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Bridging the Gap Between Assessment Literacy and Practice: A Sociocultural Exploration of EFL Instructors' Classroom Assessment in Saudi Higher Education

Abdul Aziz Mohamed Mohamed Ali El Deen
Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Translation, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

***Abstract*—This study investigates classroom assessment practices among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors in Saudi universities from a sociocultural perspective, with particular attention to the relationship between instructors' language assessment literacy (LAL) and their classroom assessment practices. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 63 EFL instructors, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with six instructors. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 22.0), and qualitative data were examined using hybrid thematic analysis. The findings reveal a strong reliance on traditional assessment methods, with limited integration of alternative assessment practices. No statistically significant relationship was found between teaching experience and assessment practices, suggesting that assessment behavior is shaped more by contextual and institutional factors than by professional experience alone. Qualitative results further indicate that peer assessment, portfolio-based assessment, and performance tasks are perceived as the most challenging forms of assessment, primarily due to time constraints, large class sizes, limited training, and institutional constraints. The study highlights a persistent gap between assessment literacy and classroom practice and demonstrates that this gap is strongly mediated by sociocultural and institutional conditions. The study contributes to the integration of LAL and sociocultural theory by showing that assessment literacy is a situated practice rather than a purely technical competence. Implications are offered for enhancing professional development and for aligning institutional policies with more formative and learner-centered assessment practices in Saudi higher education.**

***Index Terms*—Language Assessment Literacy (LAL), classroom assessment practices, sociocultural perspective, EFL instructors, Saudi higher education**

I. Introduction

Classroom-based assessment has become an increasingly important component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction over recent decades, reflecting a broader shift away from exclusive reliance on traditional testing toward more formative and learner-centred assessment approaches (Abbas, 2012; Ali & Al Ajmi, 2013; Aliasin & Amanlu, 2017). Within this shift, alternative assessment methods such as portfolio assessment (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021), peer assessment (Sung et al., 2005), self-assessment, and dynamic assessment have gained growing attention due to their potential to capture learners' communicative competence and ongoing language development in authentic classroom contexts (Ali El Deen & Mahmoud, 2025; Wubshet & Menuta, 2015; Yen et al., 2024).

Despite this increasing recognition, the implementation of alternative assessment remains uneven and context-dependent. Research indicates that classroom assessment practices are not determined solely by teachers' technical knowledge, but are strongly shaped by institutional demands, cultural expectations, and contextual constraints (Yusop & Firdaus, 2022; Dietel et al., 1991). From a sociocultural perspective, assessment is understood as a socially situated practice embedded within institutional systems and professional environments. In Arab educational contexts, cultural values and local educational traditions also play an important role in shaping teaching and assessment practices (Mahmoud, 2015). Tian et al. (2023), for example, argue that teachers' assessment practices and language assessment literacy (LAL) are deeply influenced by the sociocultural contexts in which teaching occurs (Shao, 2026). Similarly, Mohammadi et al. (2020) and Nazari (2024) found that although EFL instructors expressed positive attitudes toward dynamic assessment, its implementation was limited by institutional constraints, lack of training, and time pressures.

Within Saudi higher education, although interest in assessment literacy has increased, there remains limited empirical understanding of how EFL instructors translate assessment knowledge into classroom practice. Existing research has largely focused on teachers' perceptions, beliefs, or general competencies, while fewer studies have examined the relationship between language assessment literacy and actual assessment practices within specific sociocultural contexts

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(Gardner & Rea-Dickins, 2001; Mahmoud, 2013). In particular, the ways in which institutional structures and classroom realities shape instructors' assessment decisions remain underexplored.

To address this gap, the present study investigates classroom assessment practices among EFL instructors in Saudi universities and examines how these practices are shaped by language assessment literacy and sociocultural contextual factors. Specifically, the study explores how instructors interpret, negotiate, and implement assessment practices within their institutional environments. This focus is important because assessment is not merely a technical activity, but a pedagogical process embedded in social and institutional realities.

A. Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate classroom assessment practices among EFL instructors in Saudi universities and to examine how these practices are influenced by instructors' language assessment literacy and their sociocultural contexts.

B. Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. Identify the classroom assessment practices commonly used by EFL instructors in Saudi universities.
2. Examine the relationship between instructors' teaching experience and their use of different assessment methods.
3. Explore instructors' perceptions of challenges associated with traditional and alternative assessment practices.
4. Investigate contextual factors influencing the implementation of alternative assessment methods.

C. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of research on language assessment literacy by providing empirical evidence from a Saudi higher education context. It highlights how assessment literacy is enacted in real classroom settings and how sociocultural constraints shape instructors' assessment decisions. The findings may inform teacher education programmes, assessment policy development, and professional training initiatives aimed at improving classroom assessment practices.

D. Research Questions

RQ1: What classroom assessment practices are commonly used by EFL instructors in Saudi universities?
RQ2: Is there a relationship between instructors' teaching experience and their use of different classroom assessment methods?
RQ3: Which types of traditional and alternative assessment tasks are perceived as most challenging?
RQ4: What contextual factors influence instructors' implementation of alternative assessment methods?

II. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A. Conceptualizing Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)

Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) refers to the knowledge, skills, and principles required for designing, implementing, interpreting, and evaluating language assessments. Early conceptualizations emphasized technical competence in testing and measurement; however, contemporary perspectives highlight its broader pedagogical, ethical, and sociocultural dimensions (Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; McNamara, 2006). In this view, LAL extends beyond test construction to include classroom-based assessment practices that support learning and feedback.

Recent research has expanded LAL into a multidimensional construct that includes teachers' beliefs, identities, and contextual decision-making processes. Rahimi et al. (2021) argue that assessment literacy is dynamic and evolves through professional experience and contextual engagement. Similarly, Latif and Wasim (2022) emphasize the importance of examining teachers' assessment identities, including agency, self-efficacy, and pedagogical orientation, alongside contextual influences. Tian et al. (2023) further highlight that assessment practices are socially situated and shaped by institutional and cultural environments. Together, these studies suggest that LAL should be understood not as a fixed body of knowledge, but as an evolving competence enacted within specific sociocultural contexts.

B. Sociocultural Perspective

From a sociocultural perspective, assessment is not merely an evaluative tool but a socially mediated activity shaped by institutional, cultural, and policy contexts (Leung & Scott, 2009; Shohamy, 2001). Vygotsky's (1978) theory of mediated learning and Lantolf and Thorne's (2006) work on sociocultural theory emphasize that learning and assessment are co-constructed through interaction, tools, and social participation. Similarly, Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualize learning as participation in communities of practice, where knowledge is constructed through engagement in social contexts.

In educational settings, assessment practices are also influenced by policy interpretation and local adaptation rather than uniform implementation (Hancock, 1994; Purpura et al., 2026; Ngo, 2025). In Saudi EFL contexts, studies suggest that institutional expectations, cultural beliefs about English learning, and educational traditions significantly shape how teachers design and interpret assessment tasks (Alharbi, 2015; Ali El Deen & Mahmoud, 2025). Therefore, assessment literacy must be understood as embedded within these sociocultural systems rather than as an individual attribute alone.

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C. Traditional and Alternative Assessment

Assessment in language education is commonly categorized into traditional and alternative approaches. Traditional assessment typically includes selected-response and standardized formats such as multiple-choice questions, short-answer tests, and essays, which emphasize objectivity and summative measurement (Bailey, 1998; Hamp-Lyons, 2016). While such methods are efficient and reliable, they often focus on product-oriented learning outcomes.

In contrast, alternative assessment includes performance-based and process-oriented approaches such as portfolios, peer assessment, self-assessment, reflective journals, and project-based tasks (Ahmad et al., 2020; Alotaibi, 2019; Oz, 2014; Phongsirikul, 2018). These approaches emphasize learner engagement, reflection, and the development of communicative competence. They are closely aligned with formative assessment principles, supporting ongoing feedback and learning-oriented evaluation. Such assessment approaches have become increasingly relevant in technology-enhanced and distance-learning environments, where continuous interaction and learner-centered evaluation are emphasized (Simonson et al., 2000).

