

دراسة في مقاربات تقييم المهارات اللغوية في جامعات إقليم كردستان

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An Investigation into Approaches to Language Skills Assessment at Universities in Kurdistan Region

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المخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة، وهي مقتطف من أطروحة دكتوراه، فعالية ممارسات التقييم التي يستخدمها معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعات الحكومية في إقليم كردستان العراق. الهدف الأساسي هو تحديد ما إذا كانت ممارسات التقييم تتوافق مع التقييم من أجل التعلم (AfL) أو تقييم التعلم (AOL). ولمعالجة ذلك، تبحث الدراسة في أساليب وأعراض وإجراءات التقييم التي يستخدمها المعلمون في فصول المهارات اللغوية من خلال استخدام نهج مختلط الأساليب، ودمج استبيانات المعلم، والمقابلات، وتحليل الوثائق. تكشف النتائج عن مزيج من ممارسات (AfL) و (AOL) بين معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مع تركيز أقوى على AOL. وتختتم الدراسة بتوصيات لتعزيز ممارسات التقييم لدعم نتائج التعلم على نحو أفضل في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تشير وجهات نظر المعلمين الإيجابية حول دور التقييم في تحسين التعلم والاستخدام السائد للتقييم من أجل التعلم في مجالات مثل وجود

أغراض تكوينية، وتقديم ملاحظات وصفية، واستخدام الأنشطة التعاونية والمهام الأصيلة، وضمان الوضوح والشفافية في أهداف التعلم إلى الالتزام بدعم التعلم المستمر وإشراك الطلاب. يتماشى هذا الاكتشاف مع النتائج التي توصل إليها (Ho 2015) حيث نفذ المعلمون الفيتناميون إجراءات التقييم من أجل التعلم إلى حد ما من خلال استخدام الاستجابات وردود الفعل. ومع ذلك، فإنه يتناقض مع (Ho 2015) في أن الملاحظة وتقييم الأقران تم استخدامهما أيضًا لتعزيز الفعالية المحتملة للتقييم من أجل التعلم في تحسين تعلم الطلاب. على العكس من ذلك، كانت بعض مبادئ التقييم من أجل التعلم التي استخدمها المعلمون في الدراسة الحالية أكثر مفاهيمية من كونها فعلية ولا تتوافق تمامًا مع مبادئ التقييم من أجل التعلم من الناحية النظرية، وهو ما يشبه نتائج (Yilmazer و Özkan 2017).

ABSTRACT

This study, an extract from a PhD dissertation, explores the effectiveness of assessment practices employed by EFL teachers from English departments at public universities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The primary aim is to determine whether the assessment practices align with Assessment for Learning (AfL) or Assessment of Learning (AoL). To address this, the study examines the assessment methods, purposes, and procedures used by teachers in language skills classes by employing a mixed-method approach, incorporating teacher questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal a blend of AfL and AoL practices among Kurdish EFL teachers, with a stronger emphasis on AoL. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing assessment practices to better support learning outcomes in Kurdish EFL classes. The teachers' positive perspectives on the role of assessment in improving learning and the predominant use of AfL in areas such as having formative purposes, providing descriptive feedback, using collaborative activities and authentic tasks, and ensuring clarity and transparency in learning objectives suggests a commitment to supporting continuous learning and student engagement. This finding aligns with the results found in Ho (2015) in which Vietnamese teachers implemented AfL procedures to some extent through the use of questioning and feedback. However, it contrasts with Ho (2015) in that observation and peer assessment were also used to enhance the potential effectiveness of AfL in improving student learning. On the contrary, some principles of



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AfL used by the teachers in the current study were more conceptual than actual and do not fully align with the AfL principles in theory, which is similar to the findings of Yilmazer and Özkan (2017).

1. Introduction

Assessment, learning, and teaching are three integrated elements of language education and they can directly or indirectly affect each other positively or negatively. Assessment can clearly have a great impact on learning and teaching as decisions made based on the evidences derived from assessments can influence both the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, to raise the quality of education, assessment methods and procedures have been continuously updated and improved since the last few decades. The most recent approaches are Assessment *of* learning (AoL) and Assessment *for* learning (AfL), and the less common approach, Assessment *as* Learning (AaL). According to a review of classroom assessment research (Black & Wiliam, 1998), AfL is one of the most effective approaches to enhance learning and raise standards, and consequently there has recently been a growing trend towards AfL (or formative assessment) rather than AoL (or summative assessment) in many parts of the world. Lee and Falvey (2014) argue that shifting to AfL from AoL has almost become universal and has been advocated by many educators.

