alternative assessment skills in which teachers' attitudes are explored and addressed.

5. Related Literature

In the last three decades educational reform has brought with it the need to change the way teachers assess their pupils. Traditional tests that focus on displaying memorized knowledge are no longer enough to reveal learners' multiple competencies. There is a need for learners who are creative, who can do problem solving, and can think critically. This trend was not supported by most teachers, who found themselves struggling to implement alternative assessment without being adequately trained (Mertler, 2003; Metin, 2011). This resulted in invalid assessment of pupil knowledge and skills and teachers reluctance towards implementation.

However, research has shown that most primary school teachers realize the importance of alternative assessment in improving teaching and learning (Yang, 2007; Yu-Ching, 2008; Brumen, Cagran, Coombe, Edmonds, Heckstall-Smith, & Fleming, 2009; Brown, Lake, & Matters, 2009). In a survey of New Zealand primary school teachers' conceptions of alternative assessment, Brown (2004) found that teachers agreed that assessment improves teaching and learning and makes schools accountable.

Although some studies reported teacher satisfaction and positive attitudes towards alternative assessment (Yu-Ching, 2008; Brumen et al., 2009; Brown et al., 2009; Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Alnabhani, & Alkalbani, 2012; Gonzales & Aliponga, 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Wongwanich, 2012), most studies on primary school teachers' attitudes towards assessment came to the conclusion that most teachers' attitudes are at an average or low level (Watt, 2005; Yang, 2007; INTO, 2008; Metin, 2011; Ghazali, Yaakub, & Mustam, 2012). The inconsistency in results might be related to the fact that in some studies candidates were primary and secondary school teachers.

Another reason for this variation might be differences in the social, political, and cultural context that could affect teachers' attitudes towards assessment.

More specifically, some studies have examined primary school teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment with respect to age and experience (Watt, 2005; Clipa & Ignat, 2010). For example, Metin (2011) surveyed primary school Turkish teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment with respect to age and experience and found that young teachers and those with less than 5 years of experience had more positive attitudes towards assessment. Similarly, when examining attitudes towards alternative assessment of 180 secondary and primary school teachers in Malaysia, Ghazali et al. (2012) found that there were differences among teachers based on school district (e.g., urban or rural) and experience. Likewise, Alkharusi et al. (2012), who surveyed 165 Omani teachers in Muscat teaching different subjects including English to different grade levels (from 5-10) to find out about their attitudes, competencies, knowledge, and practices towards alternative assessment found that differences between teachers were related to grade level.

Differences in attitudes could also be the result of inadequate training. Research has shown that teachers need training in assessment techniques (Stiggins, 2001; Campell, Murphy, & Holt, 2002; Mertler, 2003; Hill, 2006; Yang, 2007; INTO, 2008; Birgin & Baki, 2009; Guerin, 2010; Tante, 2010; Alkharusi et al., 2012; Ghazali et al., 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Wongwanich, 2012). For example, Brumen et al. (2009) surveyed 108 primary school teachers in Slovenia, Croatia, and Czech Republic to learn about their experiences and attitudes towards alternative assessment of FL primary school children. Results showed that teachers do not reject assessment; however, they were unfamiliar with using self-assessment and portfolios. Teachers expressed the need for more knowledge and training.

This lack of training has forced teachers to use traditional methods of assessment (Yu-Ching, 2008; Birgin & Baki, 2009; Tante, 2010), while others complain about the current training sessions being inadequate (Mertler, 2003; INTO, 2008; Yang, 2008; Ghazali et al., 2012; Gonzales & Aliponga, 2012). In a survey of first-to-sixth grade EFL primary school teachers in Taiwan to investigate their classroom assessment practices, Yang (2007) found that teachers perceived themselves more skilled in implementing traditional summative assessment than alternative formative assessment. Teachers also reported receiving little assessment training that was not useful.

Not only did teachers prefer summative to formative assessment, but they also tended to use some activities more than others (Yang, 2007; Brumen et al., 2009). For example, Birgin and Baki (2009) surveyed primary school Turkish teachers to learn about their proficiency perceptions regarding alternative assessment methods and techniques. They found that the top five assessment methods teachers used most proficiently were in-class observation, homework, performance task, student presentation, and class discussion. However, the five assessment methods teachers used least proficiently were student journal, rubric, peer/self-assessment, and interview.