The present study focuses on alternative assessment because of its relevance to contemporary EFL pedagogy, which emphasizes communicative competence, learner autonomy, and formative learning processes. Despite its pedagogical value, the implementation of alternative assessment remains limited in many contexts due to institutional and contextual constraints.

D. Characterizing Alternative Assessment

Research on Saudi EFL contexts indicates a continued reliance on traditional assessment practices despite increasing awareness of alternative approaches. Studies have shown that instructors often depend on standardized or exam-oriented assessment systems, particularly in centralized programs (Alaudan, 2014; Umer et al., 2018; Almossa, 2021). While teachers may hold positive perceptions of alternative assessment (Green, 2014), their actual practices are often constrained by institutional structures and assessment policies.

In addition, challenges such as limited training, time constraints, and centralized decision-making reduce teachers' autonomy in implementing innovative assessment methods (Alyami, 2022). Even when instructors use informal assessment techniques, they often have limited influence over formal assessment design and grading systems (Almossa, 2021). These constraints highlight a gap between theoretical knowledge of assessment and its practical implementation.

E. Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined teachers' assessment beliefs, practices, and competencies in Saudi Arabia, limited attention has been given to how language assessment literacy is enacted in classroom practice within sociocultural contexts. In particular, little is known about how instructors translate assessment knowledge into practice while navigating institutional constraints and professional realities. This gap highlights the need for research that integrates assessment literacy with sociocultural analysis to better understand classroom assessment decision-making in Saudi EFL contexts.

III. Methodology

A. Research Context, Participants, and Ethical Considerations

This study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2017; Kostoulas & Lämmerer, 2020), which involves two consecutive phases. The first phase collected and analyzed quantitative data to identify general patterns in EFL instructors' classroom assessment practices. The second phase collected qualitative data to explain and elaborate on these patterns in greater depth. The integration of both datasets enabled a comprehensive understanding of how language assessment literacy and sociocultural factors shape assessment practices in Saudi higher education.

B. Research Context, Participants, and Sampling

The study was conducted in two public universities in Saudi Arabia within English language and preparatory-year programs, where EFL instructors are responsible for classroom instruction and assessment.

A total of 63 EFL instructors participated in the questionnaire phase, while 6 instructors participated in semi-structured interviews (three from each university). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting instructors actively involved in classroom assessment practices. This approach was appropriate because the study required participants with direct experience in assessment implementation and decision-making.

Participants represented a range of teaching experience, gender, and training backgrounds, ensuring diversity of perspectives.

C. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by removing all identifying information. Interview participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure privacy.

D. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

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Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used in the quantitative phase and consisted of four sections:

Section 1: Demographic information (5 items)

Gender, age, teaching experience, and training in language assessment.

Section 2: Classroom assessment practices (10 Likert-scale items)

This section measured the frequency of use of traditional and alternative assessment methods using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always).

Section 3: Perceptions of assessment methods (open-ended items)

This section explored instructors' views on the advantages and limitations of different assessment types.

Section 4: Contextual influences (open-ended items)

This section examined institutional, pedagogical, and environmental factors affecting assessment practices. The questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in second language assessment to ensure content validity, clarity, and relevance. Based on their feedback, several items were revised and one item was removed.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS (N = 63)

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender	Male	29 (46.0%)
	Female	34 (54.0%)
Age	22–55 years	63 (100%)
Teaching Experience	>10 years	40 (63.5%)
	5–9 years	16 (25.4%)
	≤4 years	7 (11.1%)
EFL Testing Training	At least once	46 (73.0%)
	None	17 (27.0%)

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the second phase to gain deeper insights into questionnaire findings. The interview protocol was informed by Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) theory (Giraldo, 2018) and focused on the following dimensions:

- Understanding of assessment concepts (traditional vs. alternative)
- Classroom implementation of assessment practices
- Experiences with peer assessment, portfolios, and performance tasks
- Perceived challenges in assessment implementation
- Training and professional development experiences
- Institutional and sociocultural influences on assessment decisions

The interview protocol was piloted with two instructors, and minor modifications were made to improve clarity and allow greater flexibility in responses.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, was conducted in English, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

E. Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert review, which established content validity and improved item clarity and relevance. Although Cronbach's alpha was not computed, reliability was supported through careful item construction, pilot feedback, and consistent administration procedures.

