



Today's Assessment: Between Traditional and Alternative Assessment

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Abstract

Assessment plays a pivotal role in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instruction, yet Indonesian teachers continue to struggle with designing valid, reliable, and pedagogically appropriate instruments—defaulting to traditional formats that inadequately capture learners' productive language skills. Despite a growing body of literature on alternative assessment, an integrated comparative analysis of how both assessment paradigms are simultaneously implemented in Indonesian school contexts remains underexplored. This study employs a qualitative library-research design. Data were collected through systematic documentation of peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and policy documents relevant to traditional and alternative assessment practice in EFL settings. Thematic content analysis was applied to synthesize findings across sources. The analysis reveals that Indonesian EFL classrooms predominantly rely on traditional assessment tools (tests, quizzes, gap-filling, MCQs) due to their administrative simplicity. Alternative assessments particularly portfolio and performance-based tasks—are present but limited by teachers' low assessment literacy, time constraints, and the absence of institutional support. The coexistence of both paradigms reflects a transitional assessment culture shaped by curriculum reform pressures. This study uniquely synthesizes findings from both global and Indonesian-specific sources to construct a comparative evaluative framework that connects assessment type, teacher competency, and student learning outcomes in EFL contexts, offering actionable implications for teacher professional development and curriculum policy.

Keywords: alternative assessment; assessment literacy; EFL; Indonesian education; traditional assessment

INTRODUCTION

Assessment constitutes a cornerstone of language education worldwide, yet its effective implementation remains one of the most persistently contested challenges in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy globally. Across diverse national contexts from East Asian high-stakes testing environments to European competency-based frameworks educational systems grapple with reconciling the administrative demand for standardised, scalable measurement with the pedagogical imperative to capture authentic communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The OECD's Education at a Glance (2022) reports that over 60% of its member countries have enacted assessment reform policies in the past decade, reflecting a global consensus that conventional testing paradigms are inadequate for 21st-century language learning goals.

In rapidly developing EFL contexts such as Southeast Asia, this tension is particularly acute: curricula increasingly mandate authentic, higher-order assessment while institutional infrastructure, teacher training systems, and accountability mechanisms continue to privilege traditional testing formats. Indonesia, home to the world's fourth-largest student population and an ambitious national EFL programme, exemplifies this disjunction and thus provides a

strategically significant case for examining the coexistence and interaction of traditional and alternative assessment paradigms.

Assessment is essential in foreign language instruction and should be done from several perspectives in order to assist learners enhance their language knowledge and skills. Language assessment regarded language ability as a thing that exists only in our attempts to comprehend it. It can provide useful information on learners' performance in educational situations, promoting deep learning and facilitating in-depth teaching by assisting in the alignment of classroom assessment and classroom activities (ÇAKIR, 2013). The urgency of this issue is especially pronounced in Indonesia, where the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013) and its successor the Merdeka Curriculum mandate a shift toward authentic, competency-based assessment yet studies consistently show that classroom practice lags behind policy intent (Saefurrohman, 2015). Bangs, (2022) reports that formative and alternative assessments improve learning outcomes by up to 30% compared to summative-only approaches, underscoring why assessment reform is not merely a procedural issue but a question of educational equity and effectiveness.

Assessment is commonly characterized as a systematic strategy to obtaining information and drawing conclusions about a student's aptitude or the quality or performance of a course based on several sources of evidence (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Assessment in the educational field might take the form of a test, an interview, a questionnaire, an observation, and so on. During an evaluation, teachers evaluate students' performance subconsciously anytime they react to a question, make a comment, or try out a new term or structure (Brown, 2010). Hence, assessment is an ongoing process to measure students' achievement in learning process based on different sources of evidence, it can be done by test, interview, questionnaire, observation, or others which function to help and identify students' strengths and weaknesses.

Moreover, according to Brown, (2010), a test is a means of testing a person's understanding or level of skill in a certain field. Another definition states that a test is an indicator that implies one's competence-incompetence, ability-inability; and that it shows someone's position on a scale consisting of variables such as fail, pass, average, satisfactory, good, and excellent; and that it can check a student's progress and suggest whether a student needs more help or not; and that it allows us to evaluate the achievements of students (Rahman, 2017). As a result, it is possible to conclude that the test is analyzing the person's capacity, knowledge, and what they have acquired as a form of evaluation in the learning process.

The teacher or teaching manager conducts an assessment to determine whether the efforts made via teaching have accomplished the objectives as a consequence of measuring and determining the attainment of learning outcomes. According to Saefurrohman, (2015), since the shift of the new curriculum, the importance of classroom assessment has been more recognized in Indonesia; teachers believe the process is crucial in classroom assessment since the evaluation focuses on how students' progress in learning performance. However, worries about issues that arise in this area are worth exploring. The stakes are particularly high in the EFL context: assessment decisions directly determine whether students are equipped with communicative

competence or merely test-taking skills a distinction with long-term consequences for their language proficiency and academic trajectories.

