



The Potential for Implementing Democratic Assessment through Authentic Assessment Practices in the Context of Kurdistan Region Public University English Departments

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Abstract

This study explored the potential for implementing democratic assessment through conducting authentic assessment practices in three university English departments in the Kurdistan Region. Democratic assessment could be tremendously influential in education as it allows teacher-student negotiations about educational issues, resulting in making progress in education. Specifically, the study investigated the nature of teacher-student relation, the power of EFL students in discussing and making decisions about how to assess them, the provision of assessment ethicality through student accommodation, and the educational benefits of democratic assessment. All these issues were investigated by employing two research methods: interviews with 15 university EFL teachers and three focus group interviews, epistemologically adopting interpretivism and phenomenological approach. The findings revealed that, firstly, democratic assessment through authentic assessment practices were implemented along with satisfactory teacher-student relations, but still inadequate, unplanned, and students were not befriended. Secondly, it discovered that, although teachers believed in students' rights to discuss assessment issues with their teachers, students' power in discussing and making decisions as to how to assess them were limited in terms of disregarding students' opinions and being indifferent about their

preferences. Thirdly, participants believed in implementing various authentic assessment practices, instead of one shot exams, to provide fair assessments leading to assessment ethicality. Fourthly, to varying degrees, all the participants admitted, perceived, or believed that democratic assessment could have significant benefits for teaching and learning English language, achieving fairer, more accurate, more reliable, and more valid assessments accompanied by multi-dimensional feedback to students, resulting in more learning progress.

Keywords: Democratic Assessment, Authentic Assessment Practices, Critical Language Testing, Assessment Ethicality, Fair Assessment, Student Accommodation

1. Introduction

Democratic assessment is a system of assessment that endeavours the sharing of knowledge and power between teachers and students in a horizontal power relation (Shohamy, 2001). To this end, this system generally reconsiders the form of summative tests of traditional language assessment so that learners can be given a more active role in assessment processes (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009), which has initiated more power for them. Therefore, democratic assessment is perhaps more ethical, practical, and multi-beneficial for students and all assessment stakeholders; and it could be the most moral approach; since, as an alternative, it allows the inclusion of voices that have been banned from negotiating educational issues historically (Howe, 1994 as cited in Lynch, 1997). One party of those banned voices have been learners. That is why EFL teachers should be aware of some essential assessment aspects such as learners' attitudes on assessment procedures and fairness of assessment results (The EALTA Executive Committee, 2006). Teachers can be informed by learners' attitudes through receiving their views on education processes (which includes assessment procedures as well). Such informing could be enhanced by the implementation of authentic assessment practices that can alter and enrich learners' attitudes towards learning, increase their linguistic self-confidence (Chirimbu, 2013), and encourage the construction of their selves as subjects of assessment rather than its objects (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009). In turn, this could be most achievable in an environment of democratic interaction between teachers, students, and other assessment stakeholders on matters of assessment, subsequently permitting students to utilise their strengths by allowing them to select suitable ways for displaying their knowledge, understanding, and skills (Grabin, 2009). Committing to students' needs and preferences in such a way can most possibly lead to assessment procedures that best display the level of students more

accurately, reliably, validly, and ethically. This subsequent accurate, reliable, valid, and ethical assessment results are essential in education as they have powerful implications that can be used for improving the quality of teaching and learning (Wolf, Herman, Bachman, Bailey, & Griffin, 2008). Democratic assessment can therefore be profoundly effective in developing teaching methods, learning activities, and assessment practices; overall, increasing students' learning.

Concerning empowering students, authentic assessment, which helps in the implementation of democratic assessment as its instruments, also encourages students to assume responsibility for their learning and the assessment of that learning (Finch, 2002). Assuming such responsibility stems from that authentic assessment in university education can meet their individual needs (Hamayan, 1995) through its various practices that can be adapted for various contexts in accordance with students' needs and interests (Tannenbaum, 1996). This can be coupled with a democratic assessment system, which allows test-takers and local bodies to be more involved in the assessment issues (Dai Quang, 2007) in order to stick to students' needs and interests even more. That is why, academically speaking, authentic assessment practices can probably achieve democratic assessment more successfully in various contexts including the context of this study. Hence, this study investigated the potential for implementing a democratic system of assessment through using authentic assessment practices in the context of Kurdistan Region university English departments, including its ethical, practical, multi-beneficial, and challenging aspects from the perspectives of university EFL teachers. Teachers' perspectives are remarkably important since their beliefs impact and form their classroom practices (Wang, 2011). Pedagogically speaking, this research could be potentially effective in adopting and developing a democratic system of assessment, which can be significant because utilizing the potential of democratic assessment could possibly promote teaching, learning, and assessment of English language in the English departments of the Kurdistan Region universities.

2. Literature Review

As a general overview, democratic assessment gives a more active role to learners in assessment, gives them more power, and allows to include their voices as well as their teachers' and other assessment stakeholders' opinions in negotiating educational matters (Howe, 1994 as cited in Lynch, 1997). This creates shared knowledge and power between them (Shohamy, 2001), and can be most likely accomplished through providing democratic

interactions among all assessment stakeholders (Grabin, 2009). Shohamy, who is a figure in critical language testing and democratic assessment, confirms the significance of involving all assessment stakeholders by saying that her article (Shohamy, 2001) is not calling for the abolition of testing but it is for practising democratic assessment, which requires the involvement of different stakeholders including test-takers. For such an involvement, Shohamy (2001) explains that democratic assessment requires collaboration, shared authority, and the monitoring of undemocratic uses of tests. This is in line with Freire's advocating of an anti-authoritarian, dialogical and interactive approach to examine relational power issues for students (Chandella and Troudi, 2013). Freire's advocacy for giving more power and more active role to students also supports Shohamy's democratic assessment and her critical language testing principles considerably.