For qualitative data, trustworthiness was ensured through:

- verbatim transcription of interviews,
- systematic coding procedures,
- iterative theme refinement,
- triangulation between quantitative and qualitative findings,
- use of established theoretical frameworks.

These procedures enhanced credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

F. Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 22.0). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to identify patterns in assessment practices (Mertler, 2003). Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between teaching experience and assessment practices.

Although Likert-scale data are ordinal, they were treated as approximately interval data in line with common practice in educational research (Clason & Dormody, 1994; Carifio & Perla, 2008).

Qualitative Analysis

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Qualitative data from open-ended responses and interviews were analyzed using a hybrid thematic analysis approach (Swain, 2018). This involved:

- Deductive coding, guided by Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) theory (Giraldo, 2018), and
- Inductive coding, allowing new themes to emerge from the data.

Data were repeatedly reviewed, coded, and organized into broader thematic categories.

G. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The study followed an explanatory sequential integration strategy. Quantitative results were first analyzed to identify general trends in assessment practices, followed by qualitative analysis to explain and contextualize these findings. The integration of both datasets enabled a more comprehensive interpretation of how assessment literacy is enacted within sociocultural and institutional contexts.

IV. Results

A. Saudi University EFL Instructors' Classroom Assessment Practices

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were computed for the 10 Likert-scale items measuring the frequency of different classroom assessment practices. The scale ranged from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Classroom Assessment Tasks Used by Respondents

Items	M	SD
Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)	4.34	0.876
True/False Questions	4.22	0.903
Short Answer Questions	4.12	0.897
Essay Questions	4.06	0.872
Oral Presentations	3.96	0.953
Group Projects	3.87	0.975
Peer Assessment	3.49	0.796
Portfolio Assessment	3.46	0.864
Performance Tasks	3.43	0.965
Observations and Checklists	2.85	0.987

The results indicate a clear preference for traditional assessment methods. MCQs, true/false questions, and short-answer tests obtained the highest mean scores, indicating frequent use. In contrast, alternative assessment methods such as peer assessment, portfolio assessment, and performance tasks were less frequently implemented. Observations and checklists recorded the lowest mean score.

B. Relationship Between Teaching Experience and Assessment Practices

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between instructors' teaching experience and their use of different assessment methods. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Correlation Between Respondents' Experience and Use of Assessment Types (N = 63)

Type of Assessment	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)	63	0.022	0.866
True/False Questions	63	0.032	0.814
Short Answer Questions	63	-0.102	0.429
Essay Questions	63	-0.084	0.512
Oral Presentations	63	0.051	0.692
Group Projects	63	0.033	0.796
Peer Assessment	63	-0.107	0.408
Portfolio Assessment	63	-0.151	0.238
Performance Tasks	63	-0.059	0.648
Observations and Checklists	63	-0.110	0.390

Correlations ranged from –0.151 to 0.051, and none were statistically significant ($p > .05$). The findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between instructors' years of teaching experience and their reported use of any assessment type. This suggests that assessment practices are not determined by experience alone but may instead be influenced by contextual or institutional factors.

C. Assessment Tasks Perceived as Challenging

To address the third research question, qualitative responses from open-ended questionnaire items and semi-structured interviews were analyzed. Participants identified assessment tasks they considered most difficult to implement, and the frequency of these responses is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates that alternative assessment methods were perceived as more challenging than traditional ones. Peer assessment, portfolio assessment, and performance tasks were identified as the most difficult to implement.

