

EFL Instructors' Perceptions and Practices of Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) Principles in King Abdulaziz University

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Abstract

The aim of this quantitative study was to investigate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors' perceptions, practices, and perceived challenges of Learning-oriented Assessment (LOA). The study was conducted at the English Language (ELI) Institute of King Abdulaziz University (KAU), and it involved 34 instructors from the institute. To reach the study's objectives, the researcher used the Teacher Learning-oriented Assessment Questionnaire (TLOAQ) in the form of an online survey to collect responses from the participants. Based on the results, the instructors were generally familiar with LOA concepts, and they tended to practice most of its principles to a very high degree. However, there were parts of LOA that were implemented less than the others, such as peer-assessment and the provision of authentic tasks. As for the challenges, large classroom sizes, top-down policies, and lack of training were among the issues that scored highly. The findings generally have positive implications; however, they also imply that there should be improvements made to training programs and top-down policies to promote the implementation of strategies such as peer-assessment and authentic tasks.

Keywords: language assessment, learning-oriented assessment, feedback, self-assessment, peer-assessment

1. Introduction

Traditionally, language assessment in many EFL contexts has been dominated by summative, exam-oriented approaches that prioritize measurement over learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Such approaches, while useful for certification and accountability purposes, have been criticized for their limited capacity to promote deep or sustained learning (Zeng et al., 2018). However, in the recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of assessments as valuable tools for improving learning, and as such, there have been recent developments that aim to make assessments more learning-oriented (Ahmed, 2023; Carless, 2014). This has resulted in the creation of various forms of assessments such as classroom-based assessments and assessments for learning (Alsowat, 2022). A general aim of these alternative forms of assessments is to build a stronger connection between instruction and assessments, which would mean bringing about positive change to teaching and learning practices (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006).

First proposed by Carless (2007), the concept of learning oriented assessment (LOA) is among the various alternative assessments forms that aim to improve learning. Instead of focusing on one form of assessment, this approach aims to unify both summative and formative assessment to support learners (Zeng et al., 2018). It can be defined by its primary goal, which is to develop "productive student learning processes." (Carless, 2014, pp. 2). LOA achieves this through three main defining principles, which include: developing engaging tasks as a form of assessment, engaging the students in assessment criteria, and giving them timely feedback (Carless, 2007). Together, these principles reflect a view of assessment that is collaborative, transparent, and connected to the process of learning rather than merely its outcomes.

Similar to other contexts, the topic of LOA has also only recently begun to gain attention in Saudi Arabia, and research in this context remains scarce. Almalki (2019) was among the first to investigate the use of LOA in the Saudi context. His study aimed at exploring students' attitudes towards LOA. Alsowat (2022) also explored schoolteachers' perceptions and practices of LOA and its perceived challenges. Similarly, Kamli and Almalki, (2023) also made a study with the same aims but in the context of Saudi higher education.

Furthermore, there is a recognized tension in Saudi higher education between the institutional demands of exam-oriented assessment culture and the principles of LOA (Alyami, 2022; Almosa, 2021). Instructors at university level often face top-down assessment policies that constrain their autonomy, large classroom sizes, and limited access to professional training on alternative assessment approaches (Kamli & Almalki, 2023). We do not yet know how familiar KAU instructors are with LOA or how far they apply its principles in their teaching. Without this knowledge, it is hard to decide which training programmes and institutional policies most need improvement.

1.1 Research Questions

RQ1: How familiar are EFL instructors with LOA in the context of King Abdulaziz University?

RQ2: To what extent do the instructors implement LOA principles as described by Carless (2007) in their classes?

RQ3: To what extent do the instructors experience the common challenges of implementing LOA in their classes?

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Learning-oriented Assessments*

From this, it can be said that LOA is an approach that views learning outcomes as a defining feature that determines the value of any assessment (Amer, 2021). Thus, it is essential for student learning to take place within the assessment process for it to be considered learning-oriented (Gebril, 2021). To ensure that assessments support learning, Carless (2007) has introduced three underlying principles of any instance of LOA, as follows:

- Principle 1: Assessment tasks should be designed to stimulate sound learning practices amongst the students.
- Principle 2: Assessment should involve students engaging actively with criteria, quality, their own and/or peers' performance.
- Principle 3: Feedback should be timely and forward-looking so as to support current and future student learning.