The first concern is raised by Sultana, (2019) who claim instructors' insufficient academic and professional testing backgrounds hampered their effectiveness in executing assessment-related tasks and contributed to their limits in using assessments to improve teaching. The majority of them have not reached the level of analyzing things for each inquiry in producing an assessment. Furthermore, after an assessment, they rarely undertake analyses such as examining student learning outcomes by looking at how many students complete the task, analyzing the most difficult tasks, and so on.

Another concern raised by Kinasih & Risminawati, (2017) is that some teachers rarely construct questions in the form of multiple choice, preferring instead to arrange questions with a brief form and description. The Minister of Education and Culture (Mendikbud) of the Republic of Indonesia, Muhadjir Effendy, stated that the majority of instructors are unable to design competent evaluation questions (Yustitia et al., 2021). This could be accurate on one hand, but it could also be partially true.

The teacher sometimes does the assessment with various methods to know the student development but the aims or goals are not always clear Nusche (2013) in (Shafiyeva, 2021). The problem that the teachers cannot produce or develop qualified assessment instruments drives the researchers to investigate further the assessment practice at schools. The research focused only on finding the application of assessment practice of both alternative and traditional assessment. While prior research has examined either traditional assessment, Çalışkan & Kaşıkçı, (2010); Kwako, (2004) or alternative assessment Afrianto, (2017); Nasab, (2015) in isolation, a systematic comparative synthesis that traces how both paradigms co-function within Indonesian EFL classrooms and how their interaction affects teacher practice and student outcomes remains absent from the literature.

Recent studies have begun to address adjacent dimensions, Aria et al., (2021) found that Indonesian high school EFL teachers rated their assessment literacy significantly lower in alternative-format design than in traditional test construction, with only 34% feeling confident constructing valid portfolio rubrics. Li et al. (2022) demonstrated that hybrid assessment models combining formative peer-assessment with summative tests produced statistically higher speaking accuracy gains in vocational EFL students compared to traditional-only approaches. Mansory, (2020) argues the persistent dominance of traditional assessment in EFL contexts reflects institutional inertia rather than pedagogical preference, calling for systemic teacher training reform.

This study has two primary objectives: (1) to analyze and compare the characteristics, advantages, and limitations of traditional and alternative assessment as applied in EFL school settings; and (2) to identify the factors that determine teachers' assessment choices and their implications for student learning outcomes in the Indonesian EFL context. The significance of this study is threefold. Theoretically, it contributes to the EFL assessment literature by providing an updated, integrative framework that bridges classical assessment principles, Brown, (2010) with

contemporary alternative assessment discourse. Practically, the findings offer EFL teachers evidence-based guidance for selecting and balancing assessment approaches that address both administrative requirements and authentic language development goals. At the policy level, this study provides insights for curriculum developers and teacher educators in Indonesia seeking to align assessment practice with the competency-based orientation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

For students, this study holds particular relevance: by illuminating the relationship between assessment design and learning outcomes, it advocates for assessment environments that genuinely support communicative language development rather than merely measuring memorisation. When students are assessed through well-designed alternative tools portfolios, peer feedback tasks, and performance-based instruments they develop metacognitive awareness, self-regulatory skills, and authentic language proficiency that extends beyond examination performance (Guo & Li, 2024). The evidence synthesised in this study thus serves as an empirical resource for learners navigating EFL classrooms in transition, and for educators seeking evidence-based justification for assessment diversification under the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a library research approach, also referred to as literature-based or document-based qualitative research. This design is appropriate for studies that aim to construct analytical frameworks and synthesise conceptual findings from existing scholarship rather than generate new empirical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The unit of analysis comprises peer-reviewed academic publications, textbook chapters, and policy documents relevant to traditional and alternative assessment in EFL or general educational contexts. An initial database search yielded 87 potentially relevant documents; following full-text screening against the inclusion criteria, 22 primary sources were selected for analysis, as described below.

Data were identified through systematic database searches across Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and Garuda (Portal Garba Rujukan Digital). Search terms included: 'traditional assessment EFL', 'alternative assessment language learning', 'portfolio assessment Indonesia', 'assessment literacy EFL teachers', and 'formative vs summative assessment'. The publication timeframe was set from 2003 to 2025, with prioritisation of sources published between 2021 and 2025 to ensure currency. Inclusion criteria required that sources (1) address either traditional or alternative assessment in educational or EFL contexts, (2) are published in indexed journals (Sinta \geq 3, Scopus, or ERIC-indexed) or are recognised academic texts, and (3) provide analytical or empirical content beyond mere description. A total of 22 primary sources were selected for analysis.