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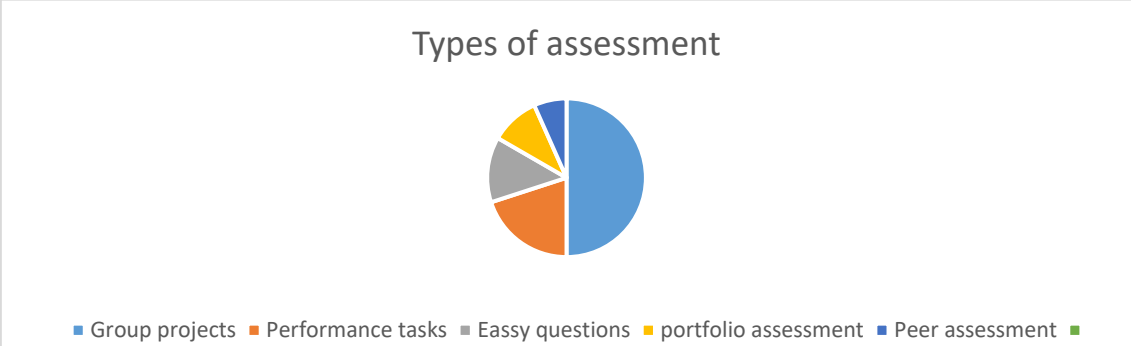


Figure 1. Assessment Tasks Perceived as Challenging by Respondents

Table 4 summarizes the main reasons provided by instructors for these challenges.

TABLE 4
REASONS FOR THE CHALLENGING NATURE OF ASSESSMENT TASKS

Type of Assessment	Illustrative Challenges
Peer Assessment	Unequal participation; perceived bias; lack of training in peer evaluation.
Performance Tasks	Time-consuming design and grading; need for advanced rubrics and clear criteria.
Essay Questions	Difficulties in ensuring objectivity and consistency in scoring.
Portfolio Assessment	Large class sizes; limited familiarity with portfolio-based evaluation.

The findings suggest that both structural and pedagogical constraints contribute to difficulties in implementing alternative assessment practices.

D. Factors Influencing the Implementation of Alternative Assessment

Figure 2 presents the main factors influencing the implementation of alternative assessment.

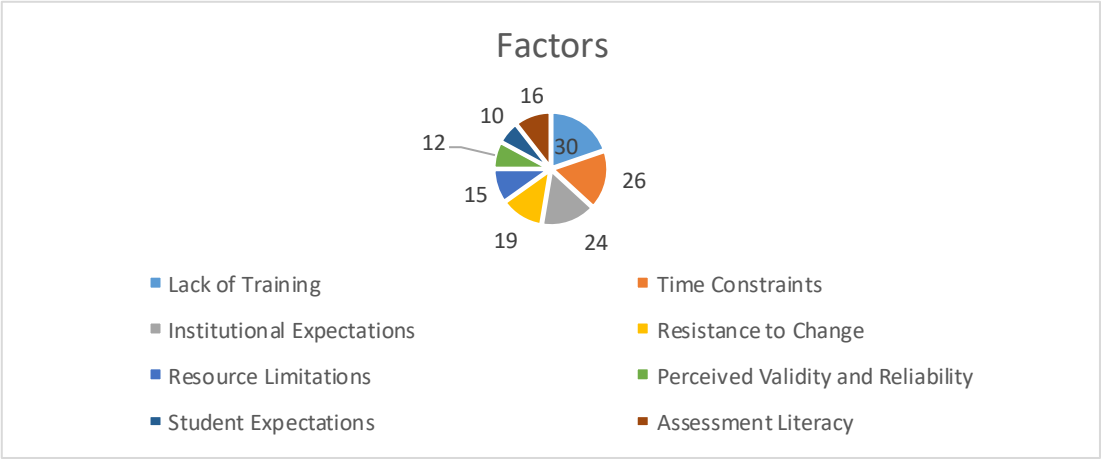


Figure 2. Factors Influencing the Implementation of Alternative Assessment

The most frequently reported barrier was time constraints, followed by limited resources, large class sizes, lack of training, and institutional resistance. Additional concerns included students' preference for traditional testing and perceived issues of validity and reliability.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Key Findings

The findings of this study reveal a consistent dominance of traditional assessment practices among Saudi EFL instructors, alongside limited but present use of alternative assessment methods. However, rather than simply reflecting methodological preference, these patterns indicate deeper structural, pedagogical, and sociocultural influences shaping assessment decision-making in higher education contexts. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data suggests that assessment practices are not solely individual choices but are embedded within institutional expectations and culturally mediated teaching environments.

