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Comparison of traditional and alternative assessment in English Language Teaching in
high schools (Georgian case).

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Significant changes are taking place in the XXI-century society. Naturally, a lot of reforms, including educational ones, are being carried out. Educational reforms aim at making the system of education as adequate to the social needs as possible. However, often the reforms are not as beneficial as expected. Sometimes the innovations are so numerous and happen so fast, that teachers (to say nothing of the wider, less familiar with education, society – the so-called stockholders) are not well acquainted with effective pedagogical innovations. Sometimes they hear about them at short trainings and acquire techniques without understanding the meaning. Many teachers have prejudices against such innovations due to wrong practice and misinterpretation. Besides, research concerning the true efficiency of innovations has to be carried out. We should not praise innovations just because they are new, we need to analyze their advantages and disadvantages, find out their reasons, and find ways of their optimal application.

Among such innovations are new methods of assessment. Though objective testing has been used in western countries from the beginning of the XX century, in some countries, including Georgia, (though it was known earlier) it became part of the official assessment system of education only in the 1990s. So, when in the 2000s another innovation - Alternative / Authentic / Performance assessment (including Portfolio assessment) was introduced to them, many people just would not hear of it. On the other hand, this kind of assessment, as it will be shown in the dissertation, compensates a great number of disadvantages that the traditional oral, written and the later introduced objective testing have. This means that its application should benefit both the quality of teaching/learning and the learners' satisfaction. Methods of assessment are a very important part of teaching methods, a kind of a "crown" demonstrating students' success and failure, motivating them to improve and just to learn. Learners' further ability to apply the knowledge obtained at school, their satisfaction largely depends on whether their knowledge and skills are effectively assessed. To see which assessment method is the best or to find an optimal combination of various methods, corresponding research is necessary. I hope my dissertation will make at least a modest contribution to studying the efficiency of educational portfolio as an assessment method. This is why I believe that application of portfolio assessment has to be popularized among teachers and studied by researchers. This makes the topic of my research **urgent/important**. Let me in short define what is authentic assessment and one of its kinds - portfolio assessment. Authentic learning (including assessment) must be personally relevant and connected to the real world. Authentic assessments ask students to apply skills and abilities as they would in real life. An educational portfolio (similarly to painter's, actor's, etc.

portfolio) is a collection of evidence (student's essays, posters, exercises made up and/or fulfilled by the student that is selected by the student (probably on teacher's advice) to show his/her learning outcomes to demonstrate their abilities.

Thus, the **goal** of my doctoral dissertation was to find out

- 1) how well acquainted the educational stockholders (administrators /employers, teachers, school children and their parents) are with educational portfolio, what attitude they have towards it
- 2) whether literature review would confirm the idea of the beneficial character of contemporary assessment methods
- 3) whether the application of portfolio would yield good results
- 4) whether experimental study could confirm a higher efficiency of a mixed approach (traditional oral/written assessment + testing + portfolio) vs. assessment not including contemporary/alternative methods.

The **problems** of my dissertation are:

- 1) many teachers are totally unaware of contemporary assessment methods, some who are vaguely aware do not think they are necessary or useful
- 2) as an innovative practice, portfolio assessment still needs a deep and vast research on its efficiency (advantages, disadvantages, ways to avoid disadvantages, change of attitudes, etc.)

The **hypothesis** of my study is:

Application of portfolio as one of the means of assessment will improve students' English language skills level as well as students' motivation to learn.

Among the main explanations of the expected increase in learning motivation and language skills is the active nature of learning while applying portfolio for formative assessment and its student-centered character (students take the responsibility for choosing the topic and later the work to be assessed). I am not trying to idealize portfolio as assessment method, as I realize its major (at least for the moment) drawbacks: they are time-consuming, permit presenting another person's work as one's own and are difficult to assess objectively. Moreover, I do not recommend it as summative assessment method, but only as one of effective formative assessment methods. This is why in my experiment I assessed students

in the following ratio: 30% of portfolio assessment, the rest – traditional oral and written assessment and testing.

To solve the above-discussed problems, I applied the following **methods of research**:

- review and analysis of existing literature on the topic
- observation
- questionnaires
- experiment
- statistical analysis of obtained through questionnaires and experiment data

My research is empirical and quantitative. The focus group of teachers of English and students high school was chosen in accordance with the above problem.