2.2 *Assessment Tasks as Learning Tasks*

The first principle is an essential aspect of LOA, and it refers to the practice of designing assessment tasks that have the same function as learning tasks (Carless, 2007). More specifically, it is concerned with designing assessment tasks that manage to be authentic, engaging, and relevant to the students (Wicking, 2017). Fazel and Ali (2022) argue that for an assessment task to be authentic, it should not be limited to preparing the students for future exams, but rather, it should also equip the students with skills that allow them to use the language in authentic communicative situations outside the classroom. One reason for suggesting the use of authentic tasks is the belief that activities that emulate real world scenarios tend to be the ones that are most likely to encourage the students to engage in deep learning (Alsowat, 2022).

2.3 *Student Involvement in Peer and Self-assessment*

The second principle is concerned with involving the students in the process of assessment in order for them to have a better understanding and engagement with the learning goals and criteria. This includes practices such as self-assessment and peer assessment (Carless, 2007). Thus, an important element of this principle requires the students to be familiar with the assessment criteria in order for them to be fully capable of carrying out assessments by themselves (Fazel & Ali, 2022). By comparing their own performance with given criteria, not only will the students be more equipped to carry out the assessment themselves and their peers, but it will also help them develop better understanding of the curriculum and better study habits (Wicking (2017). Communicating the assessment criteria to the students is thus necessary, and it can be done through the use of simple language the students can understand or through the

use of examples (Jones & Saville, 2016). Similarly, Fazel and Ali (2022) also recommend the use of samples and exemplars to give the students an accurate representation of what the assessment expects them to do.

2.4 Feedback as Feed-forward

Feedback in the context of LOA is seen as potentially being feed-forward, which implies that feedback should improve students' future learning (Carless, 2007). Feedback can generally be considered feed-forward if the students manage to utilize it to improve their performance in new learning contexts or similar future learning tasks instead of simply helping them with the current task at hand (Hamp-Lyons, 2017). However, in order for feedback to produce learning outcomes, the students must first engage meaningfully with the feedback (Fazel & Ali, 2022). In fact, students' engagement with feedback has been emphasized as being an important part of this principle (Carless, 2014). Having a positive perception of feedback also has the potential to encourage the students to engage more with the feedback as is evident by Rose's et al (2024) study which highlighted the correlation between these two variables. The students' perception of feedback can be influenced by multiple factors such as their impression of its usefulness for their future performance, the timing of the feedback, its nature and tone, and its content (Rose et al, *ibid*). Another factor that can influence students' engagement with feedback is their feedback literacy which can allow them to use it to improve their learning (Carless & Boud, 2018). To support the development of feedback literacy, Carless and Boud (*ibid.*) recommend that students should engage in activities such as peer-feedback and exemplar discussions.

2.5 Potential Challenges of Implementing LOA

While LOA can be positively perceived by teachers (Heguehag, 2024), there is still the possibility that LOA can be challenging for teachers to implement in the context of language education for a variety of reasons (Alsowat, 2022). In fact, one of the common themes in LOA-related literature is the difficulty of implementing it as well as the demands and responsibilities that it places on the teachers, students, assessment bodies, and educational institutions (Saville, 2021). Thus, a successful implementation of LOA would rely on various factors such as the teachers' knowledge in assessment and LOA, access to professional training and resources, the assessment culture, teaching loads, top-down assessment policies, the students' language proficiency and attitudes to assessments (Alsowat, 2022).

According to Brown et al. (2019), top-down policies are among some of the factors that can influence the teacher's conception of assessment. Because of this, it also has the potential to reinforce exam-culture as suggested by Manrique-Arribas et al. (2024) who argue that traditional academic culture that largely emphasizes expository teaching and summative assessments is one of the reasons for teachers to rely on summative assessment. These types of policies can pose a major challenge to the implementation of LOA because they view assessment as primary tools for measurement and grading (Carless, 2007). Because of this, educational systems where the LOA are based on an exam-oriented culture, may require an overhaul (Gebril, 2021).

The workload and amount of pressure on teachers can also influence their assessment practices.

This is especially true for academic lecturers who often find themselves in tight schedules due to the various responsibilities that they must focus on such as lesson planning, academic research, and other academic and management responsibilities (Manrique-Arribas et al., *ibid.*). Additionally, the time that teachers have in the classroom may also be too limited to implement LOA activities. This is especially evident in instances where teachers are expected to finish a large portion of the curriculum's content within a single session as demonstrated by Jalilzadeh and Coombe's (2023) study. The size of the classroom can also impact assessment practices, with large classrooms making it especially difficult for teachers to share helpful feedback (Nsowah et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To address this goal, a quantitative research design was employed in the form of a survey.

3.2 Research Participants

The study was conducted at the English Language Institute, KAU during the summer semester of 2025. The ELI at King Abdulaziz University is one of the largest English language teaching institutions in Saudi Arabia, making it a viable context for investigating LOA practices among EFL instructors.