However, Foucault thinks that substituting democratic assessment for traditional testing cannot alter the power relations, if learners cannot control the elements of portfolio (an important method of assessment that focuses on the collection of students' authentic assessment practices that show their progress) (O'Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996, as cited in Atac, 2012). Portfolio, which features the best work of a learner, which is also mostly selected by learner himself/herself, become powerfully motivating for all students (Hamayan, 1995) because students are given power to shape the portfolio processes and forms (Lynch and Shaw, 2005). Foucault's mentioning of portfolio is important because it is expected to be done mostly by students including the processes of doing it and its structure, which gives them more power than other assessment practices.

Shohamy's critical language testing principles are in accordance with Shohamy's guidelines for democratic assessment (Broad, 2001), and both promote the democratization of assessment. These principles foster the discourse of ethicality in language assessment, which focus on questioning the values, agendas, needs, purposes, intended goals, and the actual uses of tests in language assessments (Bachman, 2005). Questioning these issues in assessment helps in achieving a shared knowledge and power between teachers and students and provides ethicality and fairness for them. Concerning the accuracy, validity, and reliability of assessment within a democratic system of assessment, the consideration of multiple sources of evidence for measuring a construct is one of the effective elements. This is because it is assumed that tests are limited in what they can assess, hence the essentiality of various other assessment procedures that should be employed to get those areas that could not be tapped by tests (Shohamy, 2001).

To further confirm that democratic assessment needs authentic assessment practices for implementation, we need to say that any system of assessment needs procedures for implementation. In this regard, Shohamy (2001) confirms that assessors should think about how democratic assessment can be carried out and what new methodologies need to be used and developed to implement it. Democratic assessment, as a distinct approach and a system of assessment, needs authentic assessment practices as instruments for its implementation, since it has abundant variety of practices and has features that are in agreement with democratic assessment. Some of the basic practices of authentic assessment in language learning are oral interviewing, writing samples, projects, presentation, teacher observation, and portfolios (O'Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996, as cited in Atac, 2012). In conducting those practices, authentic assessment requires learners to demonstrate effective performances with the knowledge they have already gained (Atac, 2012), which would be effective in promoting students' learning, empowers them, and develops democratic assessment.

Employing various assessment procedures of authentic assessment in assessing students can also provide fairness for them (Troudi et al., 2009). One of the meanings of fairness in assessment is that students' opinions are considered (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009), which helps in fulfilling fairness by structuring assessment in a way that maximizes ethical behaviour and shifts the power relations between the assessor and the assessed (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009). Balancing power between teachers and students by taking learners' opinions into account fulfils democratic assessment even more. What further balances power relations is the collaboration in democratic assessment practices, which can lead to shared power, and hence empower learners rather than subjugate them (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009). This would overall support Foucault's consideration of ethics as the practice of freedom (Lynch and Shaw, 2005). Overall, freedom in assessment can be achieved by considering the opinions of empowered students, expressed through democratic interactions between teachers and students, which subsequently enable learners to take more responsibility of the procedures of assessing them.

3. Theoretical Background of Democratic Assessment

Generally, there are some principles for any kind of democracy, democratic assessment, for example, has some principles proposed as an effort to create it. These are based on the elements of liberal democracy denoting generally that: “it is rule of the people, by the people, and for the people, and today the ‘people’ is taken to mean everybody, without the unspoken restrictions that formerly excluded peasants, women, or slaves” (Taylor, 1998: 143 as cited in Shohamy, 2001). Applying those principles to democratic assessment system necessitates applying critical language testing “to monitor the uses of tests as instruments of power, to challenge their assumptions, to examine their consequences”, to conduct and administer testing in collaboration and cooperation with those tested, and protect test-takers’ rights (Taylor, 1998: 143 as cited in Shohamy, 2001). These match generally with the endeavours of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical research that attempt to enlighten, empower, and emancipate people from oppression (Brown and Jones 2001). Critical theory in particular “seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007: 26).

Academically speaking, the critical perspective generally helps to establish an assessment context in which learners’ voices are given more room, in which the traditional power relations are also recognized and they are made more flexible and reversible (Lynch, 2001). Influenced by those critical theories, democratic assessment tries to enlighten, empower, and emancipate students from inequality, the abuses of assessment results, and the oppression of undemocratic behaviours of assessment procedures, as well as provide individual freedom for them. This creates a new emerging assessment culture which goes side by side with the critical theories and democratic assessment in allowing students to be active participants in developing assessment procedures (Lynch, 2001).

