EXAMINING EFL TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT LITERACY: FACTORS OF INFLUENCE AT WESTMINSTER INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN TASHKENT

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Abstract

Teacher assessment literacy (AL) is widely recognised as central to effective language assessment, yet its development in higher education EFL contexts remains under-theorised. This mixed-methods study examines factors shaping assessment literacy among in-service EFL teachers at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), Uzbekistan. Data were collected through an online questionnaire (n = 34) and two focus group discussions (n = 8), with analytic focus on 26 EFL teachers. The findings show that assessment literacy develops through experiential practice, reflective engagement, collegial interaction, and institutional participation rather than through formal training alone. Teachers predominantly evaluate their assessment literacy via colleagues' feedback and reflective judgement, indicating that assessment literacy functions as a socially mediated and context-dependent professional capacity. Although most participants had undertaken assessment-related training, its perceived impact was uneven, pointing to a distinction between credentialised and enacted assessment literacy. References to digital assessment emerged as anticipatory concerns rather than empirically demonstrated competence. The study contributes to language assessment literacy research by conceptualising teacher assessment literacy as distributed, relational, and unevenly enacted, and by distinguishing between instrumental and pedagogical orientations to assessment practice in higher education EFL settings.

Keywords: Language Teacher Assessment Literacy (LTAL); Language Assessment Literacy (LAL); Assessment Literacy (AL); Formative Assessment; Summative Assessment; Higher Education; EFL In-Service Teachers.

1 Introduction

Assessment literacy (AL), also referred to as language assessment literacy (LAL), has become a central construct in contemporary discussions of educational quality and teacher professionalism (Popham, 2010, p. 175). In language education, teachers' assessment literacy is widely associated with the quality of assessment practices and, indirectly, with students' learning outcomes (LOs) (Ashraf &

Zolfaghari, 2018, p. 425). Beyond technical competence, AL has increasingly been conceptualised as a multidimensional and developmental construct encompassing teachers' knowledge, interpretive judgement, reflective capacity, and engagement with assessment practices over time (Xu & Brown, 2016). Despite this growing body of scholarship, the ways in which in-service teachers develop, evaluate, and recalibrate their own assessment literacy remain insufficiently theorised, particularly in higher education contexts.

Existing research has tended to examine teacher assessment literacy either as a set of discrete skills acquired through formal training or as an outcome of professional experience measured through self-report instruments (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014; DeLuca et al., 2016). Less attention has been paid to how teachers themselves gauge their assessment literacy, how collegial interaction and institutional contexts shape this process, and how assessment literacy evolves through reflection, professional dialogue, and engagement with assessment-related challenges. As a result, current literature offers limited insight into the mechanisms through which assessment literacy is developed and sustained in everyday teaching practice, particularly among in-service EFL teachers working within complex institutional environments.

Recent educational reforms in Uzbekistan provide a relevant context for examining these issues. The five-year Education Sector Plan (2020–2024) explicitly prioritises changes in assessment practices and the strengthening of teacher assessment literacy among both pre-service and in-service teachers, with the aim of improving teaching effectiveness and student performance (Sankar, 2021, pp. 109-110). With 209 universities nationwide, most of them located in Tashkent, and English language teaching embedded across curricula, higher education institutions rely heavily on in-service EFL teachers to enact these assessment reforms in practice. While policy documents emphasise AL as a lever for educational improvement, there is limited empirical evidence examining how EFL teachers understand, develop, and evaluate their AL within these reform-oriented institutional settings.

Although research on TAL has expanded internationally, empirical studies that explore assessment literacy as a reflective and socially mediated practice in Uzbek higher education remain scarce. More importantly, little is known about how in-service EFL teachers assess their own assessment literacy, which factors they perceive as shaping its development, and what forms of professional learning they identify as necessary for its further enhancement. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing theoretical understandings of teacher assessment literacy as well as for informing context-sensitive professional development initiatives.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates assessment literacy among in-service EFL teachers at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT). Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:
1.What factors influence the development of assessment literacy among in-service EFL teachers in a higher education context?
2.How do EFL teachers evaluate and gauge their own assessment literacy?

3.What assessment-related professional development needs do teachers identify in relation to their assessment practices?

By situating the investigation within current theoretical debates on teacher assessment literacy and examining these questions through a mixed-methods design, the study seeks to contribute empirical evidence on the developmental and contextual dimensions of AL in higher education EFL settings.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising assessment literacy: AL, LAL, LTAL, and TAL

Before the terms *language assessment literacy* (LAL) and *language teacher assessment literacy* (LTAL) came into widespread usage, the concept of *assessment literacy* (AL), coined by Stiggins in 1991, had already emerged as a foundational construct in educational assessment (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014, p. 377). Stiggins defined assessment-literate teachers as those able to devise appropriate assessment methods, scoring criteria, assessment tasks, and sampling procedures to align bias-free assessments with clear instructional goals. Shepard (2000) further expanded this view by defining teachers as assessment literate when they transcend the mere design and implementation of summative tasks and engage critically with assessment policies and practices (p. 12).

Despite these early formulations, subsequent scholarship has demonstrated that assessment literacy, particularly in language education, is not a straightforward or unitary concept. Although the notion of LAL was first explicitly discussed in Brindley's work on professional development, Davies (as cited in Malone, 2013, p. 331) advanced the construct by conceptualising LAL as comprising three interrelated components: skills, knowledge, and principles. This conceptualisation marked an important shift from technical competence toward a more principled understanding of assessment practice.