As to the reasons for teachers' reluctance to use alternative assessment, teachers reported some factors affecting its implementation (Watt, 2005; Yu-Ching, 2008; Alkharusi et al., 2012; Ghazali et al., 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Wongwanich, 2012). For example, in Yang's study (2007), Taiwanese EFL primary school teachers reported a number of factors that affect the implementation of assessment, such as difficulty of implementation, time constraints, difficulty of classroom management, subjectivity of grading, and heavy workloads; other researchers (INTO, 2008; Yu-Ching, 2008; Guerin, 2010) reported inadequate training, large class size, and time-consuming activities.

In a more recent study investigating elementary school teachers in Thailand about their attitudes towards using portfolio assessment, Tangdhanakahond and Wongwanich (2012) reported teachers' positive attitudes and interests; however, teachers complained about the clarity and the time set for using portfolio assessment. They further expressed the need for help in implementing portfolio assessment.

As seen from the literature above, although several studies have discussed primary classroom teachers' conceptions of assessment (e.g., Brown, 2004; Birgin & Baki, 2009); teachers' beliefs and perceptions of practice in assessment (Yang, 2007; Yu-Ching, 2008); teachers' perceptions of practice and self-perceived assessment skills (Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003); teachers' knowledge and needs for assessment (Mertler, 2003; Guerin, 2010; Tante, 2010); teachers' attitudes, knowledge and training needs (Alkharusi et al., 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Wongwanich, 2012); teachers' attitudes towards assessment (INTO, 2008; Brumen et al., 2009; Gonzales & Aliponga, 2012); and teachers' attitudes towards assessment with respect to experience and school type (Ghazali et al., 2012; Metin, 2011), there are few studies that look at EFL primary school teachers' attitudes along with their knowledge and skills in alternative assessment in relation to the following seven variables: age, nationality, degree, major, teaching experience, in-service training, and educational zone at one

point in time.

Added to this lack is the fact that most research has been done in ESL context, which might have an effect on teachers' attitudes. Also, the present study is investigating primary school, classroom-based English language assessment rather than standardized assessment or teacher assessment as most of the literature did. In addition, most of the literature has been written about studies done on adults and older learners, but very few studies have been done on young language learners. This might be because of the belief that alternative assessment emphasizes higher-order thinking skills that are characteristic of older learners (Watt, 2005).

These findings suggest that teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment should be the focus of ongoing research. Teachers' attitudes reflect their beliefs, and beliefs are the outcome of experience (Metin, 2011). If teachers encounter problems during the implementation of alternative assessment, then the experience could turn into a negative belief that could affect their attitudes towards assessment. Thus, there is a need to investigate teachers' attitudes in the hope of changing those beliefs. Teachers' competencies may also reveal their need for training and therefore help in providing them with the knowledge and skills needed. The results of such a study would also be useful for teacher educators and policy makers from the MOE to better understand teachers' attitudes and attend to their training needs. Hence, the present study seeks to expand the current research on EFL primary school, classroom-based assessment by examining EFL primary school teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and skills in alternative assessment. The research questions posed by this study are:

- 1) What are EFL primary school teachers' knowledge and skills in alternative assessment?
- 2) What are EFL primary school teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment?
- 3) Do EFL primary school teachers differ in their knowledge, skills and attitudes, towards alternative assessment based on their age, nationality, degree, major, teaching experience, in-service training and educational zone?

6. Method

6.1 Participants

A sample of 342 female EFL primary school teachers teaching grades 1-5 from 40 schools were randomly selected from six educational zones in Kuwait during the winter semester 2013-2014. Of the participants, 58.3% were Kuwaiti and 41.7% were non-Kuwaiti. The overwhelming majority of participants (i.e., 89.5%) were in the 21-40 age group compared with 10.5% in the 41+ age group. Table 1 below provides a summary of the demographic information of the sample.