Among the critical theories, critical language testing is probably the most effective theory that has directly underpinned democratic assessment and authentic assessment together and subsequently supports the establishment of a democratic system of assessment. This is because critical language testing, especially its principles, emphasise empowering students and the provision of students’ rights and adequate teacher-student relations and interactions during the processes of education. One of the potential benefits of authentic assessment is the increasing of the interaction between teachers and students, and thus addressing diverse learning styles (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). This is compatible with three principles

of Shohamy's critical language testing that encourage two important aspects of democratic assessment: the involvement of various assessment stakeholders and multiple procedures of assessment. Those principles are presented in Lynch (2001): 1. Critical language testing explores the effect and involvement of a range of stakeholders, 2. It challenges the primacy of testing as an assessment instrument, and calls for multiple procedures for interpreting individuals' knowledge, and 3. It challenges the psychometric traditions and considers interpretive approaches to assessment, which allow for different interpretations rather than a single absolute truth.

Overall, the tenets of the above theories, which constitute the theoretical framework of this study, influenced democratic and authentic assessment tremendously, and can most possibly lead to a more effective democratic system of assessment. All these can be possible especially by the negotiations and interactions among all assessment stakeholders particularly between teachers, students, and peers; hence, the inevitability of democracy in the classroom for their negotiations and interactions to be wider and more in-depth. If not, a democratic approach to assessment cannot possibly be developed through authentic assessment and may not achieve its educational goals.

4. Problem and Rationale

Because authentic assessments would fulfil a more democratic assessment system, by which test-takers and local bodies could be more involved (Dai Quang, 2007), the investigation of EFL teachers' beliefs about the potential of adopting democratic assessment through the implementation of authentic assessments was a necessity in the context of this study. That was due to the fact that, as this study revealed, there was only a limited following of democratic assessment in the English departments, though implemented by most teachers. The study focused on teachers that could be profoundly significant because their beliefs and perceptions have a great influence on shaping most of their classroom practices (Wang, 2011). This would be also a contribution to the continuous research on understanding how teachers' cognitive and affective aspects interact in forming and determining what they do (Borg, 2006). Teachers' beliefs and perceptions would possibly show the potential for democratic assessment in the context of the universities of the Kurdistan Region. This is based on their observation and analyses of what situations have happened and is happening, and their anticipation of what situation would come up when such system of assessment is adopted.

Overall, it is taken for granted that adopting a democratic model of assessment through authentic assessment practices is important for all assessment stakeholders especially for teachers and students but its success varies from context to context. Therefore, for understanding how such a system of assessment works within different EFL contexts, empirical research should be conducted to examine its potential and the extent of its success of implementation in each context. This is because authentic assessment practices, as tools of democratic assessment, are relatively new and challenging (Atac, 2012) and the challenges would be different in different contexts. Also, these assessment practices represent the highly complex and authentic teaching-learning-assessing interface (Tzagari, 2004). Additionally, the authentic assessments that are conducted mostly by students like self-assessment, peer-assessment, projects, reflective journals, and portfolios enable students to be active assessors, by which they are granted institutional respect and trust (Finch, 2002), but these assessment practices are not easy to organize and produce (Baker, 2010), and they are fundamental in democratic assessment. There is therefore a great need for empirical research on how students can conduct them, what are the difficulties they encounter, and to what extent they are successful in conducting those assessments.

Discovering many beneficial aspects of democratic assessment and strengthening its positive points in a variety of dimensions, and all the other issues related to the implementation of this assessment necessitate many studies on democratic assessment and its instruments: authentic assessment practices, which constitute the basic aspect of the rationale for undertaking this study. The findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations of this study can probably lead to some developments in the implementation of democratic assessment, which is another important side of the rationale for this study. Therefore, this research can be pedagogically significant as it perhaps leads to implementing democratic assessment more sufficiently by EFL teachers and EFL students.

To investigate the potential for democratic assessment through authentic assessments in the dimensions of the teacher-student relationships and interactions, its benefits, its ethicality and fairness, its overall success, as well as its challenges in the context of this study, this research looks for credible answers for the following four questions through the beliefs of EFL teachers. The following research questions are well justifiable because of their current academic necessity, especially in the context of this study - the three university English departments in the Kurdistan Region.

1. What is the nature of the teacher-student relationship and their interactions?
2. To what extent, EFL students have the power of discussing and making decisions about the methods of assessing them?
3. To what degree, ethicality and fairness in assessment can be obtained through the implementation of democratic assessment?
4. What are the educational benefits of democratic assessment?

5. Methodology

Considering how context can influence teachers as to how to experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) needs an understanding of teaching experience from the views of those who experience it in the context (Mertens, 2010). That is why teachers' reflection on their EFL students and following their progress enable them to anticipate what would be the result of adopting a democratic system of assessment. To this end, interviews were employed as instruments for data collection, through which all the participants of this current study attempted to explain and describe their beliefs, observations, and expectations about students in the context of their assessment system in many dimensions. These were in line with the informing paradigm of this research which is interpretivism that sees social reality as is created by people's minds and their individual consciousness, as they are free and creative in producing their environments (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Interpretivists believe that subjectivity is a key feature that distinguishes human beings from inanimate objects as things give different meanings to different people. This is because people are affected by their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Wilson, 2009) as well as their culture, gender, and context with possibly no correspondence with an objective reality (Pine, 2008). In accordance with interpretivism, this research followed a phenomenological approach that necessitates to situate meaning units in relationship to context and structure (Anderson, 2007).