At the level of classroom implementation, *teacher assessment literacy* (TAL) presents additional challenges. Griffin et al. (2005, p. 67) argue that teachers must possess sufficient knowledge to identify learning gaps and situate learners on a developmental continuum, particularly within vertically structured curricula. Vogt and Tsagari (2014, p. 377) define LTAL as a characteristic of active and well-trained foreign language teachers who assume primary responsibility for assessment rather than delegating it to external agents. From this perspective, assessment literacy is inseparable from teachers' pedagogical judgement and professional agency. Similarly, Ashraf and Zolfaghari (2018, p. 425) contend that students' academic performance outcomes and assessment quality are representative of teachers' assessment literacy.

While these definitions converge in emphasising the importance of assessment competence, they diverge in how assessment literacy is conceptualised: as a technical skill set, a principled knowledge base, or a reflective professional

practice. In response to this conceptual diversity, the present study adopts Xu and Brown's praxis-oriented model, which conceptualises assessment-literate teachers as those who continuously reflect on their assessment practices, participate in professional conversations about assessment, interrogate their own understandings, and engage with resources to reconstruct their roles as assessors (2017, p. 159). This model foregrounds assessment literacy as a dynamic, socially mediated, and developmental construct, which is particularly relevant for in-service teachers in higher education contexts.

2.2 Development of teacher assessment literacy: training, experience, and context

Research consistently indicates that teachers devote a substantial proportion of their professional time, up to one-third of their working hours, to assessment-related activities, often without adequate formal preparation (Stiggins, 2014, p. 68). This is problematic, as assessment literacy is closely linked to professionalism and to students' learning through both cognitive and affective feedback mechanisms (Hattie, & Timperley, 2007, p. 101). Black and Wiliam (2009, p. 10) further associate assessment literacy with teachers' ability to exploit "moments of contingency" during instruction, underscoring its pedagogical significance.

However, the literature reveals tensions regarding the conditions under which assessment literacy contributes to learning. Havnes et al. (2012, p. 26) argue that teachers' assessment competence alone is insufficient unless students are motivated to engage with assessment processes. This position contrasts with more recent findings from Iranian EFL school and university contexts, where teachers reported that dynamic assessment literacy was both applicable and appealing to students, particularly when teachers possessed conceptual familiarity and experience with assessment principles (Ahmadnejad & Aghajanzadeh, 2024, p. 42). Such findings suggest that the effectiveness of assessment literacy is contingent not only on teacher competence but also on contextual and relational factors.

The role of professional development has been widely emphasised as a mechanism for fostering teacher assessment literacy. Accountability-driven reforms have aimed to promote assessment competence through structured training initiatives (DeLuca et al., 2016a, p. 262), while AL has been identified as essential for developing data-informed practices in teacher education (DeLuca et al., 2016b, p. 267). Empirical evidence from long-term professional development programmes indicates that sustained training can improve classroom practices and promote higher order thinking through varied assessment activities rather than reliance on summative tests (Koh et al., 2018, p. 283). Nevertheless, inadequate programme duration and misinterpretations of assessment-for-learning principles continue to hinder effective preparation, particularly in pre-service contexts (Popham, 2011, p. 270).

Responsibility for these shortcomings is distributed across institutional levels. Teacher educators are often criticised for graduating novice teachers with

insufficient assessment literacy skills (Popham, 2011, p. 270), while university administrators and policymakers may constrain the development of LAL by failing to ensure systematic and coherent pre-training (Mirizon, 2021, p. 139). Moreover, recent studies suggest that professional development programmes frequently overlook assessment literacy in relation to digital and AI-mediated assessment practices, limiting teachers' capacity to evaluate emerging assessment technologies critically (Pan & Wang, 2025, p. 12).

2.3 Resistance, constraints, and institutional influences on assessment practice

The literature also highlights persistent resistance to innovative assessment practices. When assessment is perceived as an additional bureaucratic workload, teachers are more likely to resist alternative assessment forms (Afshar & Ranjbar, 2021, p. 11). Other studies attribute this resistance to insufficient guidance in task design and students' low motivation to engage in learning activities (Humphries & Burns, 2015, p. 246). Teachers' lack of confidence in their assessment competence further exacerbates this issue, particularly when they feel underqualified to implement innovative approaches (Atjonen et al., 2022, p. 2).

Institutional constraints also play a significant role. Limited access to professional development opportunities and rigid administrative requirements often discourage teachers from experimenting with assessment innovations (Szarka et al. 2022, p. 69). Tsagari and Vogt (2017, p. 51) report that innovative assessments are frequently implemented only as obligatory tasks or by highly motivated individuals. At the same time, the educational community has demonstrated a reluctant acceptance of flawed evaluation instruments that inadequately capture assessment quality (Popham, 2011, p. 270). The financial and organisational costs associated with developing assessment literacy further complicate efforts to secure managerial support for systemic change (Stiggins, 2014, p. 68).

2.4 Consequences of limited assessment literacy

The relevance of assessment literacy is underscored by evidence linking insufficient LAL to ineffective student LOs, rendering learners "victims of poor assessment" (Giraldo, 2021, p. 82). Weng and Shen (2022, p. 4) identify three major consequences of inadequate LAL: poorly designed assessments, misinterpretation of test scores, and flawed pedagogical decision-making. Although teachers often remain reluctant to abandon traditional assessment methods, students themselves express a desire for more engaging and alternative forms of assessment (Koh et al. 2018, p. 283). Empirical studies demonstrate that alternative assessment approaches can enhance student involvement, provided that new assessment practices are effectively consolidated (Rezai et al., 2021, p. 20; Guskey, 2002, p. 385).