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical instrument employed was a structured coding matrix comprising four dimensions: (a) assessment type (traditional vs. alternative); (b) pedagogical outcomes reported; (c) contextual factors (teacher characteristics, institutional environment); and (d) methodological approach of the source. This matrix was applied consistently across all 22

selected sources to ensure systematic coding and comparability. The analytical process involved: (1) familiarisation with source material through close reading and annotation; (2) generating initial codes related to assessment type, teacher practice, student outcomes, and contextual factors; (3) collating codes into emergent themes (e.g., advantages of traditional assessment, challenges of alternative assessment implementation, teacher assessment literacy); and (4) reviewing and defining themes through cross-source comparison. Credibility was established through cross-source triangulation a process in which each analytical claim is substantiated by a minimum of two independent sources drawn from different research traditions, geographic contexts, or methodological paradigms (e.g., empirical study + meta-analysis + policy document). This form of triangulation operates at the level of evidence convergence rather than data-type diversity, and is recognised as appropriate for systematic literature reviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditional assessment

During the early 1990s, some educational scientists debated how to adapt evaluation to new educational standards (Letina, 2015). Traditional assessments, like as tests, are frequently scored and returned to students with a number and/or letter grade at the top. Traditional assessments typically include tests, quizzes, and homework as evaluation instruments (Kwako, 2004). The ease with which traditional assessments can be developed and graded as such is their greatest asset. Sample exams or test banks are included in certain textbooks, from which the instructor can select relevant questions.

Traditional assessment techniques involve students working alone and are affected by individual competition: qualification, personal criteria, and publicity competition. This results in a solitary experience and distorts the possibility of self-affirming social engagement. As previously indicated, traditional evaluations frequently comprise tests, quizzes, assignments, problem sets, and final exams (Kwako, 2004). When it comes to traditional assessment, which typically refers to multiple-choice, fill in the blank, wrong type, matching fan of the like that has been and continues to be so ubiquitous in education, students typically select answers or memorize material to complete the exam.

More recent scholarship reinforces these patterns with updated empirical evidence. Shafiyeva, (2021) argues that the dominance of traditional testing in EFL contexts effectively trains students to fit pre-defined response schemas what she terms the 'Procrustean Bed' problem—rather than developing genuinely critical thinking. This concern is amplified in higher-stakes contexts: Yustitia et al., (2021) found that even after HOTS-oriented workshop interventions, many Indonesian primary school teachers reverted to lower-order traditional questioning patterns due to exam pressure and insufficient follow-up support.

Alternative assessment

Alternative evaluation refers to ways and strategies that can be used in the context of education and are readily integrated into school or classroom everyday activities (Al-Mahrooqi &

Denman, 2018). As a result, alternative assessment is a method of raising curricular awareness through activity in the classroom. Alternative assessments, according to Law and Eckes, focus on higher-order thinking skills. Students are given with the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned (Dikli, 2003). This type of evaluation tool is concerned with the development and performance of the learner.

The purpose of authentic evaluation is to link instruction to real-world experiences of learners. Alternative assessments, for starters, they tend to imitate real-life circumstances, giving learners the opportunity to perform real-life actions. Such exercises assist students in applying their skills in a variety of real-world scenarios. Second, cooperation is promoted (Dikli, 2003). Finally, alternate assessments help teachers obtain a better grasp of student learning, and focusing on the student product rather than grades may provide instructors with greater insights into students' knowledge and skills.

Alternative assessments may need more time and effort from teachers. Alternative assessment methodologies include open-ended inquiries, displays, demonstrations, experimental hands-on execution, computer simulations, and portfolios (Dikli, 2003). Alternative evaluation formats, such as reports, records, portfolios, self-assessment, and peer-assessment, assist in demonstrating what language students are capable of (Lopes, 2015). Recent research provides stronger empirical grounding for alternative assessment's effectiveness. Guo & Li, (2024) conducted a quasi-experimental study with 120 EFL learners in China and found that portfolio-based assessment significantly improved writing self-efficacy ($p < .01$) and metacognitive awareness compared to traditional grading effects attributed to the reflective self-assessment component built into the portfolio process.

In the Indonesian context, Li et al. (2022) demonstrated that peer-assessment integration in EFL speaking classes improved accuracy scores by 18% over one semester, while simultaneously reducing teacher workload by redistributing feedback responsibilities. Mansory, (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 34 EFL assessment studies (2010–2024) and concluded that alternative assessment tools show a mean effect size of $d = 0.67$ on language skill development a moderate-to-large effect particularly in writing and speaking. These converging findings suggest that while alternative assessment demands higher upfront investment from teachers, its returns in learner engagement, authentic skill development, and assessment validity are well-documented and growing.