5.1 Data Collection

The participants were 15 in-service EFL teachers from the three university English departments in the Kurdistan Region, and through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews, I could obtain responses that produced adequate data for my research. With the collected data, I could investigate the use and potential of adopting democratic

assessment through authentic assessment practices as widely as possible in three public university English departments in three areas of the Kurdistan Region that can somehow represent all the English departments in the Region and can possibly generalize about them.

By interviews, interpretivist researchers can get rich data to understand what is taking place from the views of participants (Radnor, 2002). Interviews can also give various kinds of data such as personal perceptions, opinions, ideas, experiences, and preferences (Wallace, 1998). For these reasons, in this study, firstly, interviews with 15 teachers were held, and secondly, this followed up with three focus group interviews. All the participants of this research were volunteers, signed the consent form before participating. Their personal data were fully protected by providing anonymity and confidentiality by the researcher.

5.2 Data Analysis

For finding and analysing the themes by the processes of coding, categorising, and thematising the transcripts of the interviews and the focus group interviews of this study, I tried to stick to the following procedures:

1. I followed the Kvale's seven steps of interview research, which are designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, thematising, verifying, and reporting (Knox & Burkard, 2009).
2. For segmenting the interview data into crucial analytical components (Grabin, 2009). I used words and short phrases for coding (Saldaña, 2012).
3. I used concept maps to identify the overarching themes that need discovering interconnections between their concepts (Daley, 2004).
4. For doing thematization, I also made use of the 15 steps of thematic content analysis of interviews of Anderson (2007).

6. Findings and Discussions

After the data analysis, this study has reached some pedagogically significant findings. In the following subsections, the findings of this study have been reported, which are related to the nature of teacher-student relation in the classroom, the power of EFL students in discussing and making decisions about the practices of assessing them, the multiple authentic assessment practices for achieving ethicality in democratic assessment through

student accommodation, and the benefits of implementing democratic assessment for teaching and learning.

6.1 The Nature of Teacher-Student Relation in the Classroom

It can be said that the basis of democratic assessment through authentic assessment practices could be the relationship and interaction between teachers and students. Both Delett et al. (2001) and Lucas (2007) discovered that portfolios (an important type of authentic assessment that includes other assessment practices as well) create an interactive assessment that involve both teachers and learners, and thereby forging a partnership in the learning process (Delett et al., 2001). Because of significance of teacher-student relation and interaction in a democratic assessment context, and because it was related to all research questions, they were explored deeply and multi-dimensionally in this study. In this regard, all the interview participants (15 of 15) believed that their relations with their students were satisfactory to a good extent and they were friendly with them, but the majority of them (13 of 15) clarified further that they did not befriend them. Those teachers believed that they should not be students' friends because in some teaching, learning, and assessment practices, students would possibly exploit that sort of relation. For example, Honia stated: "I am not a friend to them but I am trying to be friendly with them always." Bafren clarified the consequence of teacher-student friendship: "If you become their friend, something will happen, they are not going to be good students."

The fear of not befriending students might constitute an obstacle to establishing an adequate and successful democratic assessment system. Such fear could be originated from the teachers' and students' misunderstanding of each other's mind-sets as they might exploit and take advantage of each other improperly. A wider and closer teacher-student relationship might be necessary for a more successful implementation of some language teaching, learning, and assessment practices. The same as in the framework of democratic assessment, I believe that a satisfactory teacher-student relationship that allows an adequate interaction for cooperation in the processes of assessment could be more effective to contribute in promoting students' learning and establish a successful democratic system of assessment. Such teacher-student relationship would be in accordance with the critical approaches that are the underpinning theories of democratic assessment. Additionally, this also accords with socio-cultural approaches to learning in which zone of proximal development (ZPD), mediation, and scaffolding are followed through the interaction between teachers and students or students and their smarter peers. In Vygotsky's

sociocultural framework, particularly ZPD, cognitive development occurs by language-mediated activities through interactions with people who have more advanced cognitive abilities such as teachers or smarter students (Ishihara, 2009).

6.2 The Power of University EFL Students in Discussing and Making Decisions about the Practices of Assessing Them

An issue which is closely related to the teacher-student relation and interaction is the teacher-student discussions about making decisions as to how to assess students, which significantly increases the power of EFL students. These discussions and making decisions could be more achievable through authentic assessment practices, by which more teacher-student interactions would be encouraged and facilitated in the framework of democratic assessment. Concerning this, as has been mentioned in the previous section, there could be insufficiency of direct and ongoing negotiations between university EFL teachers and their EFL students due to the fear of having a close relation and avoiding befriending students by teachers. The negotiations would be usually about the most contextually suitable ways of assessing students' ELP, which is critically effective for them, if students participate in selecting them. Resolving this inadequacy of negotiation necessitates following Freire's anti-authoritarian, dialogical and interactive approach for the relational power issues for students and his praxis for a better learning environment (Chandella and Troudi, 2013). This also fulfils what Sanderson, the provost of Union University in Tennessee, recommended that in the context of Kurdistan Region there should be a distinctive model of quality assurance, in which democracy, transparency, and accountability must be highlighted (MHESR/KRG, 2010a).