Concerns regarding AL are further compounded by structural and demographic factors. Popham (2010, p. 175) characterises AL among educators as "abysmally low," attributing this to limited proficiency in digital assessment

practices (Walker, 2007, p. 3) and to factors such as gender, teaching experience, training attendance, and educational background (Afshar & Ranjbar, 2021, p. 11). Additional challenges include poorly designed instructional materials, overcrowded classrooms, misguided policy decisions, and insufficient course credit allocation, all of which undermine assessment quality (Lam, 2015, p. 190). Misalignment between assessment education and classroom practice discourages teachers from pursuing further professional learning and weakens their roles as reliable assessors (Stiggins, 2014, p. 68).

2.5 Evaluating assessment literacy and implications for the present study

Improving assessment literacy requires sustained and context-sensitive professional development focused on assessment principles and practice (Mirizon, 2021, p. 139). Scholars emphasise the importance of applying core principles such as validity and reliability in authentic teaching contexts (Lian, Yew & Meng, 2014, p. 79) and of continuously adjusting assessment strategies through reflection and feedback (Nsibande & Modiba, 2012, p. 644). Teachers who actively pursue assessment literacy development demonstrate greater capacity for self-monitoring and self-regulation (Hill, Ell & Eyers, 2017, p. 12), while learning communities provide critical spaces for professional judgement, developmental change, and collaborative learning (Thompson & Goe, 2009, p. 9).

Despite these advances, assessing teachers' assessment literacy remains challenging due to the construct's breadth and complexity. Professionals frequently overestimate their competencies, raising concerns about the validity of self-reported measures (Popham, 2013, p. 34). In response, contemporary approaches advocate for multiple-measures frameworks incorporating reflection, surveys, observations, and student assessment outcomes to evaluate assessment literacy more holistically (Gabriel, 2015, pp. 120–121).

Taken together, the literature highlights assessment literacy as a multifaceted, developmental, and context-dependent construct shaped by professional experience, collegial interaction, institutional conditions, and access to meaningful professional learning. However, limited research has examined how in-service EFL teachers in higher education evaluate their own assessment literacy, which factors they perceive as influencing its development, and how these perceptions inform their professional learning needs. These unresolved issues informed the design of the present study's questionnaire and focus group instruments, which explicitly examine teachers' understandings of assessment literacy, the sources they rely on to gauge their competence, and the contextual factors shaping their assessment practices. By addressing these gaps, the study seeks to contribute empirically and conceptually to ongoing debates in TAL research.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

A mixed-methods study design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed to gain a comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of the factors influencing assessment literacy (AL) among EFL teachers WIUT. The study followed a sequential exploratory logic, whereby quantitative survey data were first used to map teachers' understandings and experiences of assessment literacy, followed by focus group discussions (FGs) to explore these issues in greater depth. This design enabled methodological complementarity by combining breadth and depth, while supporting exploratory rather than confirmatory empirical claims.

Quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire to provide an overview of teachers' assessment literacy awareness, experiences, and self-evaluation practices. Qualitative data obtained from FG discussions offered additional understanding of how teachers conceptualised assessment literacy, interpreted their experiences, and reflected on contextual and institutional influences.

3.2 Participants and sampling procedures

The target population consisted of teaching staff at WIUT who were involved in English language teaching across faculties. In total, 42 teachers participated in the study across different stages of data collection. Of these, 34 teachers completed the online questionnaire, including 26 EFL teachers, who constituted the analytical focus of the study due to the language-specific nature of assessment literacy examined. The remaining questionnaire respondents were teachers from other disciplines, whose responses were used for contextual comparison only.

For the quantitative phase, a probability-based approach was adopted. The questionnaire invitation was distributed via institutional webmail, allowing all eligible teachers an equal opportunity to participate. This phase therefore approximated simple random sampling within the constraints of voluntary response.

Following preliminary analysis of the questionnaire data, a qualitative subsample was selected using purposive sampling. This approach was employed to ensure representation of EFL teachers with varied teaching experience, academic qualifications, and assessment-related responsibilities. From the pool of EFL questionnaire respondents, eight teachers from the School of Law, Technology and Education (SOLTE) agreed to participate in focus group discussions. This sequential combination of probability sampling for the survey and purposive sampling for the focus groups reflects standard practice in mixed-methods research, where qualitative inquiry is used to extend and contextualise quantitative findings.

3.3 Questionnaire design and administration

The questionnaire was developed to explore multiple dimensions of teachers' assessment literacy, informed by theoretical perspectives emphasising assessment literacy as a reflective, developmental, and socially mediated construct. Drawing on the literature reviewed in Section 2, particularly praxis-oriented and multidimensional conceptualisations of AL, the instrument addressed the following domains: teachers' understandings of formative and summative assessment, perceptions of assessment literacy, assessment techniques used in practice, sources used to evaluate personal assessment literacy, and experiences of assessment-related training.

The 20-item questionnaire, created using SurveyMonkey, included a combination of Likert-scale, closed-ended, multiple-choice, ranking, and open-ended questions. The use of mixed item types reflects the exploratory nature of the study and the intention to capture both descriptive patterns and qualitative insights rather than to construct a unidimensional psychometric scale. For this reason, internal reliability indices were not calculated, as the instrument was not designed to measure a single latent construct.

The questionnaire underwent two stages of review: a pilot administration with five SOLTE teachers to check clarity and relevance, followed by review and approval by the WIUT Research Committee. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality prior to participation. The overall response rate was approximately one third of the invited population.

3.4 Focus group data collection

Focus group discussions following initial analysis of the questionnaire data to explore emerging themes in greater depth. A purposive sample of eight EFL teachers (seven females and one male) from SOLTE participated in two focus groups. Participants were grouped according to teaching experience (Group 1: 11–21+ years; Group 2: 5–10 years) and academic qualifications (Group 1: PhD holders; Group 2: MA holders).

Each focus group session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Discussions were guided by five core questions developed on the basis of questionnaire findings and relevant literature, with flexibility to allow participants to elaborate on issues they considered salient. This approach supported in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives while maintaining alignment with the study's research questions.

