LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching
http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/LLT
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT AS A TOOL FOR IMPARTING HEBREW LEARNING SKILLS

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Abstract
This research explored the role of alternative assessments in highlighting students' language abilities by focusing on their strengths. Through interviews with 20 Hebrew language teachers in the Arab-Bedouin education system in Israel, the study revealed that, unlike traditional assessments, alternative methods were performance-based, student-centred, and emphasized communication over accuracy. Teachers identified authentic tasks as crucial for allowing students to assess their learning while meeting educational goals. Key criteria for these tasks included reflecting students' interests, connecting to real-life contexts, encouraging creativity, and producing high-quality results.

Keywords: alternative assessment, authentic task, learner-centered classroom, self-assessment

Introduction
Alternative assessment refers to an approach distinct from traditional assessments, which primarily rely on exams and assigning standard grades. Alternative assessment offers a broader scope for evaluating knowledge, fostering innovation, encouraging meaningful learning, and even facilitating the creation of knowledge in creative and diverse ways (Brown, 2020). According to Yanko (2021), there is a wide range of alternative assessment methods that can be utilized to maximize students' potential. For instance, activities such as writing poems, performing a play, or role-playing in the classroom can enhance learning and serve as effective forms of alternative assessment. These approaches encourage creativity and active engagement, offering students diverse ways to demonstrate their understanding and skills (Demir, 2021).

From a review of recent research literature, alternative assessment is increasingly recognized as a means of providing more comprehensive support for students. It offers meaningful feedback on student performance and incorporates methods that actively engage students in the learning process (Roberts et al., 2023). Additionally, alternative assessment fosters students' interests, ensures timely progress, and promotes self-directed inquiry. This approach enables students to engage in a substantial dialogue with their teachers, allowing both to collaboratively

establish effective learning strategies that benefit both the student and the teacher (Nellums, 2021).

Moreover, studies indicate that alternative assessment is a method that can enhance students' academic success. This success is largely attributed to the commitment of teachers, the quality of their performance, and their openness to educational innovation, all of which significantly contribute to improving the overall learning experience (Lee et al., 2012; Qadach, Schechter & Da'as, 2020). These elements collectively foster a supportive and effective learning environment that enhances student achievement and promotes educational excellence. Internal job characteristics also play a crucial role in influencing teachers' satisfaction and motivation. More motivated teachers tend to exhibit a stronger commitment to their schools and deliver higher overall performance (Normianti, Aslamiah & Suhaimi, 2019).

Alternative evaluation methods are increasingly being adopted in place of traditional evaluations, which historically relied on standardized tests. This approach underscores the importance of assessing students' achievements through complex and challenging tasks that require deep understanding rather than mere recall of information (Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). In recent years, alternative assessment has gained significant recognition in both global and Israeli education systems. Studies show that it emphasizes greater student participation in the classroom, a more holistic assessment of achievements, and the integration of diverse assessment techniques (Amzaleg & Masry-Herzallah, 2022; Ghilay & Ghilay, 2012; Qadach, Schechter & Da'as, 2020).

While traditional assessments typically focus on basic levels, such as knowledge acquisition, alternative assessments provide a more comprehensive view of a student's learning progress. These assessments highlight not only what students have learned but also how they apply their knowledge in various contexts. Additionally, language acquisition, as part of alternative assessment, can foster educational progress by enhancing both oral and written skills, contributing to overall academic improvement (Ahmad, Sultana & Jamil, 2020).

This research uniquely explores teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment as a tool for developing students' learning skills, focusing on individual strengths. Centred on Hebrew language teachers in Bedouin schools, it examines how continuous assessment fosters meaningful learning and student progress.

Literature review
Alternative assessment: Definition and key characteristics

The term "assessment" in academia refers to the process of supporting and facilitating learning. It involves an approach that enables teachers to gain deeper insights into students' abilities, allowing them to draw necessary conclusions to improve their teaching and enhance student achievement (Hoffman, 2024). According to researchers, teaching and assessment are closely intertwined, functioning as both cause and effect within the learning process. This dynamic fosters a meaningful dialogue of learning and the collaborative construction of knowledge, from which both teachers and students can continually learn (Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Maki, 2023).

Additionally, assessment serves as a significant educational tool, connecting students to relevant learning experiences, particularly in today's marginalized

teaching environments (Garrido et al., 2020). Alternative assessment is gaining recognition as an effective tool for enhancing learning, particularly in small-group settings. It also serves as a platform for individual initiatives, contributing to the continuous improvement of teaching methods and student academic performance (Berkovich, 2021; Ghilay & Ghilay, 2012).