Novelty

Educational portfolio started spreading in the 1980s, and it started to be applied in Georgia and Turkey in the 2000s. Little research has been carried out in our countries concerning the efficiency of portfolio as an assessment method. This already makes my research innovative. Besides, I tried to make an exhaustive comparison of all educational assessment methods known and used today as well as to find the place of portfolio in the assessment system. As far as I was able to find out, my thesis involves the first case study carried out in Georgia concerning the shareholders' awareness and the application of portfolio.

Methodology of the Study

As opposed to using a solely quantitative or qualitative methodology, this study utilized a mixed methodology - both quantitative and qualitative forms of data in a single study. Being able to generalize to the intended population, as with quantitative data, and also explain the richness of the participants' experiences, as with qualitative data, is what makes a mixed methodology such a powerful research tool. Further, using a mixed methodology increases a study's clarity and scope.

As a result, mixed methodology is able avoid some researchers bias and enhance clarity by looking at the data and hypotheses in multiple ways.

In this study there will be;

- experiment
- questionnaires

Theoretical value

The theoretical bases of my research are

- the ideas of student-centered teaching which requires to take into consideration students' needs, interest, background and difficulties (e.g., Armstrong 2012)

- the theories and methods of active, authentic and communicative language teaching/learning, which today – in order to have a pragmatic value - are becoming more and more eclectic (like the mixed application of assessment methods that I propone) (e.g., McKenzie, 2007)

- ideas of alternative assessment (e.g., Hancock, 1994; Hanson, 1993; Tannenbaum, 1996;)

- theories of motivation (e.g., Weiner 1922)

I tried to make my modest contribution to their development, from the angle of portfolio application in English language teaching to high school students.

Practical importance of the study

Today portfolio is gaining popularity as an assessment tool in the majority of spheres of education, probably, especially in language teaching. To apply it appropriately, it is necessary to know its advantages and disadvantages, the ways to overcome disadvantages, teacher attitude towards portfolios, etc. – the issues to which my dissertation is dedicated.

Structure of dissertation

The dissertation involves the following parts: Introduction, 3 chapters, conclusion, and appendix. There are 24 tables and 4 figures in it.

A Brief content of the dissertation

The first chapter: TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT – LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter deals with all kinds of educational assessment and their history. Assessment, evaluation, measurement and testing seem to be very much alike. Even some education

dictionaries use them synonymously and define one through another. Differences of used terms are indicated in this chapter.

The chapter also focuses on different assessment types in education, especially alternative and authentic assessments.

The functions of assessment of students' knowledge and skills, according to Kauchak and Eggen (2004, p. 493) are:

- motivation: teacher's evaluation and learner self-evaluation gives the learners a feeling of progress; if learners get high evaluation, they are pleased, if not – they get a stimulus to learn better;
- learning and correction: they say people learn through mistakes; learners try to improve their knowledge, to correct their own mistakes, not to repeat the same mistakes, while teachers try to find better ways to teach; tasks with keys are a good way for learning and self-evaluation;
- upbringing: being aware that checking and evaluation are regularly done by the teacher, students are stimulated to work regularly; they become responsible for their learning, disciplined and organized;
- optimization: based on its results, teachers can improve the educational process (apply new methods / activities, spend more time on certain materials), make it adequate to the life needs
- informing education policymakers and parents: they need to know what has to be improved
- research: educational research measures the efficiency of activities/methods through assessment

Assessment is one of the crucial components of instruction. People within the educational community, i.e. policymakers, educators, students, parents, administrators, have different ideas regarding the implementation of assessment strategies. Assessment is an ongoing and systematic process of looking at student success within and across courses by gathering, interpreting and using information about student learning for educational improvement.

Ideas of authenticity in teaching are discussed. Authentic teaching is precisely related to authenticity in learning. Authentic learning is touted as a powerful learning approach, particularly in the context of problem-based learning (Savery, 2006). Authentic assessments ask students to apply skills and abilities as they would in real life. One of the most popular today forms of authentic assessment is portfolio. The function of portfolio assessment is to measure progress of a particular process over specified length of time. Before beginning a

portfolio, the student must be aware of the goals s/he is trying to accomplish with this project. Otherwise, s/he will be confused as to what artifacts to include.