3.5 Data analysis procedures

Data analysis was conducted in two stages, corresponding to the quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

Quantitative data analysis

Questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns in teachers' responses. Cross-tabulation and box plots were used to explore relationships between variables such as teaching experience, training background, and assessment practices. Given the exploratory purpose of the study and the sample size, no inferential statistical tests were conducted.

Qualitative data analysis

Focus group transcripts, totalling over 15,000 words, were analysed using an iterative thematic analysis approach. The analysis involved repeated readings of the transcripts, initial coding of meaning units, and the development of themes and sub-themes through constant comparison across focus groups. Coding and theme refinement were conducted by the researcher, with analytic memos used to document interpretive decisions and enhance reflexivity. While formal inter-coder reliability was not calculated, analytic rigour was supported through systematic coding, transparent documentation of analytic steps, and triangulation with questionnaire findings.

3.6 Ethical considerations and methodological scope

Ethical approval for the study was obtained through institutional procedures. Participants provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire and were reminded that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw or skip questions without penalty. Focus group participants were also informed that they could refrain from discussing topics they found uncomfortable. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of anonymised identifiers (R1–R8) in all transcripts and reports.

The study does not aim to produce generalisable or causal claims. Rather, it adopts an exploratory mixed-methods approach to generate context-sensitive insights into how in-service EFL teachers understand, develop, and evaluate their assessment literacy within a higher education setting. This methodological positioning informs both the interpretation of findings and the scope of claims made in the discussion.

4 Results

The results are presented in relation to the study's research questions. Background information on participants' gender, teaching experience, academic qualifications, and modules taught is provided for contextual purposes in the Appendices, but is not foregrounded analytically, as it does not directly address the research questions.

4.1 Results related to RQ1: Factors influencing the development of AL

To examine factors influencing the development of AL (RQ1), questionnaire items explored teachers' understandings of formative and summative assessment, their conceptualisations of AL, and the assessment techniques used in practice.

Before responding to questions explicitly related to AL, participants were asked to select definitions of summative and formative assessment. Regarding summative assessment, most respondents associated it with evaluating learners' achievement at the end of a course (25 out of 34) and with gathering evidence over time to review prior learning (20 out of 34). Fewer respondents linked summative assessment to external accountability pressures (3 out of 34) or to the evaluation of past academic issues (8 out of 34) (Table 1).

Table 1. Teachers' conceptions of summative and formative assessment

Assessment function	Summative assessment: n (%)	Formative assessment: n (%)
Evaluating achievement at the end of a course	25 (73.53)	—
Gathering evidence over time to review prior learning	20 (58.82)	17 (50.00)
Providing feedback and corrective support during instruction	—	20 (58.82)
Producing feedback to enhance and expedite learning	—	18 (52.94)
Focusing on learners' needs	—	9 (26.47)
Clarifying goals and recognising understanding of the learning process	8 (23.53)	9 (26.47)
Implemented cyclically and adapted to learners	—	11 (32.35)
Driven by external accountability pressures	3 (8.82)	—
Other / unclear	1 (2.94)	1 (2.94)

For formative assessment, the most frequently selected definitions emphasised feedback and corrective support during teacher–student interaction (20 out of 34), the production of feedback to enhance learning (18 out of 34), and a focus on learning processes (17 out of 34). Less frequently selected definitions referred to formative assessment as primarily learner-needs focused or as a mechanism for recognising understanding of the educational process (Table 1).

Participants' responses to an open-ended question on AL revealed five recurring patterns: (a) misconceptions or gaps in knowledge, (b) connections between AL and teachers' own assessment practices, (c) links between AL and professional development, (d) attitudes or beliefs related to AL, and (e) the role of AL in instructional decision-making. Representative quotations illustrating these patterns are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers' understanding of AL

Common features	Selected quotations
Common misconceptions or gaps in knowledge	"To be honest, I don't know" "...it might be an ability of a teacher to use their skills, knowledge and experience to assess student's learning appropriately"
Patterns in teachers' own assessment practices	"How effectively a teacher can apply various assessment tools for students' learning". "Ability … to encourage students to learn better by providing timely feedback based on their performance". "… teacher's ability to evaluate students' achievements, academic progress through various learning activities".
Patterns in teachers' own professional development related to AL practices	Professional knowledge of the issues, critical thinking. Knowledge of the module and the system, experience. Teacher's competency in effective application of assessment techniques to enable and support student learning. Ability to adjust decisions based on evidence from the results of formative and summative assessment tasks.
Attitudes or beliefs related to AL	"…a measurable cognitive disposition that is acquired by dealing with assessment demands in relevant educational situations that enables teachers to master these demands quantifiably in a range of similar situations in a relatively stable and relatively consistent way". "Awareness and application of the alignment theory of teaching, learning and assessment".
The role of AL in teachers' instructional decision-making	"Knowledge of where to lead and how to teach". "… ability to certify that students possess certain skills or knowledge". "students' work fairly and objectively based on the assessment criteria, and guiding students through proper feedback". "Teacher's competency in effective application of assessment techniques to enable and support student learning".

Teachers also reported a range of assessment techniques used in their teaching. Most respondents listed more than one technique, with group projects (12 respondents), peer review (9 respondents), self/group reflection (8 respondents), and case studies (8 respondents) reported most frequently. Less frequently mentioned techniques included quizzes, presentations, individual assignments, and self/peer assessment. A variety of additional techniques were also noted, including simulations, debates, progress meetings, portfolios, and exams (Table 3).

Taken together, these findings describe the range of assessment-related knowledge, practices, and experiences reported by teachers and provide a descriptive basis for examining factors associated with AL development.