According to the researcher's informal observations, in the universities of Kurdistan Region, not enough attention has been paid to AfL and many teachers are believed to take AoL. Previously, some attempts have been made with this regard. For instance, the Bologna process has been introduced which encourages the use of many alternative methods of assessment to implement the formative type of assessment. However, many teachers may tend to depend heavily on traditional tests to make educational decisions whereas tests are only one method of assessments among many other alternative methods of assessment that teachers can call on. According to Ismael (2017), existing assessment techniques in English departments in the Kurdistan Region continue to rely heavily on traditional pen-and-paper assessments, which account for 90% of students' overall scores. Besides, the new approaches of assessment likely conflict with teachers' prior conceptions of the purpose of assessment and their assessment practices. Because such approaches represent a different way of thinking about assessment, it is unlikely that many teachers will find it easy to incorporate them into their practice. The shift from the traditional methods of assessment to the contemporary assessment approaches necessitates a fundamental change



in the teachers' current perspectives on the nature of learning and interactions in the classroom as well as in their existing practices. The assessment process needs newer and more radical reform so that it can go along the 21st century requirements for assessment in a way that it aids learning.

After a careful review of the literature, the researcher found little, if any, research concerning AfL in the English departments exists in the literature in the context of the Kurdistan Region, despite the fact that research into assessment has grown significantly in many parts of the world over the past two decades. Hence, it is believed that there is room for more research in the current context, especially to evaluate whether the teachers implement AfL or AoL in their classes.

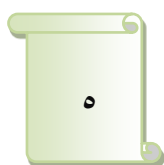
Due to all these factors and the fact that previous studies have shown mixed and various findings, conducting this research is essentially needed as an attempt to evaluate whether the current assessment implemented in English language skills classes at universities in Kurdistan Region follows the principles of AfL or AoL.

Therefore, this study aims to determine the extent to which the teachers' assessments improve student learning. More specifically, it investigates whether the teachers implement AfL or AoL in their language skills classes. To this end, the study explores the teachers' assessment practices (methods and purposes) and procedures. Based on the findings, the study identifies areas of improvement in the current assessment practices and subsequently develops recommendations to enhance learning outcomes in Kurdish EFL classes. To achieve these purposes, the current study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the predominant assessment practices employed by Kurdish EFL teachers in language skills classes?
2. To what extent do the assessment practices employed in language skills classes align with the principles of AfL and AoL?
3. How can the assessment practices be improved to better enhance learning outcomes in Kurdish EFL classes?

2. Literature Review

The four language skills, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, are the central components of learning a language. A learner is assumed to have acquired the four language skills and learnt the language when





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he/she is able to understand and produce language orally or in a written form in order to achieve communication aims. On the other hand, assessment, an essentially integrated element of the learning process, is used to collect data about students' language learning and acquisition. It is traditionally defined as "a wide range of methods for evaluating pupil performance and attainment including formal testing and examinations, practical and oral assessment, classroom-based assessment carried out by teachers" (Gipps, 1994, p. vii). But in recent years, assessment has been looked at as a tool to enhance learning and teaching. For instance, according to Dessie (2015), assessment is defined as "the ongoing process of gathering, collecting, reflecting on, and using evidence about student progress in order to support and enhance their future learning." (p. 17).

A distinction between summative and formative assessment approaches has long been recognized. However, a more recent distinction has emerged, categorizing assessment into three approaches: AfL, AoL, and AaL. Crooks (2002) and Bennett (2011) consider AfL as formative assessment which aims at boosting learners' achievement while they interact with their teachers and peers. Ho (2015) believes that the two terms, formative assessment and AfL, are different in their timeframe and emphasis. They state that AfL puts more emphasis on the role the learners play in their own learning but formative assessment focuses more on the teachers' roles in modifying their teaching practice. Likewise, the Assessment Reform Group (1999) makes clear distinctions between formative assessment and AfL. They argue that the term formative assessment helps the teacher determine points to be improved, but does not inform the learner how to make progress towards further learning. They continue explaining that that AfL is a more appropriate term since it helps in determining the next steps to build on success and strong points as well as to improve weak points. On the other hand, Sardareh (2014) mentions that the most essential elements of AfL are collaboration of both teachers and students in classroom discussions, establishing and communicating learning aims and success criteria, formative feedback, and peer- and self-assessment. These techniques allow learners to monitor their learning process and also to bridge the gap between their present



level and the intended goals (Sadler, 1989). Although its full potential has yet to be realized, the practice of AfL has shown its many advantages.