Portfolio assessment is important because it measures the progress of a student and examines the instructional process, not just the final product. Authentic educational assessments, such as portfolios, provide multiple levels of learning evidence and demonstrate what a student knows and how s/he uses this knowledge. Traditional assessments, such as oral and written (essay-type) exams are teacher-centered, rather subjective and may be subjected to corruption. Newer, but also already traditional enough assessments, such as objective tests, demonstrate how knowledge can be memorized, but portfolio assessments are student-centered and measure conceptual development over a period of time. If accompanied by a beforehand worked out clear assessment rubric, they may be made more or less objective.

In chapter I, section 1.7 much attention is paid to types of alternative assessment, their advantages and disadvantages. As Knapper and Wilcox (1995) have described, the recent origins of portfolio application in education can be traced back to the work of a committee of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), which was concerned in the 1970's with the undue reliance on student ratings for the evaluation of teaching.

Portfolio assessment enables measuring high-level skills with meaningful and realistic activities for students instead of measuring low-level skills in a limited-time, using multiple assessment methods instead of using only one measurement method, making assessment not sometimes but continuously, and determining the student's weaknesses and strengths. Besides, it also encourages students to participate in the assessment process actively and to effectively communicate with his teacher and parents. As portfolio assessment places student at the center of the teaching process, it enables students to be responsible for their learning. Portfolio assessment method also has many benefits for teacher, parents and students. Making use of portfolios effectively largely depends on using their purpose properly. Many of theoretical and empirical studies in the literature reported superiority of portfolio assessment to traditional assessment tools in education (Asturias, 1994).

In conclusion to the chapter, it is easy to see that all assessment types have advantages and disadvantages, and in majority of cases advantages of one form of assessment are disadvantages of the other, thus, we cannot abandon any of them, but it is certain that such forms as portfolio and performance assessment, as more student-centered and emphasizing real-life tasks, should gain an adequate place in the assessment system.

Chapter two: THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT TYPES ON THE RESULTS OF TEACHING EFL IN HIGH SCHOOL

The chapter deals with the impact of assessment types on the results of teaching EFL in high school. In this chapter I focused on age peculiarities of high school students in connection with assessment types used in EFL. High school learners are qualitatively different from younger learners. Using the right instructional strategies to maximize the learning advantages and addressing the learning challenges of high school learners can make all the difference in their success (Pennington, 2008).

It is easy to see that adolescents reach such a level of both mental and emotional development, such a level of independence that portfolio assessment is, on the one hand, plausible, and on the other hand, efficient for them. Portfolio assessment is really important for interaction between student and teacher. If the student possesses the peculiarities which are mentioned above, implementing of authentic assessment can be more efficient than the traditional one. In general assessment has a certain influence on the educational process. Among possible influences there are motivation, quality of skills, and improvement of teaching process.

Chapter III - RESEARCH CONCERNING TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGH SCHOOLS

The chapter is dedicated to pedagogical experiment - **research concerning comparison of efficiency of traditional and alternative assessment in English language teaching in high schools**. The goal of the research was to find out what kind of assessment is basically applied in high schools of Georgia, the awareness of teachers, school administrators and parents of alternative methods of assessment, their attitude to them, as well as to check our hypothesis – whether application of portfolio assessment can really have a positive impact on teaching English (the level of students' skills and their motivation). This is why my research includes a case study and an experiment. Both of them constitute quantitative studies, as measurements are applied.

In order to obtain information about the awareness of Georgian English **teachers** on portfolio assessment we held a questionnaire 100 teachers filled it in. The results showed that many teachers are unaware or not well informed of portfolio as an assessment tool in EFL (only 27% said they knew well what it is). What is interesting that a few teachers who said they knew what it is chose, however, a wrong definition, while some who said they didn't know what it is (probably, by exclusion method) chose the correct definition, which shows that reliability of results certainly isn't 100%. Some who are aware, however, do not apply it in practice, and even some who apply it (60%), are not satisfied (25% of those who have used it). Teachers who do not apply portfolio say it is difficult to assess (17% of those who answered "no"), time consuming (45%) and it is difficult to collect information (38%). Still, the results of the questionnaire are inspiring enough as teachers who like portfolio, find it creative, motivating, stimulating and imaginative – all features that traditional assessment lacks so much. Also 37% of respondents answered that they prefer a mixed form of assessment (opinion also shared by us). All this proves that spreading portfolio as assessment method requires time and effort of its proponents. Most teachers use traditional assessment (50%), few use performance and project assessment (10%), few, but a little more (15%) use portfolio assessment and many enough (25%) use a combined approach. It means that contemporary ways of assessment are slowly gaining place in the schools. Of course, to my mind the situation has to be changed in favor of mixed approach.