Table 3. Assessment techniques integrated in teaching

Most used assessment techniques (N)		Less used assessment techniques (N)	
Group projects	12	Quizzes	2
Peer review	9	Self-evaluation checklist	2

Self/group reflection	8	Presentations	2
Case studies	8	Individual task/assignment	2
Self/peer assessment	3	Other	17

4.2 Results related to RQ2: How teachers evaluate their own AL

To address RQ2, questionnaire items examined the sources teachers use to evaluate their own AL. Most respondents reported relying on feedback from colleagues (27 out of 34) and self-reflection on their behaviour, attitudes, or beliefs in assessment contexts (26 out of 34). Other commonly reported sources included participation in professional events (24 out of 34) and seeking feedback from students (23 out of 34). Fewer respondents indicated using self-assessment as a primary evaluative strategy (20 out of 34), while a small number mentioned other approaches (Table 4).

Table 4. How WIUT teachers evaluate their own AL

Variables	Frequency Number	Percentage
Seeking feedback from colleagues	27	79.41
Self-reflection (reflecting on one's behaviour, attitudes or beliefs in a particular situation)	26	76.47
Participating in professional events (workshops, training sessions, conferences, etc.)	24	70.59
Seeking feedback from students	23	67.65
Self-assessment (reflecting on one's own performance or abilities in a particular area)	20	58.82
Other	3	8.82

In open-response comments, two participants additionally referred to reading research articles and professional literature as a means of maintaining awareness of AL developments.

These results indicate the relative frequency with which different evaluative sources are used by teachers when reflecting on their AL.

4.3 Results related to RQ3: Assessment training experiences and perceived needs

RQ3 examined teachers' experiences of assessment-related training and their perceived professional development needs. Slightly fewer than two-thirds of questionnaire respondents (22 out of 34) reported having undertaken some form of formal training related to AL (Figure 2). The most frequently reported training experiences included a Postgraduate Certificate on Teaching and Learning (5 respondents), a Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching (3 respondents), and assessment-focused training sessions organised by WIUT or the British Council (3 respondents) (Table 5).

Table 5. Formal training in AL

Training category	Main provider/location	No. of teachers (n)	Perceived impact on AL (self-reported range)
Postgraduate qualifications (PGCert, MALT, MEd)	WIUT / UK	9	82–100%
Assessment-focused short courses (British Council, STC)	Tashkent	4	87–100%
Institutional professional development (PDS, CACTLE)	WIUT / Not specified	3	77–90%
Online courses and webinars	Coursera / Online	2	77–86%
Other professional qualifications (PRINCE2, Module university course)	UK / Not specified	3	10–95%
Total	—	21*	10–100%

* One respondent reported more than one form of training.

Participants reported varied perceptions of the impact of training on their AL. Responses ranged across the full scale, from lower perceived impact (10–76%) to very high perceived impact (95–100%) (Table 8). These ratings reflect self-reported perceptions rather than measured changes in assessment practice.

A comparison between EFL teachers and teachers from other faculties indicated differences in the range of training experiences reported and in perceived impact levels (Table 6). This comparison is descriptive and based on small subsamples.

Table 6. Summary of formal assessment training and perceived impact at WIUT

Group	No. of teachers	Teachers with training (n)	Teachers without training (n)	Types of training reported	Mean perceived impact on AL (%)
EFL teachers	20	14	6	10	86.6
Teachers from other faculties	14	8	6	5	67.3

Overall, these findings outline teachers' reported exposure to assessment-related training and their perceptions of its impact, forming the empirical basis for subsequent qualitative exploration.

4.4 Summary of key results

Across the questionnaire data, the results indicate that teachers reported diverse understandings of formative and summative assessment, a wide range of assessment techniques in use, reliance on multiple sources—particularly collegial feedback and self-reflection, for evaluating AL, and varied experiences of assessment-related

training. These patterns informed the focus group analysis presented in the subsequent section.

4.5 Results from focus groups

The focus group data were analysed using an iterative thematic approach involving repeated readings of transcripts, initial coding, and constant comparison across participants and groups. Themes were refined through comparison of convergent and divergent views rather than frequency alone. Not all participants endorsed all themes, and where applicable, contrasting positions are reported to illustrate variation in perspectives. The themes presented below extend and contextualise questionnaire findings by revealing how teachers conceptualise, experience, and evaluate AL in practice.

4.2.1 Conceptualising AL through metaphor

To elicit participants' underlying conceptualisations of AL, respondents were asked to generate metaphorical representations of AL in pairs and present them to their groups. This task was used as a projective elicitation technique to surface tacit beliefs and assumptions that may not emerge through direct questioning. Four dominant metaphorical frames were identified across participants: confidence in assessment (R1–R2), a mirror reflecting teaching, learning, and assessment (R3–R4), a toolkit for formative and summative assessment (R5–R6), and a journey in which teachers act as captains and students as sailors (R7–R8).

Across these metaphors, AL was consistently framed as a guiding professional capacity rather than a fixed set of technical skills. Participants described assessment-literate teachers as being guided by principles, concepts, and rules, adjusting their assessment practices in response to contextual demands and top-down regulations, and actively participating in assessment-related decision-making. While most metaphors emphasised agency and reflection, one participant pair foregrounded procedural control through the "toolkit" metaphor, suggesting a more instrumental orientation toward assessment.

4.2.2 Assessment practices and tensions in implementation

Participants reported employing a wide range of assessment types in their teaching, including formative, summative, diagnostic, authentic, self-, and peer-assessments. Several teachers described deliberately combining formative and summative assessments and initiating discussions with students about the effectiveness of implemented assessment practices. However, views diverged regarding the feasibility and value of certain approaches.