Some studies have shown the proper implementation of AfL. For example, Britton (2015) examined the teachers' understanding and practices of AfL in two Polish schools and found that the teachers' understanding of AfL was greatly aligned with the theoretical principles of AfL. As for the teachers' actual practices of AfL, the participant teachers were observed to use 18 AfL techniques (e.g., Success Criteria, Learning Partners, What are we learning today?-type questions, Traffic Lights, Thumbs up or down, etc.) for a variety of purposes (e.g. giving and clarifying instructions; sharing learning aims and criteria for success; providing feedback from teachers, learners, and peers; and evaluating learners' levels of confidence). In addition,

Ho (2015) carried out case studies to investigate assessment procedures employed by three Vietnamese university lecturers. It was revealed that the teachers were following the principles of AfL to some extent, including questioning, observation, oral feedback, and peer assessment. Furthermore, the teachers communicated the learning aims and success criteria to the students.

On the other hand, the term AoL, emerging along with its new paradigm, AfL, is defined as "assessment that happens after learning has occurred, to determine whether learning has happened." (Cheng & Fox, 2017; p. 4). Hidri (2020, p. 6) considers AoL as "a concentrated process which functions to compile learners' performance usually in the shape of ranks or grades through analysing how much has been learnt in connection to what was taught". In brief, AoL is the assessment given in the form of testing at a specific time after instruction. It is used to summarize what students know and can do at a specific time in order to consequently make a summative judgement of pupils' academic performance and attainment in comparison to aims and goals. Because learners have little involvement and the feedback is normally given in the form of grades, there is little direction or information for improvement (Berry, 2008). Sewagegn (2019) investigated Ethiopian university instructors' assessment practices and found that teachers primarily used



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written, paper-and-pencil assessment methods, which aligned with AoL concepts, rather than alternative assessment methods.

Although the focus has recently switched from AoL to AfL, in a language classroom, both AoL and AfL are essential types of assessment. Cheng and Fox (2017), Cole (2010), Hidri (2020) and Vik (2013) believe that the combination of both approaches of assessment in daily classroom practices can have considerable effects on student learning and that both should be integrated into a system of assessment, curriculum, and instruction. In order to measure student achievement and influence student learning in the classroom, a balanced assessment that includes both AfL and AoL is required.

Mussawy (2009) carried out a study in order to determine Afghan university teachers' assessment practices and perceptions. It was found that they primarily relied on summative assessment (AoL), such as exams and classroom assignments, although they expressed a tendency towards a mix of alternative and traditional methods of assessment. However, the teachers infrequently used seminars and class projects, as well as some informal questioning and classroom discussions, which are aligned with formative assessment.

Assessment as learning (AaL), a less common to assessment, differs from the other two assessment approaches. It emphasizes student involvement in the assessment process, primarily through self- and peer-assessment. More responsibility is placed on students to monitor and direct their own learning. However, according to Earl (2003; 2006) and Lam (2018), the concept of AaL is a part of AfL that emphasizes using assessment to help learners in building and improving their metacognition.

Different sets of assessment principles have been put forward by a wide variety of sources in the literature for evaluating and designing assessment procedures. With regard to the principles of AfL, the most widespread and influential principles are presented by the Assessment Reform Group in 1999. In an article entitled "Assessment for Learning: Beyond the Black Box", the Assessment Reform Group (1999; pp 4-5)



identified five principles of AfL through which assessment can improve learning. The principles are:

1. Providing students with effective feedback;
2. Involving students in their own learning;
3. Adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment;
4. a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning;
5. the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

This practice of assessment contrasts with the traditional practices of AoL, in which assessment is used to test and grade students for administrative and reporting purposes.

Similarly, Sambell et al. (2013; cited in Rahman and Majumder, 2014) highlight six guiding principles of AfL:

1. Designing authentic assessment
2. Appropriate balancing of summative and formative assessment
3. Creating confidence-building opportunities for practical and rehearsal
4. Designing formal feedback to improve learning
5. Designing opportunities for informal feedback
6. Developing students as self-assessors and effective lifelong learners

For teachers applying AfL in their classes, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2003) provide four fundamental practices: sharing success criteria and learning objectives with students, questioning, feedback (teachers' feedback, peer assessment, self-assessment), and formative use of summative tests.