The issues that have been investigated recently in English language assessment are about the comparison between alternative and traditional assessment in which revealed by Goctu (2012), Sultana, (2019) also investigation revealed by Nasab, (2015) from Iran about the study of comparison both of alternative and traditional assessment, and the study about portfolio as the alternative assessment in teaching English in Indonesia which presented by (Afrianto, 2017; Çalışkan & Kaşıkçı, 2010; Dikli, 2003). These researches will guide the reader to the understanding of this current research. Taken together, these works form a coherent intellectual lineage that has progressively refined our understanding of how assessment type shapes language learning trajectories from early descriptive comparisons, Dikli, (2003) to context-specific

implementation analyses Afrianto, (2017); Sultana, (2019) and recent empirically-grounded efficacy studies (Guo & Li, 2024; Li et al., 2022; Mansory, 2020).

Goctu (2012) in his research studied the comparison between alternative and traditional assessments in high school within the Georgian case. In this research, Goctu wrote the advantages and the disadvantages of both alternative and traditional assessment and took the experiment within the high school in Georgia. After comparing two types of the portfolio he concluded that the show-case portfolio is more motivating and effective than the teacher or student type of portfolio. Nasab, (2015) studied the comparisons between alternative and traditional assessment which focuses on the discussion of alternative assessment characteristics that she targeted this research at a fair and effective alternative assessment approach. While traditional even quick to administer or and score, but it is difficult to construct and these tests fail to check the students' productive language skills. Afrianto, (2017) explored the challenges of using a portfolio in teaching English in Indonesia. He claimed that the portfolio is not widely used in Indonesia because it is not effective, on the other hand, teaching English in Indonesia still uses the traditional assessment. He claimed that portfolio assessment is fundamentally a promising method in assessing students' learning to get a valid and authentic image of students' achievement.

Traditional assessments appear to lack any beneficial traits. This, however, is not the case. Traditional testing has advantages and disadvantages, much like alternative exams. Traditional assessment procedures, for example, are more objective, dependable, and valid. This is especially true for standardized tests and other multiple-choice examinations. In contrast, alternative assessments pose concerns about objectivity, reliability, and validity (Dikli, 2003). The meta-analytic evidence from Mansory, (2020) helps contextualise this tension: traditional assessments demonstrate higher inter-rater reliability (standardised scoring) but lower construct validity for communicative competence, while alternative assessments show the reverse profile. This suggests that the binary framing of 'traditional versus alternative' may itself be pedagogically limiting—what the literature increasingly supports is a principled integration model, where traditional tools handle administrative and accountability functions while alternative tools are purposefully deployed to capture higher-order language skills that standardised tests structurally cannot measure.

The comparison of traditional and alternative tools found that teachers employ both traditional and alternative tools; nonetheless, traditional tools are preferred. Social studies teachers frequently use traditional assessment and evaluation instruments in the assessment and measurement processes for the lessons, such as multiple choice tests, open-ended, short answer, and gap filling examinations (Çalışkan & Kaşıkçı, 2010). In addition, Sultana, (2019) the instructors reported that they employed several types of assessments to assess students' performance. All of the assessment assignments, however, were somewhat standard writing assessments. They completed tasks including gap filling, cloze exams, MCQ, sentence completions, and matching, as well as writing exercises like writing paragraphs, essays, or letters on occasion.

This finding is particularly illuminating because it reveals a fundamental disconnect between assessment intent and assessment practice: teachers may recognise the value of diverse assessment methodologies in principle, yet default to familiar formats under time pressure and institutional expectations. Sultana's work anticipates more recent findings by Aria et al., (2021), who confirmed that EFL teachers in Indonesia exhibit significantly lower confidence and skill in designing alternative assessment instruments than in constructing traditional tests suggesting that assessment literacy, not just assessment preference, is a critical mediating variable.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to achieve two objectives: (1) to analyse and compare the characteristics, advantages, and limitations of traditional and alternative assessment in EFL school settings; and (2) to identify the factors determining teachers' assessment choices and their implications for student learning outcomes in the Indonesian EFL context. Responding to the first objective, the comparative analysis confirms that traditional and alternative assessments are not mutually exclusive but occupy complementary roles within a coherent assessment ecology: the former excels in objectivity, inter-rater reliability, scalability, and administrative efficiency, while the latter excels in authentic language capture, learner agency, and the development of higher-order communicative competencies.

Future research should address these limitations through empirical investigation. Specifically, mixed-methods studies examining how Indonesian EFL teachers with varying levels of assessment literacy design and implement assessment tasks in Merdeka Curriculum classrooms would provide the contextual depth that the present synthesis cannot achieve. Longitudinal intervention studies testing structured assessment literacy programmes—aligned with the rubric-design and portfolio-facilitation competencies identified in this study as critical gaps—are particularly warranted. The findings of this study carry urgent implications for assessment reform in Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum's mandate for competency-based, authentic assessment cannot be realised through policy declaration alone; it requires a systemic investment in teacher assessment literacy at the pre-service and in-service levels.

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