Table 1. Distribution of sample

Independent Variables	No.	%
Age*		
21-30	119	35.6
31-40	180	53.9
41+	35	10.5
Total	334	100
Experience*		
5 and less	88	26.5
6-10	146	44.0
11+	98	29.5
Total	332	100
Nationality*		
Kuwaiti	194	58.3
Non-Kuwaiti	139	41.7
Total	333	100
Educational Zone*		

Al-Asema	49	14.8
Hawalli	47	14.2
Al-Farwaniya	54	16.3
Mubarak Al-Kabeer	54	16.3
Al-Ahmadi	71	21.4
Al-Jahra	57	17.2
Total	332	100
In-service Training*		
Training	121	40.9
No training	175	59.1
Total	296	100
Degree*		
Diploma	5	1.5
Bachelor	311	93.7
Master	15	4.5
PhD	1	.3
Total	332	100
Major*		
Primary School Education	198	59.8
Middle & High School Education	33	10.0
General English	100	30.2
Total	331	100

* Variables for which a few subjects did not provide information; therefore, they were not counted during the tests of variables.

6.2 Instrument

A questionnaire of three parts was used in the study. It was developed within the theoretical framework delineated by the literature on classroom assessment (Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003; Watt, 2005; Malcom, 2007; Yang, 2007; Yu-Ching, 2008; S. Brookhart & E. Brookhart, 2011; Tangdhanakanond & Wongwanich, 2012). The questionnaire consisted of 43 five-point Likert-type items and was composed of three sections. The first section concerned teachers' demographic profile, including age, nationality, degree, major, teaching experience, in-service training in alternative assessment, and educational zone. The second section concerned teachers' skills and knowledge in alternative assessment and consisted of 18 items. Responses were obtained on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The last section concerned teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment and consisted of 25 items including two open-ended questions. Responses were obtained on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Always" to "Never". Question 44 asked teachers to tick from a suggested list of factors the ones that hinder the use of alternative assessment. They were further left blank space for them to suggest other factors; hence, this question was analyzed qualitatively. Question 45, however, asked teachers to rate their skill in implementing alternative assessment on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) and was calculated quantitatively. To establish content validity the questionnaire was given to two experts in the field to judge the clarity of wording and the appropriateness of each item to the construct being measured. Their feedback was used for further refinement of the questionnaire.

The second instrument used was a focus group interview. Three questions were directed to school principals, head teachers, and EFL primary school teachers about their feelings towards alternative assessment and its advantages and disadvantages. The reason for using a focus group interview was to help in interpreting questionnaire results (Bloor, 2001). Also, focus group interviews provide data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found within a group. Added to that is the fact that teachers were very busy,

and individual interviews would take more time. To triangulate the data, document analysis was employed. Documents about ongoing assessment used in primary schools were obtained from the ELT General Supervision at the MOE.

6.3 Procedure

Permission was granted by the Department of Educational Research at the MOE and the six educational zones to collect data from schools. Afterwards, a pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted on 30 EFL primary school teachers (outside of the sample) to test the reliability of the questionnaire. A Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.933 has been reported indicating a high level of reliability of the scale. Accordingly, the questionnaire was distributed during the winter semester of the academic year 2013-2014 and was filled out by the remaining 342 teachers. Although 342 questionnaires were collected by the researcher, only 335 were analyzed. Seven questionnaires were found either missing a page or incomplete and hence were removed from statistical analysis. The variable “degree” was removed from statistical analysis because the sample in each degree was less than 30, except for the bachelor’s degree.

Regarding the focus group interview, the researcher asked three questions to a random sample of 8 primary school principals, 16 head teachers, and 114 EFL primary school teachers (the same teachers and head teachers who answered the questionnaire). Principals and head teachers were interviewed individually, while primary school teachers were interviewed as a group. The researcher took notes of the participants’ responses, which were later categorized into different themes.

7. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to describe teachers’ attitudes, skills, and knowledge in alternative assessment. A t-test for significant differences was used to compare between Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti teachers and between those who had in-service training and those who didn’t in attitudes, skills, and knowledge. A one-way ANOVA test was further conducted to detect significant differences in teachers’ attitudes, skills, and knowledge in relation to teachers’ age, major, teaching experience, and educational zone.

For statistical analysis, participants’ perceptions were categorized into three levels: high, medium, and low. For example, the high value in Likert scale (i.e., 5.00) is subtracted from the low value (i.e., 1.00) and divided by the three levels.