Providing multimodal feedback was perceived by some participants as pedagogically effective (R1, R2), while others expressed strong reservations, citing workload and emotional strain. One participant stated: *"It's killing teachers' time, it's psychologically ruining teachers ... [since] out of 1200 students, maybe 200*

students understand the value" (R3). This contrast illustrates a tension between pedagogical ideals and perceived sustainability of feedback practices.

Similarly, self- and peer-assessment were described as potentially effective for engaging students in evaluative processes, yet several participants emphasised the need for gradual implementation. Some teachers reported resistance to formative assessment when it was not associated with grades (R4), whereas others attributed such resistance to students' limited prior exposure to formative practices rather than to the assessment approach itself (R3). These contrasting positions highlight variation in how teachers interpret student responses to assessment practices.

4.2.3 Development of AL over time

Participants identified multiple factors shaping the development of their AL over time. Experience and practice—particularly teaching different modules, working across educational institutions, and engaging in trial and error were described as central to developing assessment-related judgement (R1–R8). Learning from others, including colleagues, mentors, trainers, conference presenters, and through MOOCs, was also frequently cited as contributing to expanded perspectives on assessment (R1, R3, R6, R7, R8).

In addition, participants emphasised the role of reflective practices, research engagement, and formal courses of study in developing AL (R1, R2, R4, R5). Institutional structures were also implicated: one participant highlighted Course Committee Meetings as a space for refining assessment understanding (R2), while others noted that administrative roles, particularly as module leaders, prompted more deliberate consideration of assessment design and consequences (R3, R5). Notably, a small number of participants described AL development as largely experiential and self-directed, with limited reliance on formal training, suggesting alternative pathways of professional growth.

4.2.4 Challenges in implementing formative and summative assessment

Participants reported a range of challenges associated with implementing formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment was frequently described as more difficult to implement due to external constraints and the perceived nature of assessment practices. Several teachers noted students' reluctance to engage in assessments that were not graded (R1, R3, R4), as well as superficial engagement with assessment criteria and feedback (R6–R8).

Additional challenges included mismatched expectations between teachers and students, students' strong focus on marks, and the influence of upper-level students on perceptions of summative assessment tasks (R1, R5, R6). Concerns about professional reputation also emerged, with some participants reporting that students perceived academic English modules as "boring" or "useless" (R6). However, not all participants experienced these challenges to the same extent; a minority described relatively smooth implementation of formative assessment when expectations were clearly negotiated early in the course.

4.2.5 Strategies for addressing assessment challenges

Participants proposed several strategies to mitigate assessment-related challenges. Suggested approaches included providing small incentives for participation in formative activities, such as progress meetings (R2), clustering assessment tasks to manage workload (R1), and calculating more realistic intervals between assessments to reduce student fatigue and maintain engagement (R2, R4, R5). While these strategies were described pragmatically, some participants expressed uncertainty about their long-term effectiveness, indicating ongoing experimentation rather than settled solutions.

4.2.6 Avoidance of feedback and alignment with LOs

Participants identified multiple reasons why teachers may avoid providing extensive feedback or aligning assessment closely with LOs. These included cultural stereotypes about teaching roles and limited pedagogical training among subject-specific professionals, such as lawyers teaching language-related modules (R2, R3, R5, R8). Some teachers described intentionally limiting formative assessment due to its labour-intensive nature (R5, R7), while others reported prioritising content coverage over outcome alignment in content-driven curricula (R5).

Although these practices were described as common, not all participants endorsed them. A minority emphasised deliberate efforts to align assessment with LOs despite institutional and workload constraints, suggesting variation in how teachers negotiate competing demands. Across groups, participants proposed that needs-based professional development could support more consistent alignment of assessment practices with LOs and feedback principles (R1–R8).

4.2.7 Collegial feedback as a source of AL judgement

Building on questionnaire findings, focus group discussions explored why teachers rely on colleagues' feedback to evaluate their AL. Participants cited seeking validation, fear of making mistakes, and professional growth as key reasons. Some described inviting colleagues to review assessment tasks or provide feedback to refine assessment decisions (R3), while others referred to second marking as a means of clarifying ambiguous assessment judgements (R6, R7).

Concerns about error and potential professional consequences were also expressed (R4, R5). At the same time, feedback from experienced colleagues was viewed by many as a marker of professional development and a source of confidence in assessment performance (R4, R5, R7). A small number of participants, however, expressed discomfort with relying heavily on external judgement, indicating a preference for independent decision-making.

4.2.8 Perceived needs for higher-quality AL training

Across focus groups, participants advocated for higher-quality, personalised, and practice-oriented professional development in AL. Suggested models included staged approaches involving knowledge acquisition, application, and reflection (R2), as well as training closely aligned with teachers' immediate assessment needs (R6,

R7). Participants raised concerns about the timing and relevance of existing training opportunities (R4, R7) and emphasised the importance of ongoing support, particularly in light of emerging assessment challenges related to AI and digital tools (R8).

Some participants expressed dissatisfaction with training topics perceived as externally imposed or insufficiently responsive to local needs, noting that such sessions rarely addressed concrete assessment challenges faced in their teaching contexts (R5). While views on training varied, the data indicate a shared perception that existing provision does not consistently support sustained development of AL.

5 Discussion

5.1 Integrating questionnaire and focus group findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more nuanced understanding of AL among WIUT EFL teachers. Rather than serving solely to triangulate or validate results, the mixed-methods design revealed tensions and discontinuities between teachers' stated understandings of AL and their enacted assessment practices. These tensions are analytically productive, as they expose limits in dominant conceptualisations of TAL and suggest areas where existing models may under-specify professional realities in higher education contexts.