B. Language Assessment Literacy as Situated Practice

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From a Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) perspective, the findings suggest that assessment literacy among instructors is partial and context-dependent rather than fully developed or standardized. While instructors demonstrate familiarity with a range of assessment types, their actual classroom practices remain largely constrained to conventional methods.

This aligns with contemporary reconceptualization of LAL that emphasize it as a situated and evolving construct rather than a fixed set of technical competencies (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Sadeghi and Rahmati, 2017). In this study, LAL appears to function more as procedural familiarity than as critical pedagogical competence, particularly in relation to designing and implementing performance-based or formative assessments.

The limited use of alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, peer assessment, and performance tasks suggests a gap between theoretical awareness and classroom enactment of assessment literacy.

C. Sociocultural Mediation of Assessment Practices

The findings strongly support a sociocultural interpretation of assessment practices, where classroom assessment is shaped by institutional norms, workload demands, and culturally embedded expectations of teaching and evaluation.

Consistent with Vygotskian theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), assessment practices in this context are mediated by institutional tools such as standardized testing systems, departmental policies, and grading structures. These mediating factors limit the extent to which instructors can independently implement alternative assessment approaches.

Moreover, the findings align with sociocultural views of policy enactment, where educational policies are not implemented uniformly but are interpreted and adapted at the classroom level (Leung & Mohan, 2004; Shohamy, 2001). In this study, instructors appear to adapt assessment practices to fit institutional constraints rather than pedagogical ideals.

D. Experience as a Non-Predictive Factor

A key finding of this study is the absence of a significant relationship between teaching experience and assessment practices. This result challenges the assumption that increased professional experience naturally leads to more diversified or innovative assessment practices.

Instead, it suggests that assessment behavior is primarily shaped by systemic and institutional conditions rather than individual expertise. This supports the view that assessment literacy development is not simply a function of experience but requires structured institutional support, professional training, and opportunities for reflective practice.

E. Constraints on Alternative Assessment Implementation

The qualitative findings highlight persistent barriers to the implementation of alternative assessment, including large class sizes, limited time, lack of training, and institutional resistance. These constraints reflect both practical and epistemological tensions within EFL assessment cultures.

From an LAL perspective, these barriers indicate limitations in both knowledge and skills dimensions, particularly in designing rubrics, managing peer assessment, and implementing formative feedback strategies. However, from a sociocultural perspective, these constraints are not merely technical deficits but reflect broader systemic priorities that privilege efficiency and standardization over pedagogical innovation.

F. Teacher Beliefs and Assessment Continuity

The continued reliance on traditional assessment methods is closely linked to instructors' beliefs regarding fairness, objectivity, and manageability (Önalan & Karagül, 2018). These beliefs reinforce the persistence of standardized testing practices, even when alternative approaches are perceived as pedagogically beneficial.

This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that teacher beliefs act as strong mediators of classroom practice, often outweighing formal training or theoretical knowledge (Alharbi, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2022). In this sense, assessment reform cannot be achieved through training alone, but requires shifts in belief systems supported by institutional change.

G. Novel Contribution of the Study

This study makes three key contributions to the field of language assessment research.

First, it extends Language Assessment Literacy research by empirically demonstrating that LAL in the Saudi EFL context is not merely a knowledge deficit issue but a contextually constrained practice, shaped by institutional structures and workload pressures.

Second, it contributes to sociocultural assessment theory by showing how assessment practices are actively mediated by institutional systems, rather than being directly determined by teacher competence or experience.

Third, it integrates LAL and sociocultural theory within a single explanatory framework, demonstrating that assessment literacy development cannot be fully understood without considering the interaction between individual agency and institutional mediation. This integrative approach provides a more holistic explanation of the gap between assessment knowledge and classroom practice.

H. Pedagogical and Institutional Implications

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The findings suggest that improving assessment practices in Saudi EFL contexts requires interventions at both pedagogical and institutional levels. Professional development programs should move beyond theoretical instruction and focus on practical training in alternative assessment design, rubric development, and formative feedback strategies (Epstein et al., 2002).