- $1.00 + 1.33 = 2.33$
- $2.33 + 1.33 = 3.66$
- $3.66 + 1.33 = 5.00$

Based on the above, means were calculated as follows:

- (From 1–2.33) indicates a low-value mean
- (From 2.34–3.66) indicates a medium-value mean
- (From 3.67–5.00) indicates a high-value mean

8. Results & Discussion

The present study intended to answer three research questions. The first and second research questions were set to find out EFL primary school teachers attitudes, knowledge, and skills in alternative assessment. Table 2 shows that teachers reported a high level of knowledge and skills regarding alternative assessment. Meanwhile, the same table shows an overall medium level of teachers’ attitudes towards alternative assessment.

Table 2. General means and standard deviations for the two factors

Factors	M	SD	Rank
Teachers’ Knowledge & Skills	4.08	.458	High
Teachers’ Attitudes	3.30	.450	Medium

As shown in Table 2, the means and standard deviations were determined for teacher’s knowledge and skills and their attitudes. Specifically, the first research question addressed teachers’ knowledge and skills in alternative assessment.

According to Table 3, teachers' responses to statements 1-9 reveal a high level of skill and knowledge regarding alternative assessment. This is consistent with most research studies (Yang, 2007; Yu-Ching, 2008; Birgin & Baki, 2009; Alkharusi et al., 2012). It is explicitly stated in statement 8 that the majority of teachers said they "always" (37.8%) and "often" (44.7%) have the skill to implement alternative assessment. However, when it came to rating their skills in implementing alternative assessment (Question 45), teachers reported a medium level of competency (39.9%—average; 36.3%—high) ($M=3.54$). This suggests that teachers have sufficient knowledge but lack adequate training, which makes them unsatisfied with their performance. Added to that, in their interview teachers reported problems related to assessment implementation. Similarly, statement 1 reflects teachers' perceptions of their skills and knowledge in their reporting 'always' (67.7%) and 'often' (26.3%). However, this finding is inconsistent with other studies in which teachers were found illiterate in alternative assessment (Mertler & Campell, 2005; Chan, Kennedy, & Fok, 2006; Metin & Demiryurek, 2009; Zhang, 2009; Tangdhanakanond & Wongwanich, 2012). This inconsistency might be attributed to differences in assessment methods used in the different countries. In Kuwait, for example, alternative assessment is another form of traditional assessment of activities that do not have as much potential to improve cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills (e.g., match, true/false, multiple choices, and short-answer questions). Hence, teachers are familiar with these activities and use them more frequently. This is also similar to Yildirim and Orsdemir's (2013) findings.

Table 3. EFL primary school teachers' knowledge and skills in alternative assessment

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
1	I know how to use portfolios to assess pupil performance.	4.60	.658	High
2	I guide pupils to collect materials for portfolio assessment.	4.05	.961	High
3	I use classroom observation to assess pupils during activities.	4.50	.683	High
4	I know how to design classroom-based tests.	4.69	.603	High
5	I can assess pupil performance during role plays.	4.29	.738	High
6	In addition to grades, I can give pupils written descriptions on their report cards.	4.34	.756	High
7	I know how to assess pupils through oral questioning.	4.55	.627	High
8	I have enough skill to implement alternative assessment.	4.18	.786	High
9	I use the results of alternative assessment to make useful decisions for pupils.	4.02	.910	High

As shown in Table 3, the means and standard deviations were determined for teachers' knowledge and skills in alternative assessment.

Teachers continue to express their knowledge and skills in conducting alternative assessment, as illustrated in Table 4. In statement 13, for example, most teachers reported that they "always" and "often" use classroom written tests along with alternative assessment. This might suggest teachers' overall willingness to integrate classroom written tests with alternative assessment. In the interview teachers said that alternative assessment cannot replace classroom written tests and that classroom written tests are a more important and practical way of assessment. This is also confirmed in statement 18, for which a high percentage of teachers reported that they "always" (42.9%) and "often" (29.1%) prefer written tests to alternative assessment.

Although teachers said that they have the skills and knowledge to use alternative assessment and sometimes read research about the latest methods in alternative assessment, many teachers reported that they "sometimes" (35.4%) feel confident when using alternative assessment (statement 11) and "sometimes" (33.0%) need training (statement 16). This is also substantiated by other studies where teachers reported their need for training (INTO, 2008; Yu-Ching, 2008; Brumen et al., 2009). This need might be justified because teachers reported in the interview that most of them ($N=175$) did not receive training at all, and those who did said that the training course lasted for a week and did not provide them with the necessary information and skill.