In second language teaching, alternative assessment plays a crucial role in promoting meaningful personal learning. Through close teacher guidance and regular feedback, students' progress can be effectively monitored. This type of assessment significantly impacts the student's learning by facilitating the construction of knowledge, personal experiences, and new socio-cultural understandings. It enables students to develop their individual skills and, as a result, enhances their overall learning, particularly in the context of second language acquisition (Abu-Gweder, 2024; Ghilay & Ghilay, 2012; Lau, 2016; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Spruce, 2023).

At present, alternative assessment places significant emphasis on performance-based tasks and practical projects that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application (Chan, 2023). Another core characteristic is the fostering of democratic relationships between teachers and students, recognizing students as unique individuals with distinct abilities and interests. This approach positions students as active participants in shaping their educational paths and in selecting the areas they wish to explore. Moreover, alternative assessment promotes higher-order thinking and encourages students to take responsibility for their learning (Ghilay & Ghilay, 2012).

Characteristics of alternative assessment

Alternative assessment, particularly in the field of mathematics, is better suited to the post-modern world, providing students with more relevant and meaningful feedback on their achievements (Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Spruce, 2023). One of its key characteristics is its positive impact on students, as it fosters a more open and flexible learning environment where students can choose assignments that align with their skills and interests (Hoffman, 2024). The constructivist approach underpinning alternative assessment allows students to actively acquire new knowledge by integrating their prior experiences and socio-cultural contexts. This approach facilitates significant changes in educational systems and learning methods, reinforcing the perception of the student as capable of discovering their abilities and realizing their potential (Berkovich, 2021).

Currently, alternative assessment emphasizes performance exams and practical projects that connect theoretical knowledge to applied, real-world tasks in the relevant field of study (Chan, 2023). Another important characteristic is the promotion of democratic relationships between teachers and students, treating students as individuals with unique abilities and interests. This approach views students as active participants in shaping their educational journeys and in selecting the fields they wish to explore. Furthermore, alternative assessment encourages higher-order thinking and motivates students to take responsibility for their own learning (Ghilay & Ghilay, 2012).

Important terms in alternative assessment

Six key terms will be presented in the following. First is the *learning opportunity.* This term refers to the need to provide students with all the necessary conditions for quality and meaningful learning. These conditions include relevant materials, skilled teachers, suitable learning environments, and diverse teaching experiences, all of which enable students to improve their achievements (Mohammed & Kora, 2023; Qadach, Schechter & Da'as, 2020). Second is the *classroom assessment.* This type of assessment occurs when a teacher evaluates students within the classroom setting. The purpose is to assess individual students or the entire class on a specific subject (Leung, 2024; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020).

Third is the *authentic evaluation.* This is an evaluation conducted through a direct examination that reflects students' actual performance. Typically, the student is required to complete a complex and meaningful task, such as solving a real-world problem using previously acquired knowledge (Searle & Poth, 2021; Wang, 2020). Fourth is the *assignment.* An assignment is a task that requires the student to demonstrate knowledge of a specific subject. It often involves exercises or tasks that need to be completed or solved (Chew & Cerbin, 2021). Fifth is the *evaluator*

The evaluator is the individual responsible for judging the student's behaviour or performance according to predefined conditions and criteria (Ghilay & Ghilay, 2012). Last is the *scoring.* Scoring refers to the detailed grading of a student's performance based on their class level, age, or other criteria. This process allows for the evaluation of the student's abilities and performance (Ragupathi & Lee, 2020).

The educational system and Bedouin society in southern Israel

Bedouin-Arab society in southern Israel is inherently collectivist, hierarchical, and patriarchal (Abu-Gweder, 2023). In such a society, the needs of the social group are prioritized over individual goals, contrasting with individualistic cultures. The Bedouin social structure is deeply rooted in tribalism, loyalty to the family and tribe, and obedience to male authority figures (Iliyan, 2008). Despite modernization, traditional customs persist, leading to a continued inferior status for Bedouin women despite increased education and employment opportunities (Abu-Gweder, 2024; Al-Said, 2015).

Bedouin schools mirror these societal norms, with relationships between teachers resembling familial hierarchies (Iliyan, 2012). Traditional and frontal teaching methods in these schools reflect the patriarchal nature of Arab society (Abu-Gweder, 2023). The school culture within the Bedouin education system reflects a family-oriented, tribal structure, where the school principal often hails from the largest family, which serves as a primary source of their educational authority (Arar & Masry-Herzallah, 2014). According to Abu-Gweder (2024), the primary factor contributing to students' success is strong parental support, alongside the intensive efforts of parents working with students at home.

Method

This research seeks to explore the perceptions of teachers within the Arab-Bedouin education sector regarding the use of alternative assessment as a tool for developing learning skills in Hebrew as a second language. Specifically, the study examines their experiences and attitudes toward these assessment methods, aiming

to understand how they are integrated into educational practices and their potential influence on student learning. Therefore, two research questions were formulated to achieve the research objective, namely:

1. How do teachers perceive alternative assessment as a tool for enhancing students' learning achievements and fostering academic progress?
2. In what ways do teachers view the continuous assessment process as essential for developing students' abilities and promoting meaningful learning?