There was a total of 65 participants in the study. Out of 65 ELI instructors who were teaching at the time, a total of 34 (29 male and 5 female) instructors responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of approximately 52%. While a higher response rate would have been preferable, this figure is considered acceptable in survey-based research, particularly in situations where the participation of individuals is voluntary (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Table 1 shows the biographical details of the staff such as their qualifications and years of experience.

Table 1. Characteristics of study sample (n=34)

Qualifications	n	Years of Experience	n
BA	1	0-5	2
BA + (CELTA*-DELTA**-Teacher Trainer)	2	6-10	3
MA	10	11-15	5
MA+ (CELTA-DELTA-Teacher Trainer)	14	15<	24
PhD	3		
PhD + (CELTA-DELTA-Teacher Trainer)	4		
Total	34		34

*Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. ** Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

3.3 Research Instrument

The questions in the online survey were adopted from Kamli and Almalki's (2023) iteration of Alsowat's (2022) TLOAQ. This choice was made because the questions in this questionnaire align with the study's research questions, while Kamli and Almalki's (2023) version was specifically selected because it presents the items in a clear and concise manner. This questionnaire contains 28 Likert-scale items split across five sections. Likert scale items are questions that measure degree of responses, and they are among the most widely used response formats in survey-based research due to their ability to capture the degree of agreement or disagreement (Cohen et al., 2018). In this questionnaire, responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The five sections of the questionnaire include: (1) Knowledge of LOA, (2) The use of assessments as learning tasks, (3) The involvement of students in assessment, (4) Student engagement with feedback and feedforward, and (5) Challenges of LOA.

3.4 Reliability

In terms of reliability Cronbach's alpha returned good coefficients for all sections, with only one section returning a coefficient below 0.7. The coefficients are as follows: EFL teachers' knowledge of LOA (0.85), practices of assessment tasks as learning tasks (0.80), practices of involving students in assessment (0.57), practices of engaging students with feedback and feedforward (0.74), challenges of implementing LOA (0.82), and the whole questionnaire (0.83). The findings indicate that the questionnaire is reliable.

3.5 Data Analysis

The degrees of agreement were categorized according to the following scale that was adopted from Alsowat's (2022) study: Very low (below 1.8), Low (from 1.8 to below 2.6), Moderate (from 2.6 to below 3.4), High (from 3.4 to below 4.2), and Very High (from 4.2 to 5). This classification system allows for a structured and consistent interpretation of the mean scores across all sections of the questionnaire.

4. Results

The first main question of this study is "How familiar are EFL instructors with LOA in the context of KAU?". The first section of the survey addresses the question. The responses are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Teacher's knowledge of LOA

Item No.	Item	n	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	I understand the importance of feedback in initiating learning and reaching success.	34	4.76	0.43	1	Very High

Item No.	Item	n	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
2	I recognize the connection between assessment, instruction, and learning.	34	4.74	0.45	2	Very High
3	I am familiar with similar notions such as assessment for learning, alternative assessment, and formative/continuous assessment.	34	4.47	0.61	5	Very High
4	I understand the importance of involving students in their learning.	34	4.68	0.47	3	Very High
5	I understand the importance of incorporating assessment into language instruction.	34	4.62	0.49	4	Very High
Overall		34	4.65	0.39		Very High

Table 3 demonstrates the instructors' responses to question items that measure their knowledge of LOA-related concepts. Thus, the overall mean score ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.39$) of this section is also ranked as very high. The two highest ranking items are Item 1 ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 0.43$) and Item 2 ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.45$), which are concerned with the role of feedback in supporting learning and the connection between assessment, instruction, and learning respectively. As for Item 3 ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.61$), it received the lowest score in this section. While it still falls within the very high range, it has the lowest mean ($M = 4.47$) and highest standard deviation ($SD = 0.61$), which suggests that some instructors have relatively low understanding of terms such as assessment for learning, alternative assessment, and formative assessment.

The second research question is “To what extent do the instructors implement LOA principles as described by Carless (2007) in their classes?”. The responses to this question are displayed in Tables 4, 5, and 6. Each of the three tables represents one of the three LOA principles.