Table 4. EFL primary school teachers' knowledge and skills in alternative assessment

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
10	I read research about the latest methods in alternative assessment.	3.00	1.112	Medium
11	I feel very confident when I use alternative assessment.	3.54	1.007	Medium
12	I know how to assess pupils by using group & pair work.	4.24	.825	High
13	I use classroom-based tests in addition to alternative assessment.	4.26	.957	High
14	I can choose the kind of alternative assessment that suits the skill being assessed.	4.14	.863	High
15	I feel confident using traditional written tests.	4.47	.746	High
16	I don't need a training course in alternative assessment because I'm qualified.	3.51	1.160	Medium
17	Alternative assessment assesses pupils through multiple tests.	4.05	.804	High
18	I prefer using traditional written tests to alternative assessment.	4.07	1.004	High

As shown in Table 4, the means and standard deviations were determined for teachers' knowledge and skills in alternative assessment.

Regarding the second research question, investigating teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment (Table 5), results indicated a medium level as shown in Table 2 (M=3.30). This suggests that teachers are not highly motivated to conduct alternative assessment. This is in line with Ghazali et al.'s (2012) study that found teachers' attitudes to be at an average level. Similarly, the interview demonstrated teachers' dissatisfaction with the way alternative assessment is conducted, and some of them preferred traditional written tests for reasons that will be discussed with the interview. Yet, the majority of teachers 'strongly agreed' (33.6%) and 'agreed' (42.9%) that there is a need for ongoing assessment (statement 21), and most of them (37.0%-strongly agreed; 34.8%-agreed) expressed the need for workshops and training programs on alternative assessment (statement 24), which is in agreement with the interview results.

Although teachers believed that alternative assessment plays an important role and helps the teacher to assess pupil language skills, most teachers "strongly agreed" (30.1%) and "agreed" (38.8%) that traditional written tests are more effective in assessing students' language skills than alternative assessment (statement 26), and the majority "strongly agreed" (34.6%) and "agreed" (40.0%) that portfolio assessment takes time (statement 23), which is consistent with the interview results. Overall, results suggest that teachers' are not highly motivated to conduct alternative assessment, and their preference is for traditional written tests.

Table 5. EFL primary school teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
19	Portfolio assessment improves pupil self-assessment ability.	2.40	1.035	Medium
20	Alternative assessment is not useful.	3.01	1.186	Medium
21	Formative assessment is more important than summative assessment.	4.01	.928	High
22	It is better to use alternative assessment instead of traditional written tests.	2.68	1.026	Medium
23	Using portfolios to assess pupils is time-consuming.	3.98	.983	High
24	It is necessary to hold workshops on the use of alternative assessment.	3.94	1.075	High
25	Alternative assessment plays an important role in teaching.	3.45	1.057	Medium
26	Traditional written tests are more effective than alternative assessment in assessing pupil language skills.	3.87	.983	High
27	Alternative assessment helps the teacher assess pupil performance in the language skills.	3.43	1.029	Medium

As shown in Table 5, the means and standard deviations were determined for teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment.

Teachers' attitudes were further presented in table 6. Statements 28 and 29 support what teachers and principals reported during the interview about the advantages of alternative assessment. Indeed, more than half the teachers "strongly agreed" and "agreed" that alternative assessment helps discover low achieving pupils and elevates tension of exam-taking. Teachers' attitudes were further expressed in statement 32, with which only 23.5% "agreed". Teachers' preference for using both summative tests and alternative assessment was further reported in statement 35, with which most teachers "strongly agreed" (27.6%) and "agreed" (48.2%). Nevertheless, teachers still believe that daily assessment is good for pupils (statement 36) ($M=3.97$).

Table 6. EFL primary school teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
28	With alternative assessment the teacher can discover pupils' difficulties in learning.	3.49	1.006	Medium
29	Alternative assessment lowers pupils' anxiety.	3.50	.984	Medium
30	Alternative assessment helps pupils understand their learning problems.	3.42	1.050	Medium
31	Alternative assessment helps pupils learn language easily.	3.33	1.028	Medium
32	Alternative assessment is interesting.	3.00	1.033	Medium
33	Alternative assessment makes parents care about their children's performance more than their grades.	2.92	1.361	Medium
34	With alternative assessment parents are better informed about their children's progress.	3.08	1.289	Medium
35	Classroom-based tests are used to assess pupils' performance more than alternative assessment.	3.95	.884	High
36	It is better to assess pupils' performance daily during class.	3.97	.937	High

As shown in Table 6, the means and standard deviations were determined for teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment.