5.2 Rethinking teachers' conceptualisations of AL

Both questionnaire and focus group data indicate that WIUT teachers associate AL with the ability to design, select, and apply appropriate assessment tools, and to reflect on assessment practices in relation to student learning. At first glance, this appears to align closely with established definitions of AL and LAL in the literature (Griffin et al., 2005; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014; Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018). However, closer examination of the qualitative data complicates this alignment.

While questionnaire responses foregrounded assessment techniques and procedural knowledge, focus group discussions framed AL as a situated and interpretive capacity, emphasising professional judgement, contextual sensitivity, and decision-making informed by experience and reflection. This divergence suggests a distinction between what may be termed instrumental AL, centred on tools and techniques, and pedagogical AL, which integrates assessment with broader teaching and learning purposes. Existing models tend to subsume these dimensions under a single construct, yet the present findings indicate that they may operate unevenly within individual teachers' practices.

Although Xu and Brown's (2016) praxis-oriented model most closely captures the reflective orientation expressed in focus groups, the data suggest that even reflective models may overestimate the extent to which teachers internalise

assessment judgement individually. Instead, teachers frequently described AL as something negotiated, validated, or calibrated through interaction with others.

5.3 AL as distributed judgement

One of the most salient and unexpected findings concerns teachers' reliance on colleagues' feedback to evaluate their own AL. While self-reflection is frequently positioned in the literature as a core mechanism of AL development (Hill, Ell & Eyers, 2017), the present study indicates that reflective judgement is often externalised rather than internalised. Teachers described seeking collegial validation to confirm assessment decisions, reduce uncertainty, and manage perceived professional risk.

This pattern suggests that AL operates not only as an individual cognitive or reflective capacity but also as a form of socially distributed judgement, embedded within professional relationships and institutional cultures. While learning communities are often portrayed as supportive environments for professional growth (Thompson & Goe, 2009), the data also reveal more ambivalent motivations, including fear of making mistakes and concerns about accountability. These findings invite a refinement of existing models by foregrounding the relational and risk-sensitive dimensions of AL, particularly in high-stakes higher education contexts.

5.4 Experience, training, and the limits of linear development models

Consistent with prior research, teachers in the study identified experience, reflection, and professional interaction as key influences on their AL development (Afshar & Ranjbar, 2021; Rezai et al., 2021; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). However, the findings complicate assumptions that AL develops linearly through formal training or accumulated experience alone.

While many participants reported having undertaken assessment-related training, both questionnaire and focus group data revealed uneven and conditional impact. Some teachers described training as transformative, while others questioned its relevance or practical value. This discrepancy challenges training-centric models of AL that assume a direct relationship between participation in professional development and enhanced assessment competence.

The qualitative data further indicate that teachers with extensive experience and advanced qualifications continued to express uncertainty about assessment decisions, suggesting that AL may remain fragile and situational, even at advanced career stages. These findings point to a distinction between credentialised AL (acquired through formal qualifications) and enacted AL (demonstrated in practice), a distinction that is rarely made explicit in existing frameworks.

5.5 Explaining resistance and selective adoption of assessment practices

The study also sheds light on teachers' selective adoption and occasional avoidance of formative assessment practices. While formative assessment is widely endorsed in the literature as pedagogically desirable (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Guskey, 2002), participants described practical, emotional, and institutional constraints that limited its implementation. Resistance to formative assessment was often framed not as a lack of awareness, but as a rational response to workload pressures, student disengagement, and reputational concerns.

These findings challenge deficit-oriented interpretations that attribute limited use of formative assessment to insufficient knowledge or motivation. Instead, they suggest that avoidance may reflect structural and contextual constraints, including labour-intensive feedback demands and student cultures oriented toward grades rather than learning. This reframing underscores the need to situate AL within organisational and cultural conditions, rather than treating it solely as an individual teacher attribute.

5.6 Implications for AL training

Although most participants had engaged in some form of assessment-related training, focus group discussions highlighted dissatisfaction with the relevance, timing, and specificity of available programmes. While survey data suggested high overall satisfaction rates, qualitative findings revealed that teachers evaluated training effectiveness primarily in terms of its alignment with immediate assessment challenges.

Notably, emerging assessment concerns related to digital tools and AI were absent from questionnaire responses but surfaced strongly in focus group discussions. This discrepancy suggests that teachers' articulated training needs may evolve in response to contextual developments and may not be fully captured through standardised survey instruments. These findings extend existing critiques of assessment training provision (Jeong, 2013; Crusan et al., 2016) by highlighting the importance of needs-responsive and forward-looking professional development, particularly in relation to digital AL.

5.7 Revisiting AL models in light of the findings

Taken together, the findings suggest that prevailing models of TAL would benefit from greater attention to social mediation, contextual constraint, and uneven enactment. While existing frameworks emphasise reflection, training, and professional knowledge, the present study demonstrates that AL is often negotiated, provisional, and relational, rather than stable or fully internalised.

By identifying distinctions between instrumental and pedagogical AL, credentialised and enacted competence, and individual and distributed judgement, this study contributes to a more differentiated understanding of AL in higher

education EFL contexts. These conceptual refinements do not reject existing models, but rather extend them by accounting for complexities that are often underrepresented in theoretical accounts.

6 Conclusions

This study contributes to ongoing debates in AL and LAL by demonstrating that AL among in-service EFL teachers in higher education is neither a stable individual competence nor a purely technical skill set. Rather, the findings suggest that AL operates as a situated, relational, and unevenly enacted professional capacity, shaped by experience, collegial interaction, institutional conditions, and perceived professional risk. In this sense, the study extends existing models of TAL by foregrounding the *social distribution of judgement* and the distinction between instrumental and pedagogical enactments of AL.