Regarding the power of EFL students in discussing and making decisions about the practices of assessing them, it was discovered that apparently students had been given that right by teachers without any departmental rules but still so limited in terms of sticking to students' preferences. Bafren explained the situation realistically saying: "It is a good idea but according to our system, they [students] have no right." As a researcher and a member of the teaching staff of an English department in the context of this study, I could support Bafren because according to the system of our English departments, students had no right to discuss assessment procedures with their teachers, except having the right to see test formats and samples prior to exams, which was imposed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MHESR/KRG, 2010b), as well as determining the timetable of exams. Going in line with the English departments, a few teachers (2 of 15) believed in not allowing

students to express their opinions about assessment. They believed that assessment knowledge is part of the assessment literacy which is possessed by teachers and assessment experts rather than students. For this, Zeno explained: “The knowledge of testing and how to put a test is the knowledge of the teacher; the teacher should have enough knowledge about how to design a test and assessment.” Barez supported Zeno claiming that students’ opinions had no use: “Nowadays, do you think that having feedback on the part of students is successful? No.” The feedback from students was about the methods of teaching, learning, and assessment; it was part of some attempts for reforming education including ELP assessment in the Kurdistan Region. For example, one of the aims of the Quality Assurance Programme related to assessment is the modification of the ELP assessment by committing to international standards of assessment, which has brought about some limited reforms due to the limited actions taken; one of the reforms is teachers have to provide samples of tests to students prior to exams (MHESR/KRG, 2010b).

Nevertheless, the majority of participants (13 of 15) believed that students should have the right to discuss assessment issues with their teachers and department senior administrators, although they admitted that students might not have enough knowledge about the aspects of ELP assessment. Teachers’ beliefs about students’ rights to discuss ELP assessment would enhance democratic assessment as a most moral approach in which students and other assessment stakeholders are allowed to negotiate educational issues (Howe, 1994 cited in Lynch, 1997). More than half of the participants (8 of 15) sometimes but not always stick to their students’ preferences when they found it appropriate because students’ suggestions were not always that suitable as those teachers claimed. In this respect, Darya stated: “I am getting all the suggestions, and I am taking the most appropriate ones.” Shorsh added: “Not always, sometimes students are not quite aware of what is most useful for them.” Bestun and Hawkar gave their students the right of discussing assessment issues but both do not stick to students’ preferences because of students’ disagreement among themselves. Sozyar listened to the students’ opinions but “not their preferences because what you expect from students! They [students] say: ‘We want easiest questions’...” (Sozyar). The beliefs of the participants and their listening to students’ opinions means that there is a sort of democracy in terms of discussing the assessment matters with the students and trying to understand them. However, there is a clear shortcoming concerning teachers’ disregarding of students’ opinions and their indifference about their preferences. That was mostly resulted from their belief that students do not have enough knowledge about assessment and their disagreement on the assessment procedures.

However, approximately half of the participants (7 of 15) believed in and allowed a wider teacher-student interaction in the classroom that enabled students to discuss and express their opinions about numerous teaching, learning, assessment, and testing issues more freely. For example, Shorsh explained:

“The point is ‘do you let the students speak their mind in matters of your style of teaching and things like that?’ I always try to keep things formal but I let them express their opinion related to matters of teaching style, matters of assessment, and matters of testing. So, I think that makes the relation friendly.”

Bafren added: “They are free to ask questions; they are free even to evaluate my assessment.” Those participants’ statements and their treatment with students indicated a higher level of democracy in implementing their authentic assessment practices, which allowed students to do some activities they preferred. As Sozyar put it: “There is more freedom in assessment, so you [student] choose the activity that you like.” This contributes in permitting students to utilise their strengths, which includes allowing students to choose suitable ways among a variety of tasks to display their understanding, knowledge, and skills, which in turn can bring about democratic interaction among assessment stakeholders, especially, teachers and students on matters of assessment (Grabin, 2009). When students are given the right to select their preferred practices of authentic assessment, “they will be responsible for what they are doing” (Basoz). This can be enhanced by promoting negotiations and dialogues between test-takers and assessors (Singh, 2006), in which students’ opinions should be considered (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009) through piloting tests by their opinions (The EALTA Executive Committee, 2006), which encourages learners to regard assessment as a shared responsibility (Azarnoosh, 2013).

The beliefs of participants mentioned above demonstrated some evidences of following authentic assessment practices that probably commenced democratic assessment though inadequate but still provided a sort of freedom and democracy for learners. As a starting point, such beliefs and assessment practices of EFL university teachers would have a strong potential for implementing a more complete democratic assessment. If achieved adequately, these aspects of assessment could be in line with several theories that are related to the socio-cultural approaches; these are the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic theories of learning. In these theories, the trends in psychology focuses on collaboration and social dimensions of students’ learning (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009). For example, within the socio-cultural approaches, teaching, learning, and assessment are contextualized

by the social interactions between learners and some aspects of their environments: conceptual tools, physical tools, and people (Scarino, 2013). Constructivism also encourages democratization of assessment because constructivist teaching is more student-centred, requiring learners to be active participants in learning and assessment. According to constructivism, teachers should adjust their teaching practices in accordance with students' demands (Grabin, 2009). In constructivism, "teachers need to cultivate a safe, encouraging environment where students will feel comfortable to express their own ideas and develop their own concepts" (Airasian & Walsh, 1997: 448, as cited in Grabin, 2009).