Statements 37-43 in table 7 continue to convey teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment. For example, a large number of teachers (35.5%) prefer summative to formative assessment (statement 37). This is further confirmed in the interview. It is also in line with other studies reporting similar findings (Tante, 2010; Gonzales & Aliponga, 2012). In addition, although teachers reported having enough skills to conduct alternative assessment, some of them (25.6%) believe that grading with alternative assessment is difficult while 40.9% reported being "neutral" (statement 38). This response is backed up by the teachers' report during the interview that the distribution of grades makes it hard to assess some skills. For example, a total grade of 100 was assigned to each one of the four skills and distributed between the sub-skills. This resulted in assigning a high grade to simple sub-skills (e.g., listen & tick, copy & trace, match). This finding was further supported by the documents analysis. It is also consistent with some research studies (INTO, 2008). Yet, many teachers "agreed" that alternative assessment increases pupils' motivation (statement 42), as they reported during the interview.

Table 7. EFL primary school teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank
37	It is better to assess pupils at midterms or at the end of the year.	3.46	1.014	Medium
38	It is difficult to grade with alternative assessment.	3.10	.941	Medium
39	Alternative assessment is more important than traditional written tests.	3.10	.978	Medium
40	Alternative assessment helps pupils develop practical skills to use English.	3.20	.993	Medium
41	Alternative assessment is widely used.	3.11	.871	Medium
42	Alternative assessment enhances pupils' learning motivation.	3.13	1.169	Medium
43	Managing classrooms during alternative assessment is difficult.	3.04	1.046	Medium

As shown in Table 7, the means and standard deviations were determined for teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment.

With respect to the third research question in this study about whether there were significant differences among teachers in their attitudes, knowledge, and skills, significant differences were found for age regarding teachers' knowledge and skills, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. ANOVA test for efl primary school teachers' knowledge and skills in alternative assessment with respect to age

No	Part1	Variables	N	M	SD	F	Sig.
		21-30	119	4.00	.50		
1	Knowledge & Skills	31-40	180	4.10	.41	4.23	.015
		41+	35	4.25	.48		

As shown in Table 8, the means and significance were determined for teachers' knowledge and skills according to age. It seems the older the teachers, the more knowledge and skill they have. Teachers at 41 and above years reported more knowledge and skills in alternative assessment than those at 21-30 years. A reasonable explanation may be that older teachers might have practiced alternative assessment more often and thus have gained more knowledge and skills. It also suggests that the current pre-service and in-service training program is insufficient to provide teachers with adequate knowledge and skills. However, no significant differences were found for "age" regarding teachers' attitudes. This is in contrast to Metin's study (2011), which found that teachers under 25 years have more positive attitudes towards alternative assessment than older teachers. This might be because the alternative assessment methods used are a form of traditional written tests, thus teachers are familiar with them. Added to that are the problems related to alternative assessment implementation as reported by the teachers during the interview. With respect to "nationality", no significant differences were found for teachers' knowledge and skills. This is because, as stated before, all teachers receive the same training from the MOE. Similarly, no significant differences were found for teachers' attitudes. Indeed, all teachers expressed the same sentiment during the interview; all teachers disliked the way assessment was conducted.

Nonetheless, significant differences were found for teachers' "major" as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. ANOVA test for EFL primary school teachers' knowledge and skills in alternative assessment with respect to educational major

No.	Part 1	Variables	N	M	SD	F	Sig.
1	Knowledge & Skills	Primary School	198	4.05	.47076	2.667	.071
		Middle & High School	33	4.02	.45328		
		General English	100	4.17	.43185		