While prior research has emphasised reflection, training, and feedback as central components of AL development, the present findings complicate these assumptions. Teachers in this study did not rely on reflection alone to evaluate their AL; instead, they frequently externalised judgement by seeking validation from colleagues. This pattern suggests that reflective competence is often mediated through professional relationships rather than internalised individually. Similarly, although many teachers had participated in formal training, its perceived impact was uneven, indicating a gap between credentialised AL and enacted AL in everyday teaching practice. These findings invite a re-examination of linear, training-centred models of AL development that dominate much of the existing literature.

The study also has implications for applied linguistics and language assessment theory. The findings indicate that LAL frameworks may overemphasise procedural knowledge and technique use, while under-specifying the contextual, affective, and relational dimensions of assessment decision-making. In particular, teachers' selective adoption and at times avoidance of formative assessment challenges deficit-oriented interpretations that attribute limited formative practice to lack of awareness or competence. Instead, the data suggest that assessment practices are shaped by workload pressures, student cultures oriented toward grades, and concerns about professional reputation. Incorporating these structural and interactional dimensions into LAL theorisation would offer a more realistic account of assessment practice in higher education language contexts.

With regard to digital AL, this study does not claim to provide empirical evidence of teachers' digital assessment competence. Rather, references to AI and digital tools emerged as future-oriented concerns voiced by participants, particularly in relation to uncertainty about assessment practices in rapidly changing technological environments. These concerns suggest that digital AL should be treated as an *emerging extension* of AL rather than as a fully developed construct within the present study. Future research is therefore needed to examine how digital

tools reshape assessment judgement, professional risk, and collegial mediation, particularly in language education settings.

The limitations of the study should be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small and context-specific, and the findings are based primarily on self-reported data. While triangulation through questionnaires and focus groups strengthened interpretive depth, future research could benefit from incorporating classroom observations, document analysis, or longitudinal designs to capture changes in AL over time. Expanding research to include teachers from different institutional and disciplinary contexts would also enhance theoretical generalisability.

Rather than offering prescriptive recommendations, this study points toward several research-facing implications. Future studies could explore how AL is negotiated within disciplinary teams, how collegial feedback functions as a mechanism of professional judgement, and how institutional accountability structures shape teachers' willingness to experiment with assessment practices. Investigating the relationship between TAL and student engagement with feedback also represents a promising avenue for further inquiry.

In conclusion, this study positions TAL as a complex, socially mediated construct that cannot be reduced to training attendance or technical competence alone. By reframing AL as distributed, contingent, and context-sensitive, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of AL in higher education EFL contexts and opens new directions for theoretical and empirical research in language assessment.

Abbreviations:
The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

EFL   English as a Foreign Language
LAL   Language Assessment Literacy
LTAL   Language Teacher Assessment Literacy
AL   Assessment Literacy
LOs   Leaning Outcomes
WIUT   Westminster International University in Tashkent

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Appendices
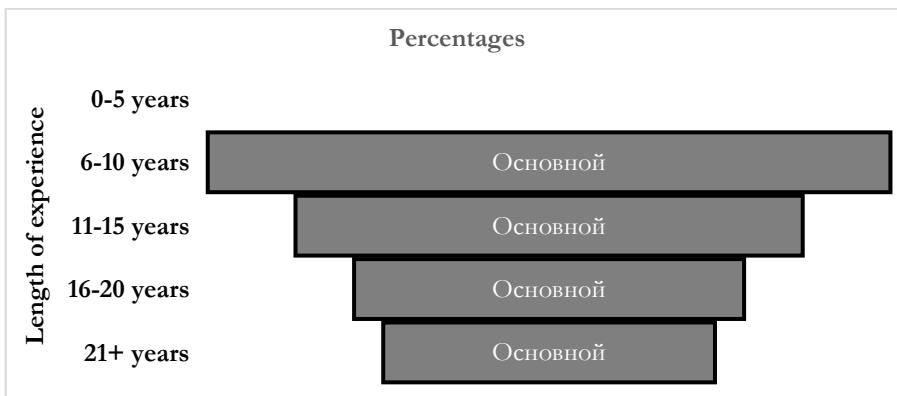
Figure 1. Total length of teaching
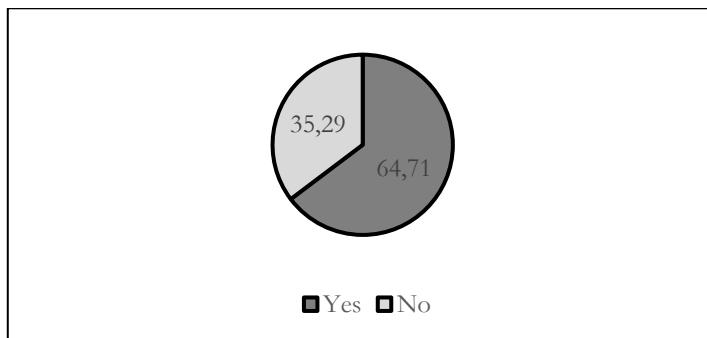
Figure 2. Formal training in assessment literacy

Table 1. Gender distribution

Variables	Frequency Number	Percent
Male	11	32.5
Female	23	67.65

Table 2. Educational attainment by gender

Variables	Male	Female	Total
Master	22.70%	77.27%	64.70%
	5	17	22
PhD	75.00%	25.00%	11.76%
	3	1	4
DSc	100%	0.00%	5.88%
	2	0	2
Doctoral student	16.67%	83.33%	17.64%
	1	5	6

Table 3. Most frequent modules taught by the participants

Variables	Frequency number	Percent
Developing Professional	6	17.65%
Identity (DPI)	6	17.65%
Business		
Management	4	11.76%
Academic English (AE)	12	35.29%