Data collection

To gather rich, detailed data, a qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Flick, 2017). The study included 20 Hebrew language teachers from the Arab-Bedouin education system, selected to provide diverse perspectives on the use of alternative assessments in their teaching. The semi-structured interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of the teachers' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, ensuring a nuanced understanding of the cultural and educational contexts influencing their views.

Research tool

The primary research tool was the semi-structured interview, chosen for its flexibility in capturing detailed insights into participants' experiences. The interviews encouraged teachers to share their thoughts openly while allowing researchers to probe deeper into specific areas. The questions combined pre-determined topics with follow-up inquiries, ensuring that the data collected was comprehensive and reflective of the participants' authentic perspectives (Carless, 2020).

Research procedure

The research process began with participant recruitment, followed by scheduling and conducting the interviews. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntariness. Afterward, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, with an inductive approach to identify and categorize key themes. This coding process involved thoroughly examining the transcripts and assigning codes to recurring ideas. The thematic analysis provided a structured yet flexible interpretation of the data, offering deep insights into the teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment.

Study population

The participants comprised 20 Hebrew language teachers working in the Arab-Bedouin education system. This group was chosen to offer insights into how alternative assessment methods are perceived and implemented in a unique cultural and educational context. Their perspectives highlighted both the challenges and benefits of using alternative assessments, contributing to a broader understanding of their role in education. This section outlines the research methodology, detailing the steps taken to ensure the collection of meaningful data, ultimately supporting the study's goal of exploring the role of alternative assessment in fostering learning skills among students.

Findings
Cultivating ability and meaningful learning

The first key finding that emerges from interviews with the teachers is the significance of students' investment in their work, as well as the teachers' ability to foster active learning. By encouraging student engagement, teachers can promote meaningful learning in innovative ways.

During the interviews, the teachers noted that students initially embraced the alternative assessment policy with enthusiasm, believing the course would be easier without traditional exams. However, when they realized that they were required to demonstrate not only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also communication skills, accuracy, daily study habits, social skills, and teamwork, their initial excitement diminished. R1, one of the teachers interviewed in the study, noted that students responded to the new system in varied ways:

> "Some students adapt easily and naturally, while others struggle with the transition. Extensive training and preparation are necessary for students to critically rethink their learning processes, develop clear action plans, and provide feedback to their peers."

R2 added that students appreciated receiving specific feedback on their performance in various areas of learning, valuing the continuous assessment process. While some students did not miss the traditional quantitative evaluation methods, there remained a need for such methods, especially to address gaps in grammar and vocabulary among students with different levels of Hebrew proficiency. R3 observed that through continuous training, students developed the ability to identify and leverage assessment moments to understand their strengths and areas for improvement:

> "The success of alternative assessment often depends on the students' cognitive styles. Those with an analytical learning style—who are independent, autonomous, and logical—may find the new system more comfortable, as they can use the teacher's feedback to create action plans and develop problem-solving strategies."

Teachers regularly meet with students after each unit to discuss their progress in communication, teamwork, accuracy, strategy use, classroom performance, and homework. R4 emphasized:

> "At the end of each cycle, there is a summary conference to discuss the student's progress. With this evaluation system, students usually know whether they have passed or failed before the process is even complete."

This student-centered evaluation process made students active partners, and responsible for their own learning within the classroom. R5 highlighted the importance of evaluating achievements within the framework of alternative assessment:

> "Evaluation should be conducted according to clear learning goals, which teachers must present transparently to students. Each assessment must align with these goals, as referring to the learning objectives defined in the

curriculum enhances the predictive validity of the student's knowledge quality."

The assessment utilized diverse methods, allowing teachers to assess a broad range of learning objectives rather than relying solely on traditional methods. This diversity ensured that the assessment reflected the multiple intelligences and skills exhibited by students, promoting fairness and reducing biases related to race, gender, and other factors. R6 argued:

"In my opinion, the teacher's personality plays a vital role in the educational process. In fact, through such a process, the teacher can not only contribute significantly to the students' development but also foster their own learning. Therefore, the teacher's position in this kind of educational context is of crucial importance."

In conclusion, Despite the complexity of this method, it is important to promote it, as teachers who encourage students to learn and develop will also need to be more daring and cultivate new skills and adaptations. Furthermore, any educational change can be challenging for teaching teams. However, the unique ability of teachers to learn and take initiative can greatly contribute to the success of all projects, including implementing alternative student assessments.

The assessment as a continuous process
The current study shows that the integration of alternative assessment in Hebrew as a second language holds significant value for both teachers and students. This approach fosters the development of new skills and adaptations, enhancing student learning. R7 asserted:

"In my view, alternative assessment is a continuous process that starts with the teacher's development of the ability to foster student growth and extends to the sense of fulfillment students should derive from this type of learning."