Table 4. Instructors' Practices of Assessment Tasks as Learning Tasks

Item No.	Item	n	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	I prepare real-life tasks that are relevant to learning outcomes.	34	4.29	0.63	4	Very High
2	I offer tasks that require effort and resources to complete.	34	4.18	0.63	5	High
3	I offer language tasks that are interactive.	34	4.65	0.49	1	Very High
4	Tasks are used for both learning and assessment in my classroom.	34	4.32	0.88	3	Very High

Item No.	Item	n	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
5	I employ collaborative discussion and decision-making tasks with learners.	34	4.41	0.61	2	Very High
Overall		34	4.37	0.49		Very High

The overall mean score for this section is 4.37 (SD = 0.49), and it falls within the very high range. The highest ranking item was Item 3 (M = 4.65, SD = 0.49), which is concerned with the use of interactive language tasks. The lowest ranking item was Item 2 (M = 4.18, SD = 0.63), which addressed tasks that require effort and resources to complete, and was the only item in this section to fall below the “Very High” range.

Table 5. Instructors' Practices of Involving Students in the Assessment Process

Item No.	Item	n	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	In my classroom, students are involved in the assessment process and activities.	34	3.94	0.89	4	High
2	I assist students in keeping track of their progress.	34	4.38	0.6	2	Very High
3	I support learners' autonomy (i.e. motivating students to study independently and actively engage in-class activities).	34	4.62	0.49	1	Very High
4	I encourage students to assess themselves to determine their language learning strengths and limitations.	34	4.38	0.7	2	Very High
5	In various assessment assignments, I teach students how to apply scoring rubrics.	34	4.32	0.81	3	Very High
Overall		34	4.33	0.43		Very High

The overall mean score for this section is 4.33 (SD = 0.43), indicating that the instructors' perceived implementation of this principle is ranked as very high. Item 1 (M = 3.94, SD = 0.89) is concerned with students' involvement in the assessment processes, and it is the only item in this section to fall below the very high threshold, which makes it the lowest rated item in this section.

Table 6. Instructors' Practices to Support Students' Active Engagement in Feedback and Feed-forward

Item No.	Item	n	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	I provide opportunities for both giving and receiving feedback.	34	4.62	0.49	1	Very High
2	I ask students to evaluate and give feedback on their peers' performance in language activities.	34	4.15	0.78	5	High
3	I provide detailed and descriptive feedback on language skills.	34	4.44	0.56	3	Very High
4	Instead of focusing on grades, I provide feedback that focuses on learning.	34	4.32	0.68	4	Very High
5	I offer purposeful feedback.	34	4.56	0.56	2	Very High
Overall		34	4.42	0.44		Very High

The overall mean score of this section is 4.42 (SD = 0.44), making it the highest scoring section among the three sections that dealt with LOA principles. The highest scoring item is Item 1 (M = 4.62, SD = 0.49), and it pertains to the provision of opportunities for both giving and receiving feedback. The lowest and only item to fall below the very high threshold is Item 2 (M = 4.15, SD = 0.78), and it is concerned with asking students to evaluate and give feedback on their peers' performance.

The third and final research question of this study is "To what extent do the instructors experience the common challenges of implementing LOA in their classes?". This question is addressed in the last section of TLOAQ. Table 7 shows the responses that were given by the participants.

Table 7. Challenges of implementing LOA

Item No.	Item	n	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	Language curricula are inappropriate for implementing learning-oriented assessment.	34	2.85	0.96	7	Moderate
2	Students find it hard to perform in unconventional assessment methods.	34	3.38	0.85	6	Moderate
3	Due to a top-down assessment policy, teachers don't have much control over assessment.	34	3.85	0.86	2	High

Item No.	Item	n	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
4	Teachers lack training on LOA and how to put it into practice.	34	3.47	0.9	4	High
5	The implementation of learning-oriented assessment is time-consuming	34	3.41	0.86	5	High
6	The implementation of learning-oriented assessments in large classes is difficult.	34	4.03	0.8	1	High
7	The influence of exam-oriented culture.	34	3.85	0.82	2	High
8	Potential bias in self/peer assessments.	34	3.62	0.92	3	High
Overall		34	3.39	0.58		Moderate

As evident by the overall mean of this section ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.58$), the instructors generally perceive common challenges of LOA to a moderate degree, with some items ranking high and others ranking moderate. The highest ranking item on the list is Item 6 ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.80$), which is concerned with the difficulty of implementing LOA in large classes, making it the most prominently perceived challenge in this section. Both Items 3 and 7 have an equal rating of 3.85 in terms of mean score, and they pertain to the two issues of top-down assessment policies and the exam-oriented culture respectively. As for Items 2 and 1, they have the lowest scores in this section ($M = 3.38$ and $M = 2.85$ respectively), both falling within the moderate range.

5. Discussion

RQ1: How familiar are EFL instructors with LOA in the context of KAU?