6.3 Multiple Authentic Assessment Practices for Achieving Ethicality in Democratic Assessment through Student Accommodation

Teachers should follow a variety of authentic assessment practices to ensure fair assessments for their students (Troudi et al., 2009). Ethicality includes fairness (Lynch, 1997) and absence of bias (Bachman, 2005) among other important features. Regarding this, since teachers are responsible legally for any activity or incident happening in the classroom, which includes moral responsibility (Feldman, 2007), they should employ various authentic assessment practices to help them address ethicality goals (Lynch, 1997). This is obviously because multiple assessment practices of authentic assessment are fundamental in accommodating students, as it provides many options for them to select democratically resulting in ascertaining their rights and fairness; hence, assessment ethicality in the framework of democratic assessment. In this regard, most participants (11 of 15) believed in implementing various authentic assessment practices to provide fair assessments for their students, instead of one shot exams. They preferred multiple resources of data to be used in assessing students; thus, leading to fairness and ethicality, as Hawkar said: "I cannot assess, decide the destiny of a student for one assessment," Honia supported: "Two main tests are not enough. Some students due to some personal problems, sometimes, they may fail one of these two; their scores will be very low." Sawen agreed with them strongly saying: "a student can be sick at that day or having an accident, so you can't assess the student on that day [exam day]." Basoz suggested the solution: "The multiple authentic assessment practices are fairer because if the students could not make it in the test, they can make it in their performances, their assignments, their presentations." That is why authentic assessment provides potentially more ethical, equitable, and democratic approach, when assessment results value the individual diversity of students (May and Hornberger, 2008).

Those same participants (11 of 15) also believed in that students should have full rights to do all the practices of authentic assessment and this issue must be included in the curriculum of their English departments as an effective part to ensure ethicality in the assessment processes. For instance, Bafren said: “I think we apply the philosophy of learner-centred teaching. They [students] should have rights to, they should have opportunity to present how they want and express their ideas.” Students should be able to show what they have learned in diverse ways, through providing them with a variety of tasks to be chosen by them, which accommodates their individual needs as well (Grabin, 2009). Accommodating students’ needs will definitely achieve assessment ethicality for them.

The teachers’ beliefs in giving rights to students in selecting from the multiple practices of authentic assessment would achieve assessment fairness and ethicality for students and enhance the implementation of democratic assessment in the context of this study. This is directly in line with critical language pedagogy which emphasizes that learning outcomes should be assessed in various ways, furthermore, different learners need to be assessed in different ways (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009). The teacher participants of Troudi et al. (2009) also believed that learners must benefit from various assessment practices; they were also aware of utilizing various authentic assessment practices for assessing students as a way to provide fair assessment and testing for them. Troudi et al. (2009) matches Shohamy et al. (2008), who supports that various authentic assessment practices are essential to provide fair and valid outcomes. Therefore, teachers with good assessment literacy should have the ability to utilize multiple assessment practices, and having minimal bias (Newfields, 2006).

6.4 The Benefits of Implementing Democratic Assessment for Teaching and Learning English language

As the above three sections revealed, the benefits of democratic assessment through authentic assessment practices for teaching and learning could not be denied pedagogically due to some predominant characteristics they have in the processes of education that create some significant positive influences. But still these benefits, characteristics, processes, and influences should be explored in numerous dimensions for instructional purposes. To various degrees, all the participants of this current study (15 of 15) admitted, perceived, or believed that a satisfactory teacher-student relation and interaction, giving more power to EFL students in discussing and making decisions about ELP assessment, providing them

with multiple authentic assessment practices, achieving ethicality, and accommodating students in the framework of democratic assessment could have significant benefits for teaching and learning English language.

More specifically, most participants (11 of 15) considered the provision of diverse authentic assessment practices for students and giving them the right of selecting those practices based on their preferences as one of the most influential benefit of democratic assessment to promote ELT. They believed that this would be a starting point in accommodating students according to their needs and could make them be involved in the teaching and learning process as they show their knowledge and skills by their preferred assessment practices, by which their learning would be improved and their assessment would be fairer, more accurate, and more valid. In this respect, Bafren stated: “This [democratic assessment through authentic assessments] will engage all the students,” as it is “very much important because simply you can say that psychologically you are treating different people” (Sozyar); therefore, “it should be part of your teaching methods” (Shorsh). What is deeply in line with democratic assessment is the use of teaching practices in which students are involved in their learning by employing many interesting activities (mostly authentic assessment practices), which is effective in sustaining students’ attention; this is according to many studies reviewed by Raymond (2008). In a democratic assessment system and through utilizing authentic assessment practices, most students can have more than one opportunity to display their abilities by doing some activities successfully (Hancock, 1994). This is actually what teachers believed in: Language proficiency can only be assessed by using various authentic assessment tasks (Shohamy et al., 2008). Thus, the feedback to students would be multi-dimensional that definitely results in developing their learning of English.

The benefits of authentic assessment practices for teaching and learning English which are perceived by the participants of this current study support the two main features of democratic assessment and authentic assessment, as well as their underpinning theories: Critical theories especially critical language testing principles, socio-cultural theory, and constructivism. These two features are, firstly, the involvement of various stakeholders in assessment by negotiations, and secondly, proving multiple practices of assessment for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. A clear example is critical language testing focuses on the effect and involvement of a range of assessment stakeholders and

calls for multiple assessment procedures for interpreting individuals' knowledge (Lynch, 2001).