Throughout the research, it appears that the teachers' efforts in fostering a specific type of learning are crucial for developing students who are proactive, responsible, and engaged in the learning process. This approach contrasts with traditional methods, where the teacher remains the central figure in the classroom. R8 highlighted the importance of challenging assignments, stating:
"the teacher should engage students with challenging tasks that foster the development of their critical thinking skills. Through the teacher's careful monitoring and guidance, the aim is for students to produce meaningful work and significantly improve their language proficiency."

Moreover, R8 emphasizes the need to adapt the assignment to the student's cultural background:

"I believe it is crucial to connect the learning experience to the student's own experiences and provide them with all the necessary tools to express themselves in the most effective way."

Thereby increasing their engagement and interest in learning. By linking the material to meaningful contexts, students could see the relevance of their learning in their personal lives, leading to better knowledge retention and the development of critical thinking skills. R9 echoed this sentiment, suggesting:

> "Actual language learning occurs when students apply the material in contexts that hold personal significance. These contexts not only aid in understanding but also challenge students to expand their thinking."

The research advocates for active learning, where the student takes on an active role in the classroom. Structured classroom activities contribute to enhancing the student's ability to realize their potential, thereby fostering an effective language model in both written and oral expression. As R2 notes,

> "Teachers must significantly contribute to students' development through active learning, as well as other learning experiences, to improve their language proficiency."

In conclusion, according to the teachers, the objectives set for students in this type of assessment significantly contributed to the development of language skills for persuasive communication, the enhancement of writing abilities, and the improvement of oral expression in Hebrew as a second language. While both teachers and students invested considerable effort, the benefits for the students were substantial. Furthermore, the school's culture plays a pivotal role in this process. As an educational institution, the school has the potential to foster collaboration among students, teachers, and parents, thereby promoting a more innovative and effective educational approach.

Discussion

The central headquarters of the study was to check to understand the factors influencing the extent to which teachers implement alternative assessment techniques and how these methods are used in practice. The findings of this study align with previous research, such as Yanko (2021), which highlights a tendency among teachers to favour traditional assessment methods, particularly standardized tests, due to a higher level of comfort and confidence. However, while teachers express interest in alternative assessments, their application often remains limited.

In the current study, we observed that alternative assessment activities allow students to highlight their language abilities by emphasizing their strengths. Unlike traditional assessments, which typically rely on standardized measures and focus on correct answers, alternative assessments are performance-based and prioritize communication as the key goal of language learning. This shift in focus is particularly relevant in language classrooms where the ability to communicate effectively is paramount.

The interview data revealed that alternative assessment methods are especially well-suited to learner-centered classrooms. In these environments, students actively participate in their evaluation process, using the assessments as opportunities for self-reflection on their language development. This process not only aids students in understanding what supports their learning but also helps them identify areas where improvement is needed. Furthermore, teachers can utilize

alternative assessments to integrate evaluation with the exploration of effective learning strategies.

One of the key advantages of alternative assessment is its use of authentic tasks. These tasks, as noted by the teachers in this study, enable students to demonstrate their ability to meet the learning objectives by focusing on real-world communication rather than simply providing the right answer. Through these tasks, students contribute to setting the success criteria for communication activities and are involved in both self-evaluation and peer evaluation.

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The findings of this study are consistent with the broader professional literature, which emphasizes the connection between alternative assessment methods and the enhancement of learning abilities and motivation (Ghilay & Ghilay, 2012; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). However, the successful implementation of alternative assessment requires significant time, effort, and thorough teacher training.

Conclusion

The success of the alternative assessment model in second language teaching largely depends on the school's ability to create an environment that fosters this approach and allows teachers to develop innovative teaching methods. In these methods, students are offered a choice of tasks that align with their cultural background and provide opportunities to address additional challenges, such as communication beyond the classroom and finding novel learning solutions. Furthermore, integrating current topics that students can engage with and develop, along with involving parents who can support the process, is essential for ensuring the model's success.

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. The first limitation is the relatively small sample size, with only 20 teachers participating, out of the hundreds or even thousands of teachers in the Bedouin Arab education system. This restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the focus on specific stakeholders, particularly teachers, limits the study's scope. Future research could explore the learning outcomes from the students' perspectives, which may offer a broader understanding of the educational processes in this context. Conducting parallel studies that include students' viewpoints would provide a more comprehensive analysis of the educational dynamics. Another limitation is the use of qualitative research methods to examine teachers' attitudes. While this approach provided in-depth insights, conducting quantitative studies could complement these findings by offering additional perspectives and data that were not captured in this study. Quantitative research would enable the identification of patterns and trends on a larger scale, thus enhancing the robustness of the conclusions drawn.

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