As shown in Table 9, the means and significance were determined for teachers' knowledge and skills according to Major. Unexpectedly, those with educational background (primary & high school teachers) seemed to have less knowledge and skills in using alternative assessment than those with no educational background (General English). A tentative explanation might be that most in the 'General English' group are older teachers who have gained their knowledge through experience. This is confirmed in table 8, in which the most experienced (41+) are the most knowledgeable. It could also be that the "General English" group got their knowledge from reading research on alternative assessment methods (statement 10). On the other hand, it might suggest that those with educational background did not study this during their pre-service education course on measurement and evaluation. This is consistent with some studies that found similar results (Mertler, 2003; Yang, 2007). Indeed, teachers reported their need for training and their dissatisfaction with the in-service training offered. This is also similar to findings of other studies (INTO, 2008; Brumen et al., 2009). However, no significant differences were found for teachers' attitudes with respect to their 'majors', knowing that, a number of them (N=33) did not have a background in primary education (i.e., High & Middle School), and a large number of them (N=100) did not take education courses at all (General English).

As for educational zones, no significant differences were found for teachers' knowledge and skills. This might be, as mentioned before, that the MOE is the entity responsible for providing in-service training for all teachers in the country. However, significant differences were found for educational zones regarding teachers' attitudes, as shown in Table 10, in which teachers' from Al-Farwaniyah, followed by Hawali, and Al-Asema (the capital city), seemed to have more positive attitudes towards alternative assessment, while those far away from the capital city like Al-Jahra, Al-Ahmadi, and Mubarak Al-Kabeer have shown to have less positive attitudes. This might be related to the workload of teachers: areas distant from the capital city usually have bigger schools and hence more students and larger classes, which might have a negative impact on teachers' attitudes (see, e.g., Alkarusi et al., 2012). Similarly, in the interview, teachers indicated outside pressure from parents, principals, and supervisors, which differs by educational zone. This is also similar to Ghazali et al. (2012), who found differences in teachers' attitudes with respect to school district.

Table 10. ANOVA test for EFL primary school teachers' attitudes to alternative assessment with respect to educational zone

No	Part2	Variables	N	M	SD	F	Sig.
1	Teachers' Attitudes	Al-Asema	49	3.34	.49072	2.116	.063
		Hawalli	47	3.38	.37120		
		Al-Farwaniyah	54	3.40	.33966		
		Mubarak Al-Kabeer	54	3.15	.51688		
		Al-Ahmadi	71	3.27	.45590		
		aljahra	57	3.31	.47306		

As shown in Table 10, the means and significance were determined for teachers' attitudes according to educational zone.

More significant differences were found for teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards alternative

assessment in relation to experience (table 11). This finding is consistent with other research studies that found similar results (Yu-Ching, 2008; Metin, 2011; Alkharusi et al., 2012). As table 11 indicates, those with more experience seemed to have more knowledge and skill in alternative assessment; as experience decreases, less knowledge and skill is found. As Mertler and Campell (2005) argued, experience has an effect on assessment competency. This is also confirmed by other studies (see e.g. Ghazali et al., 2012).

Table 11. ANOVA test for EFL primary school teachers' knowledge and skill in alternative assessment with respect to experience

No.	Part 1	Variables	N	M	SD	F	Sig.
		5 years & less	88	4.00	.49329		
1	Knowledge & Skills	6-10 years	146	4.07	.46089	4.324	.014
		11+	98	4.19	.40293		

As shown in Table 11, the means and significance were determined for teachers' knowledge and skill according to experience.

As for teachers' attitudes towards alternative assessment in relation to experience, table 12 shows those with more experience having less positive attitudes towards alternative assessment than those with less experience. It might be that more experienced teachers are usually more conventional and less open to change; hence, they refuse reform and prefer to stick to traditional written tests, or they might have had negative experiences with alternative assessment that made them less motivated to use it. On the other hand, this finding reflects the positive attitudes of the newly graduated teachers who were found to be more willing to try out new ideas compared with experienced teachers. As Watt (2005) pointed out, recently graduated teachers are more likely to have positive attitudes towards alternative assessment and are less satisfied with traditional written tests.

Table 12. ANOVA test for EFL primary school teachers' attitudes to alternative assessment with respect to experience

No.	Part 2	Variables	N	M	SD	F	Sig.
		5 years & less	88	3.30	.49434		
1	Attitudes	6-10 years	146	3.36	.40992	2.543	.080
		11+	98	3.23	.46309		

As shown in Table 12, the means and significance were determined for teachers' attitudes according to experience. 'In-service training' did not exhibit any significant differences. As said before, all teachers received similar in-service training from the MOE, and teachers mentioned during the interview that training was insufficient.