The results of questionnaire **for parents** show that the majority of parents rely on the traditional assessment (30%) and testing (25%). This is not surprising, as they are/may/need not be very much acquainted with innovations in education. They naturally support the way they were assessed and the assessment which has already become familiar. However, as they are among stockholders in education (they care about what and how their children are taught), they need to be better aware of the nature and benefits of innovations (sometimes mass media present all innovations in a dark light). But the fact that after a very brief information 25% of them supported the idea of combined way of assessment (proponent of which I am) and even 20% supported assessing children only through portfolio means that the view on this kind of assessment is not so negative, and it may improve with time, when it becomes widely known to society.

The results of questionnaire for school **administration** showed that 40% of respondents (8 administrators) answered that only traditional assessment is used in their schools, which is really too bad. 35% (7 administrators) said that they used a combination of traditional and contemporary methods. 20% (4 people) write that performance and project assessment is

used, and 5% (1 person) mentioned using portfolio. However, it means that 60% of schools use to this or that degree the contemporary methods, which is, finally, not so bad, especially taking into consideration the answers to the second question – all of them say they would like to use portfolio assessment in their schools. 45% rely on testing as a measure of students' skills level, however, they either were unable formulate the reason or did not care about answering this question.

Positive attitude towards portfolios was explained by respondents by its motivation character (60% - 12 respondents), stimulating nature (25% - 5 respondents) and creativity (15% - 3 respondents). Nobody named any reason for disliking portfolios. They were quite in disagreement concerning the right method to be used for students' assessment, which, from my viewpoint, emphasizes the fact that school administration should be better informed about the contemporary requirements towards assessment. Seven of them (35%) named as their preference testing, 6 (30%) - the combined assessment, five (25%) – portfolio, and two (10%) – traditional assessment.

Experiment procedure

I also applied an experiment comparing traditional assessment and one of authentic assessments (portfolio assessment). It was held with 11th graders (11-A, 11-B, 11-C,) at Private Demirel College in 2011/2012.

I used quantitative methods. Survey as a quantitative method was used to collect data on general background and evaluative form of the instruction. Experiment (with one control and two experimental groups) was held, with the control group taught without the application of portfolios, while in experimental groups two different kinds of portfolios were used (show-case portfolio in one group and teacher-student portfolio – in the other). Otherwise teaching in all three groups was identic – same number of hours (4 lessons per week, 40 minutes each) same textbooks (Aim – High by S. Iannuzzi, P.Kelly, Oxford University Press, 2011), same methods of material presentation, same activities and assessment. The textbook contains portfolio assessment tasks, but very few. At the end of each unit there is a part where students self-assess their knowledge in order to check students' progress in different skills. Though the book involves portfolio assessment, it is not very much emphasized and due to this reason, teachers were not using it before my experiment. A pre-test, 2 while-tests and a post-test were used to measure and compare the scores of the students. Both methods aimed at revealing the results before and after experimental instruction in all groups.