In comparison to the other studies that have used the same questionnaire (e.g. Kamli and Almalki, 2023; Alsowat, 2022), the participants have expressed a much higher understanding of LOA-related concepts. Out of all the concepts in this section, the most understood notion is the idea of feedback being an important tool for initiating learning and reaching success. This aligns with the findings of previous studies where feedback has been recognized as being a core element of LOA (Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2022; Heguehag, 2024). Such recognition of feedback is important because it is an essential tool that can bridge the gap between what the students know and the goals they have to reach (Hattie and Timperley's, 2007). Additionally, it is also a central part of LOA that supports the learning process (Carless, 2007).

RQ2: To what extent do the instructors implement LOA principles as described by Carless (2007) in their classes?

Despite the support for interactive tasks, the instructors appeared to have lower confidence in

using tasks that require effort and resources to complete. This may possibly be the result of the challenges that EFL students can face in finishing tasks (e.g. Almalki, 2019; Jalilzadeh & Coombie, 2023), thus restricting some of the instructors to use less difficult tasks. For instance, in Saudi higher education, students tend to have a teacher-centered perspective on learning, and as a result, they rely on their teachers' feedback instead of solving difficult tasks on their own (Almalki, 2019). Aside from this, the use of authentic tasks appears to also have a similarly low score. This may suggest the need for more training in designing authentic tasks which are needed as they help the students to engage in deep learning (Alsowat, 2022) and use the language communicatively in real situations (Fazel & Ali, 2017).

While involving the students in the assessment process has been implemented by most of the participants, their numbers are relatively lower than is the case with the first principle as evident by the larger number of participants that have not shown any agreement. It is possible that this may be the result of the students not being used to peer-assessment as is the case with Heguehag's (2024) study which shows that students' negative attitude towards peer-assessment and their dependence on summative assessments are among the student-related challenges of LOA. Similarly, in the context of Saudi education, implementing alternative assessment strategies can also be difficult due to the traditional views that students have towards assessment (Umer and Omer, 2015). In fact, Almalki (2019) has shown that peer-assessment can be very time-consuming for students in higher education. This could be due to the students' perceived uncertainty of how to evaluate and assess their peers as demonstrated by the results of Al-khariesheh's et al (2025) study. Al-khariesheh (ibid.) argues that this issue could be resolved by establishing clear frameworks for peer-assessment tasks. Furthermore, Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023) also argue that engagement with the assessment criteria could make the students more independent in their learning, and this suggestion could be helpful in this context, considering that the use of rubrics by the students is the second lowest rated practice of this section of the questionnaire.

RQ3: To what extent do the instructors experience the common challenges of implementing LOA in their classes?

The top-down policies and the prominence of the exam-oriented culture appear to be among the three highest ranking challenges. This result aligns with previous findings that have shown that top-down policies can pose obstacles to LOA implementations (Jalilzadeh and Coombe, 2023; Alsalem, 2020; Almosa 2022). This also affirms Alyami's (2022) position that teachers in higher education tend to be more restricted by top-down policies than schoolteachers. Furthermore, the correlation between these two items supports the perspective of Manrique-Arribas et al. (2024) who argue that top-down policies can reinforce an exam-oriented culture. The most perceived challenge, on the other hand, is the difficulty of implementing LOA in large classes, and this appears to be a recognized issue across multiple studies (Ali, 2013; Derakhshan & Ghiasvan, 2022; Heguehag, 2024). The larger size of the class can limit the possibility of implementing some of the principles of LOA, such as the provision of effective feedback (Nsawah et al., 2024).

6. Conclusion

Taken together, the findings show that the instructors tend to be generally aligned with LOA and supportive of its principles in practice. This is despite the constraints which hinder the full realization of its potential. The study contributes to a still-developing body of LOA research in the Saudi context (Alsowat, 2022; Ahmed, 2023; Kamli & Almalki, 2023) by offering the first investigation focused specifically on the English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University.

6.1 Limitations

The most notable methodological limitation of this study is its exclusive reliance on a quantitative survey design. While the TLOAQ is a validated instrument that offers a structured and efficient means of collecting data from multiple participants, Likert-scale responses inherently lack depth. A mixed-methods approach, combining the TLOAQ or other similar instruments with semi-structured interviews or classroom observations, would have provided a more complete and detailed account of instructors' experiences. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should supplement questionnaire data with qualitative methods to address this gap.

6.2 Pedagogical Implications

Moreover, professional development in assessment should not be limited to theoretical input. In fact, training programs are more effective when they focus on building practical, applicable skills rather than simply delivering theoretical knowledge (Kamli & Almalki, 2023). These training programs should prioritize the areas where the gaps are most evident: the design of authentic tasks, the use of peer-assessment, and the integration of assessment criteria into instructional activities.

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