However, institutional change is equally necessary. Without adjustments to workload, class size, and assessment policies, even well-trained instructors may struggle to implement alternative assessment approaches effectively. Therefore, sustainable assessment reform requires alignment between teacher training initiatives and institutional policy frameworks.

I. Summary of the Discussion

Overall, the study demonstrates that assessment practices among Saudi EFL instructors are shaped by a complex interplay of literacy, belief systems, and institutional constraints. The findings highlight that improving assessment practice requires not only enhancing language assessment literacy but also addressing the sociocultural conditions in which assessment is enacted.

VI. Conclusion

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study investigated classroom assessment practices, language assessment literacy (LAL), and perceptions of alternative assessment among EFL instructors in Saudi universities from a sociocultural perspective. The findings provide clear answers to the four research questions guiding the study.

Regarding RQ1, the results show that Saudi EFL instructors predominantly rely on traditional assessment methods, particularly multiple-choice questions, true/false items, and short-answer tests. Alternative assessment practices such as peer assessment, portfolios, and performance-based tasks are used less frequently, despite instructors' general awareness of their pedagogical value.

In relation to RQ2, the findings reveal no statistically significant relationship between teaching experience and assessment practices. This indicates that assessment choices are not primarily determined by professional experience but are instead shaped by contextual, institutional, and pedagogical constraints.

For RQ3, instructors identified alternative assessment methods—especially peer assessment, portfolio assessment, and performance tasks—as the most challenging to implement. The main difficulties included lack of training, time constraints, large class sizes, and concerns about fairness and consistency in grading.

Concerning RQ4, the study found that the implementation of alternative assessment is significantly influenced by institutional and sociocultural factors. The most prominent barriers include time limitations, large class sizes, limited institutional support, insufficient training opportunities, and students' preference for traditional testing formats.

Overall, the findings suggest a persistent gap between instructors' awareness of alternative assessment and its actual classroom implementation. This gap is not primarily a matter of individual competence but is largely shaped by structural and contextual constraints within Saudi higher education.

A. Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) literature by demonstrating that LAL in the Saudi EFL context is not simply a matter of knowledge or skill acquisition but is deeply situated within institutional and sociocultural realities. The findings also reinforce sociocultural perspectives on assessment by showing that classroom assessment practices are mediated by institutional expectations, workload conditions, and culturally shaped beliefs about fairness and validity.

By integrating LAL and sociocultural theory, this study provides a more holistic explanation of the gap between assessment knowledge and classroom practice, highlighting assessment as a socially situated and context-dependent activity rather than a purely technical process.

B. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study suggest several important pedagogical implications for improving assessment practices in Saudi EFL higher education.

First, there is a need for targeted professional development programs that go beyond theoretical knowledge and focus on the practical implementation of alternative assessment methods. Training should include rubric design, performance-based assessment strategies, peer assessment techniques, and effective formative feedback practices.

Second, improving assessment literacy requires institutional support structures. Universities should provide conditions that enable the use of alternative assessment, including manageable class sizes, reduced teaching loads, and access to appropriate assessment tools (Al Ruqeishi, 2015) and resources.

Third, a balanced assessment approach is recommended. Rather than replacing traditional assessments entirely, instructors can integrate alternative methods into existing practices to gradually promote more formative and learner-centered assessment cultures.

C. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study offers the following recommendations:

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a) Higher education institutions should implement continuous professional development programs focused on practical assessment literacy.
b) Curriculum designers should incorporate alternative assessment strategies into official assessment frameworks.
c) Policy-makers should revise assessment policies to encourage formative and performance-based evaluation practices.
d) Institutions should provide structural support (e.g., reduced class sizes, workload adjustment) to facilitate effective assessment implementation.
e) Future assessment reforms should align pedagogical goals with institutional policies to ensure sustainable change.

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Abdul Aziz Mohamed Mohamed Ali El Deen works as an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Translation, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He has presented and published extensively at national and international conferences and in Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed journals. His research interests include Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), language assessment, technology-enhanced language learning, affective factors in language learning, and critical pedagogy.

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