With respect to the last two questions posed at the end of the questionnaire, question 45 asked teachers to rate their skill (from number 1= very low level to number 5= very high level) in implementing alternative assessment. Results showed that teachers perceive themselves to have average competency (M=3.54); the majority rated themselves between 'average' (39.9%) and 'high' (36.3%). Other research studies have found similar results (Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003; Birgin & Baki, 2009).

As to question 44, teachers were asked to tick the reasons they thought might be preventing the proper application of alternative assessment. The first and most mentioned factor was that alternative assessment was "time-consuming". Alternative assessment is time consuming because it requires daily assessment of pupils' work. This becomes difficult when considering the workload of teachers, the number of pupils in each class (25-30), and the long curriculum that teachers need to cover in a limited time. This is consistent with findings from other studies (Yang, 2007; Yu-Ching, 2008; Zhang, 2009; Demir, Ozturk, & Dokeme, 2011; Chroinin &

Cosgrave, 2013). Teachers further reported these beliefs in the interview.

The second factor mentioned was “lack of organization” (see, e.g., Watt, 2005). Some participants left comments explaining that class control and student absences became major concerns for teachers since the start of alternative assessment. Pressure from administration and parents came third.

The issue that concerned teachers the most, however, was that alternative assessment did not fail pupils. Thus, parents care less about their children’s progress, and pupils are discouraged from trying to improve their skills. This is further confirmed by school principals and head teachers. Some teachers wrote comments saying that because with alternative assessment, students automatically pass to the next grade level regardless of grade and attendance, parents relied on this fact and did not bother to follow up on their children or help them with their homework.

Other teachers believed that one of the disadvantages of alternative assessment was ignoring absences, which resulted in pupils missing a lot of information needed for the next grade level. However, teachers’ major concern was the fact that alternative assessment does not provide pupils with enough writing practice, which resulted in weakness in writing. Teachers further stated that there was a gap in the curricula of first and second grades compared to third, fourth, and fifth grades, with more focus on reading and writing in later grades. When pupils reached fourth grade, there was a huge deficit in their reading and writing skills. Thus, pupils graduated from primary school not being able to read and write properly.

With regard to the interview (see Method above), results supported questionnaire findings to a great extent. In particular, teachers reported that alternative assessment cannot possibly replace written exams: written exams are the most important and practical way of assessment.

Teachers recommended that since alternative assessment measures different skills, grades should be divided according to the importance of the skill. Other subjects, such as music and art, should not be graded equally to core subjects. Parents should also be informed about the goal of alternative assessment, which is to urge them to cooperate with the teachers, all the while knowing that their children will eventually pass. Finally, teachers stressed the fact that writing was the most affected skill and expressed the need for an immediate solution. They further suggested combining alternative assessment with traditional written tests to improve pupils’ language skills.

9. Conclusion

In this study we tried to answer three research questions. The first research question investigated teachers’ knowledge and skill in alternative assessment. Results showed that teachers perceived themselves as knowledgeable and skillful in using alternative assessment ($M=4.08$). However, they felt more confident using traditional written tests ($M=4.47$) and reported the need for more training in alternative assessment. This was further confirmed by teachers when they rated their skill in implementing alternative assessment as average.

The second research question explored teachers’ attitudes towards alternative assessment. Results revealed that EFL primary school teachers’ attitudes were at a medium level ($M=3.30$). In addition to pointing out their preference for traditional written tests, they reported during the interview that alternative assessment was time-consuming, and it did not focus on writing skill. The most negative aspect of alternative assessment, according to teachers, was that it did not fail pupils. However, teachers agreed that alternative assessment helps discover slow learners and lowers pupils’ tension during exams.

The final research question examined differences between teachers regarding the different variables. Significant differences were found in teachers’ knowledge and skill regarding their “age”, “major”, and “experience”. Significant differences were found as well in teachers’ attitudes in relation to their “experience” and “educational zone”.

The present study is limited by the fact that it solicited the attitudes of a representative but relatively small sample of the whole population of female EFL primary school teachers. Also, results cannot be generalized to secondary school teachers, teachers of other subjects, or male teachers.

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