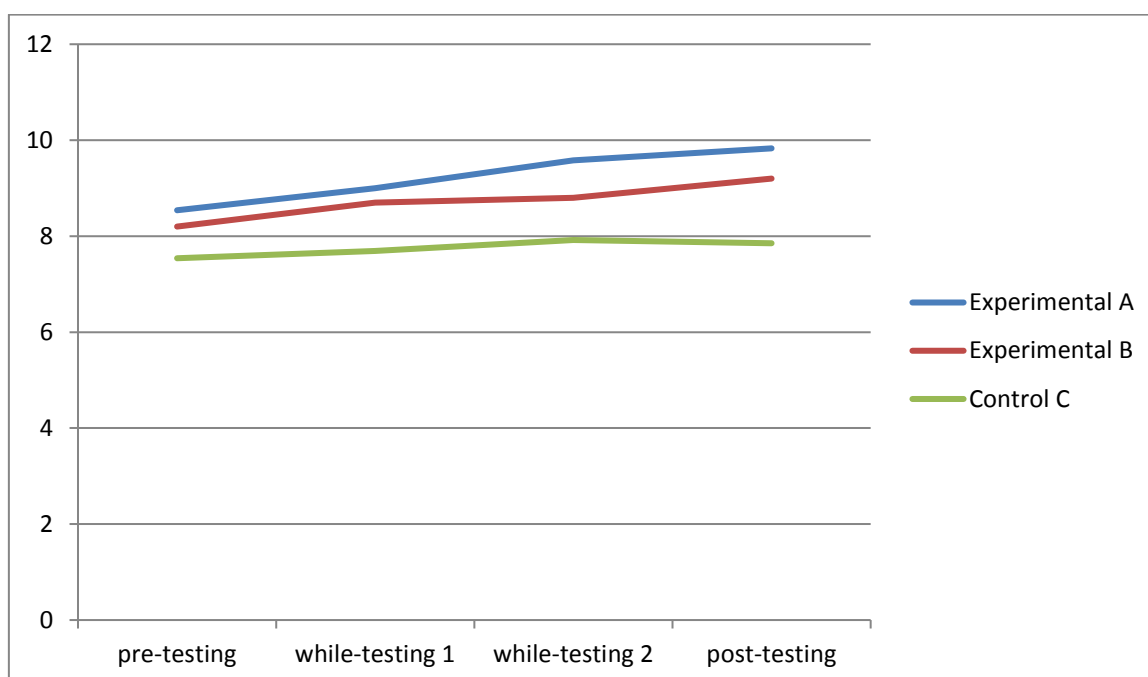
The **goal of the experiment** was to see whether the offered by me hypothesis is confirmed. In other words, I needed to see whether educational portfolio, combined with traditional ways of assessment (oral, written, objective testing) is an effective means of assessment. The reasons of efficiency of portfolio assessment are that it gives a more accurate measure of student's achievement and it contributes more to students' progress.

The aims of the experiment were the following:

- to increase student motivation in experimental groups through the application of portfolio,
- to provide students' active involvement in learning
- to stimulate students to take the responsibility for their learning
- to develop a positive attitude toward all skills in English,
- to raise the students' general language competence
- to encourage students to study and work independently
- to give a chance to the students to reflect about their work and knowledge
- to encourage teacher-student conferencing

The methodology underwent a 15-week-long action research for (in the second semester of 2011-2012 academic year). The participants, the procedure, and the results are discussed separately in subsections.

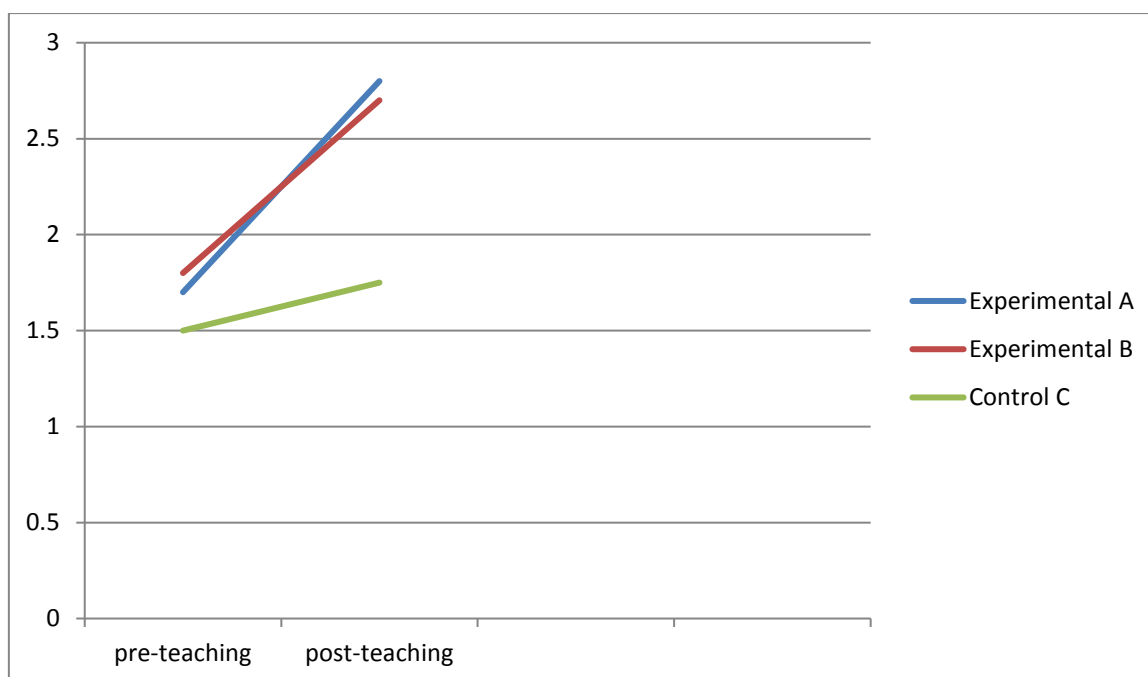
Table 1. The results of the experiment: students' skill's level change



One can notice fast and stable growth in experimental group A, relatively fast and stable growth in group B and slow growth and then even a little drop in group C.