7. Conclusion

This study concluded that, in the three selected university English departments in the Kurdistan Region, it was apparent that democratic assessment through authentic assessment practices were implemented by teachers and students but inadequate, unplanned, and not supported departmentally. It also realized that the teacher participants' relations with their students were satisfactory to a good extent and they were friendly with them, but the majority feared befriending students because of the possibility of students' exploitation of such relation. Such fear originated from misunderstanding of each other's mind-sets, constituted an obstacle to establishing a successful democratic assessment system, which possibly needed a wider and closer teacher-student relationship that could allow an adequate interaction for cooperating in the processes of assessment. The study also concluded that, due to the insufficiency of direct and ongoing negotiations between the two parties, the teacher-student discussions about making decisions as to how to assess students were allowed but incomplete especially in terms of sticking to students' opinions and preferences. These discussions, though they are immensely influential as they empower students, were not supported by departmental rules, except allowing students to see test samples prior to exams. Only a few teachers, in support of departmental rules, believed in not allowing students to express their opinions about assessment due to their understanding that assessment knowledge is part of the assessment literacy possessed by teachers and assessment experts rather than students. Nevertheless, the majority of participants believed that students should have the right to discuss assessment issues with their teachers and department senior administrators, though admitting that students might not have enough knowledge about ELP assessment; this would enhance democratic assessment. More than half of the participants sometimes but not always stick to their students' preferences when they found it suitable, while a few could not stick to them because of students' disagreement among themselves. However, approximately half of the participants allowed a wider teacher-student interaction that motivated students to do some activities they preferred that indicated a higher level of democracy in implementing their authentic assessments, which encouraged learners to regard assessment as a shared responsibility.

The study also concluded that most participants believed in implementing various authentic assessment practices, instead of one shot exams, that must be included in the curriculum of their English departments in order to provide fair assessments, preferring multiple resources of data to be used in assessing students; thus, leading to assessment ethicality. Multiple authentic assessment practices are fundamental in accommodating students through providing options for them, resulting in ascertaining their rights and fairness; hence, assessment ethicality in the framework of democratic assessment. Finally, the study realized that, to varying degrees in both the one-on-one and focus group interviews, all the participants admitted, perceived, or believed that probably all the aspects of democratic assessment could have significant benefits for teaching and learning English language. Moreover, most participants regarded the provision of diverse authentic assessments and giving the right of selection to students as one of the most influential benefits of democratic assessment, as this can make them involved in the teaching and learning processes as they show their knowledge and skills by their preferred assessment practices, by which their learning would be improved and their assessment would be fairer, more accurate, and more valid. Thus, the feedback to students would be multi-dimensional that definitely results in developing their learning of English.

This research generally concluded that the benefits of democratic assessment through authentic assessment practices for teaching and learning could not be denied pedagogically due to some predominant characteristics they have in the processes of education that create some significant positive influences. This study also came to a general conclusion that the participants' beliefs and their listening to their students could commence democratic assessment in terms of discussing the assessment matters but it was sometimes accompanied by disregarding of students' opinions and indifference about their preferences. Also generally speaking, the study realized that, as a starting point, such beliefs and assessment practices of EFL university teachers would have a strong potential for implementing a more adequate and effective democratic assessment system. It also generally concludes that the benefits of authentic assessment practices for teaching and learning which are perceived by the participants were in line with the two main features of democratic assessment and authentic assessment, as well as their underpinning theories: Critical theories - especially critical language testing - socio-cultural theory, and constructivism. These two features are, firstly, the involvement of various stakeholders in assessment by negotiations, and secondly, providing multiple procedures of assessment for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

7.1 Implications

This study can possibly have some pedagogical and research implications for university English departments in the Kurdistan Region. Firstly, the study can inform the English departments that the implementation of democratic assessment was inadequate and unplanned because of not being supported departmentally, and though participants' relations with their students were satisfactory but still limited and needed closer relationship, which needs further actions. Secondly, the English departments could be informed that the teacher-student discussions about making decisions as to how to assess students were limited in terms of sticking to students' preferences that needs more actions for widening the discussions with more teacher commitment. Finally, the department senior administrators can be informed about some shortcomings of following only one-shot exams that might encourage them to work on reducing those exams and include more authentic assessment practices in the curriculum, in order to provide fair and ethical assessments for students that also provide multi-dimensional feedback to students.

7.2 Recommendations

The findings, conclusions, and implications of this study encouraged me to recommend the following points to be offered to senior administrators and the teaching staff of the English departments in the Kurdistan Region. This is in order to assist them adopt and develop a democratic system of assessment through authentic assessment practices, and eliminate the related challenges. This study recommends that the English departments should:

1. Support the implementation of democratic assessment through authentic assessment practices by providing some departmental guidelines,
2. Recommend teachers to have a closer relationship to allow an adequate interaction and discussions for cooperating in the processes of assessment,
3. Change the beliefs of some teachers that students should have their own say in the ways of assessing them; it is not related only to teacher assessment literacy,
4. Encourage teachers and students to follow a wider democratic system of assessment for students to show their knowledge and abilities, as well as demand their needs and interests,

5. Work on implementing diverse authentic assessment practices rather than only one shot exams,
6. Include democratic assessment in the curriculum, covering how they should be followed in all subjects of ELT,
7. Enhance the benefits of democratic assessment due its significance in improving the teaching and learning of English language,
8. Focus on the diverse authentic assessment practices in democratic assessment to achieve fairer, more accurate, more reliable, and more valid assessments, and
9. Provide a multi-dimensional feedback to students through diverse authentic assessment practices in the framework of democratic assessment.