What we can see from numeric data is that the median in group C is not increasing and the mode and the mean are increasing slowly, and the mean even drops a bit in the end, so the results in this class are not as good as in the experimental classes. Besides, the standard deviation in three cases out of four is above one (in a 10-point assessment system), which means that the class was rather heterogeneous in the beginning of the experiment and remained so till its end.

Figure 1. Motivation change during the experiment



The average level of motivation has increased in control group a little ($1.5 \rightarrow 1.75$) but not as much as in the two experiment groups (A: $1.7 \rightarrow 2.8$; B: $1.8 \rightarrow 2.7$).

Thus, we can say that the results of the experiment are in agreement with my hypothesis that a combination of traditional and portfolio assessment yields higher motivation and, correspondingly, higher level of language skills than purely traditional assessment. Between the two types of portfolio assessment compared show-case portfolio turned to be both more motivating and effective than teacher/student type of portfolio.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Methods of assessment are a very important part of teaching methods, a kind of a “crown” demonstrating students’ success and failure, motivating them to improve and just to learn. The functions of assessment of students’ knowledge and skills are: motivation; learning and correction, upbringing, optimization, informing, research.

However, traditional assessment methods (oral answer /written essay, testing involving close-ended/objective and open-ended/subjective questions) are not authentic (these tasks are not part of real-life language applications). Due to this some students may be highly assessed, but unable to communicate in the real-life situations in the target language adequately, while other students, receiving low grades, effectively communicate. This is why contemporary methods of assessment (including portfolio) are necessary in order to provide the students with linguistic, sociolinguistic, linguopragmatic, linguocultural, and strategic competences they will need in real life.

2. Based on literature analysis I came to conclusion that the “weighty” advantages of portfolio assessment are: it is student-centered, promotes student self-assessment and collaborative assessment, is less stressful, enhances student motivation, has a systematic character, and focuses on improvement, not on comparison with others.
3. The analysis of research on this topic showed me that all methods of assessment have certain advantages and disadvantages. Thus, none of them should be abandoned or chosen as the only way to assess students’ knowledge and skills. What I recommend to language teachers is to assess students’ knowledge of language through a combination of traditional and authentic assessment. In our experiment, for example, we assigned 70% of assessment to traditional assessment and 30% - to portfolio assessment.
4. The types of alternative/authentic assessment viewed in the references are show-case portfolio, teacher-student portfolio and teacher alternative assessment portfolio. The format in which portfolios are done may be on-paper or electronic. As I believe that teacher alternative assessment portfolio is, in fact, a kind of teacher-student portfolio, I concentrated the experiment on two types of portfolios: show-case and teacher-student. On-paper format was applied due to unavailability to some students of computers at home.
5. The case study dealing with awareness and attitudes of shareholder (administration, teachers and parents) towards portfolio as a means of assessment of language skills showed that:
 - many administrators are not well aware about contemporary methods of assessment, their advantages and disadvantages, and have not clear opinion about these methods.
 - there are not too many administrators who apply or at least would like to apply contemporary methods of assessment.

- many teachers are not well informed of portfolio as an assessment tool in EFL; not all those who are aware, however, not apply it in practice, and even some who apply it are not satisfied. It means that teachers need to be better aware of innovations in methods of teaching and assessment. The case study showed that the majority of teachers who are well aware about portfolio are satisfied with it and are ready to go on using it, alongside with the traditional assessment.
 - the majority of parents rely on the traditional assessment and testing. Naturally, they support the way they were assessed and the assessment which has already become familiar. Today parents, as the especially interested in education results part of society, are listened to when educational planning is done. Correspondingly, they need to be informed by the teachers and administration about the advantages of the innovative methods of teaching and assessment, applied to their children.
6. The experiment held by me showed that a combination of traditional and portfolio assessment yields higher motivation and, correspondingly, higher level of language skills than purely traditional assessment. Between the two types of portfolio assessment compared show-case portfolio turned to be both more motivating and effective than teacher/student type of portfolio.