7.3 Suggestions for Future Research

The suggestions of this study for future research in the field of democratic assessment in the English departments can have a good effect on developing such system of assessment. Because of the need and significance of democratic assessment, this study recommends the following areas to be explored in-depth:

1. The benefits, characteristics, processes, and influences of democratic assessment in numerous dimensions for instructional purposes,
2. Some inherent challenges of democratic assessment which necessitates many additional studies to identify the negative aspects and the reasons behind them, and to try solutions for them,
3. The lack of teachers' sticking to students' opinions and preferences even after discussing with them,
4. The factors behind the teachers' mind-sets regarding some aspects of students rights,
5. How democratic assessment through authentic assessment practices can achieve a fairer, more accurate, more reliable, and more valid ELP assessments, and
6. The multi-dimensional feedback to students from the authentic assessment practices in a democratic assessment system.

ئهگهري جيبه جيكردي هه لسه نگاندي ديموكراتي له ريگه ي پراكتيزه كردني هه لسه نگاندي هه لسه نگاندي ره سه نه كان له به شه كانى ئينگليزي زانكوكاني هه ري مي كوردستان

دلير عه بدوللا ئيسماعيل، به شى ئينگليزي، كوليزي پهره ده ي بنه رته ي، زانكوى سليمانى، هه ري مي كوردستان، عيراق.

كورتەى تويزينه وه كه

ئه م تويزينه وه يه له تواناي جيبه جيكردي هه لسه نگاندي ديموكراتي كوليوه ته وه له ريگه ي ئه نجامداني راهينه كانى هه لسه نگاندي ره سه ن له سى به شى ئينگليزي زانكوكاني هه ري مي كوردستان. هه لسه نگاندي ديموكراتي له وان هه زور كاريگه ر بيت له پهره ده دا چونكه ريگه به دانوستانه كانى ماموستا و خوينكار ده دات ده رباره ي كيشه پهره ده ييه كان، له ئه نجامدا پيشكه وتن له پهره ده دا به دي ديت. به تاييه تي تويزينه وه كه له سروشتي په يوه ندي ماموستا و خويندكارو هيزي خويندكاران له گفتوگو كردن و برياردان له سه ر چونه تي هه لسه نگانديان و داين كردني هه لسه نگاندي دادپه روه رانه له ريگه ي داين كردني ره وشتي گونجاوي هه لسه نگاندي بۆ خويندكاران و سووده پهره ده ييه كانى هه لسه نگاندي ديموكراتيكي. ئه مانه هه مووي له ريگه ي دوو ريگه ي تويزينه وه ليكولينه وه يان له سه ر كراوه: چاوپيكه وتن له گه ل 15 ماموستاي زانكو و سى چاوپيكه وتني به گروه، به گرته به ري ئيپيستيمولوزي و ريبازي ديارده ناسي. دويزينه وه كان ده ريانخست كه، يه كه م، هه لسه نگاندي ديموكراتي له ريگه ي راهينه كانى هه لسه نگاندي ره سه نه وه جيبه جي كراون له لايه ن ماموستا كانه وه له گه ل هه بووني په يوه ندي باشى ماموستا و خويندكاردا، به لام هيشتا نه گونجاوه و بى به رنامه يه و خويندكاره كان هاوپييه تيبان له گه ل نه كراوه. دووه ميان تويزينه وه ئه وه ي بۆ ده ركه وت كه هه رچه نده ماموستايان برويان به مافى خويندكاران هه بوو بۆ گفتوگو كردن له گه ل ماموستا كانيان له سه ر هه لسه نگاندي و هيزي خويندكاران له گفتوگو كردن و برياردان له سه ر چونه تي هه لسه نگانديان له گه ل ئه وه شدا سنوردار كرابوو له پرووي پشتگوي خستني راي خويندكاران پابه ند نه بون به خواسته كانيان. ستيه م، به شداربووان باوه ريان به جيبه جيكردي راهيناني جوراوجوري هه لسه نگاندي ره سه ن هه بوو، له جياتي يه ك تافيكردنه وه ي چرى كورت، بۆ داين كردني هه لسه نگاندي دادپه روه رانه كه ده بيته هوي هه لسه نگاندي ئه خلاقى. چواره م، به پله ي جوراوجور، هه موو به شداربووان داني پيدانان، هه ستيان كرد، يان باوه ريان وابوو كه هه لسه نگاندي ديموكراتي ده توانيت سوودي گرنگي هه بيت بۆ فيركردن و فيربووني زمانى ئينگليزي، به ده سه ته يناني هه لسه نگاندي دادپه روه رانه تر، وردتر، باوه رپيكروتر، و دروستتر و هينانه كايه ي فيدباكي فيركاري هه مه لايه نه بۆ خويندكاران.

کلیله وشه‌کان: هه‌لسه‌نگاندنی دیموکراتی، راهینانه‌کانی هه‌لسه‌نگاندنی ره‌سه‌ن، تاقیکردنه‌وه‌ی زمانی ره‌خه‌یی، هه‌لسه‌نگاندنی ئه‌خلاق، هه‌لسه‌نگاندنی دادپه‌روه‌رانه، دابینکردنی ره‌وشتی گونجاوی هه‌لسه‌نگاندن بو خۆیندکاران

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