Some researchers have looked into specific elements or principles of AfL. For example, Sardareh (2014) investigated how teachers implement two assessment strategies of AfL, namely questioning and classroom discussion as well as giving feedback, in ESL classes in a primary school. The results showed that the teachers used questioning to a good extent; yet, they asked lower cognitive questions that did not trigger thoughtful reflection and not all the students were given chances to respond to the questions. They were just trying to check students' understanding, not to provoke communicative responses so that students reflect on their learning. Besides, it was also found that the whole class discussions were teacher-centered in which the majority of the questions were raised by the teacher and the students rarely asked questions. Lastly,



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the data revealed that the students were passive in the process of giving feedback and that most of the feedback was teacher-dominated, given in the form of compliments and one-on-one instructions, not as dialogic discussions that help students improve student learning. The students were not given chances to negotiate meaning or to assess their own and their peers' work. Lee and Falvey (2014) inspected the assessment strategies employed in writing classrooms in three secondary schools in Hong Kong. The participants were 496 students and six teachers. The findings indicated that the teachers employed a range of strategies to support AfL, including a strong link between teaching and assessment, sharing success criteria, giving formative feedback throughout the writing process, and peer assessment.

While all these principles have been put forward to help improve student learning, many learner-related, teacher-related, and context-related challenges could greatly influence the successful implementation of assessment.

3. Method

The current research adopts an, empirical, exploratory, descriptive, and evaluative methodology to examine assessment practices among Kurdish EFL teachers in undergraduate language skills classes. The study aims to identify whether these practices promote learning (AfL) or merely measure it (AoL). To achieve this, a mixed-method design was employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This design aligns with the perspective of Berry & Adamson (2011), who highlight the popularity of evaluative research in assessment studies. The mixed-method approach, as advocated by Creswell (2009), offers a comprehensive understanding by combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data were collected using a descriptive survey, while qualitative data were gathered through conducting interviews. Additionally, document analysis was used to triangulate the findings and enhance the reliability and validity of the study's outcomes. This multifaceted approach ensures a thorough evaluation of the assessment practices, contributing valuable insights into the effectiveness of AfL and AoL in Kurdish EFL contexts.

3.1 Population

The study's population consisted of EFL Kurdish teachers from English departments at public universities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The sample representing this population includes 80 teachers who completed the questionnaire, and an additional 10 teachers who took part in in-depth



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interviews. The involvement of these teachers offers important insights into the assessment practices used in language skills classes, contributing to the overall objectives of this evaluative research. Demographic information for the questionnaire participants is presented in Table 1 below.

Table (1): Demographic Information of the Questionnaire Participants

Demographic Information	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	44	55%
	Female	36	45%
Age	21-30 years old	8	10%
	31-40 years old	46	57.5%
	41-50 years old	21	26.25%
	Above 50 years old	5	6.25%
University	Salahaddin University-Erbil	20	25%
	University of Sulaimani	12	15%
	University of Duhok	9	11.3%
	University of Halabja	6	7.5%
	Koya University	6	7.5%
	Soran University	6	7.5%
	University of Raparin	8	10%
	University of Charmo	4	5%
	University of Garmian	6	7.5%
	University of Zakho	3	3.8%
Years of Teaching	1-10 years	42	52.5%
	11-20 years	29	36.25%
	21-30 years	8	10%
	More than 30 years	1	1.25%
Degree	Master's	60	75%
	PhD	20	25%
Language Skills teaching or have taught	Reading	63	78.8%
	Writing	60	75.0%
	Listening	50	62.5%
	Speaking	62	77.5%

Demographic details of the ten interview participants are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table (2): Demographic Information of the Interviewees

Teachers	Gender	University	Degree	Skills Currently Teaching/Previously Taught
Teacher 1	Female	Salahaddin	Master's	Advanced Speaking



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		University-Erbil		
Teacher 2	Male	University of Charmo	Master's	Reading and Writing
Teacher 3	Male	Salahaddin University-Erbil	Master's	Speaking
Teacher 4	Female	University of Sulaimani	Master's	Reading and Writing; listening and speaking
Teacher 5	Female	Soran University	Master's	Reading & Writing Listening & Speaking
Teacher 6	Female	Salahaddin University-Erbil	Master's	Writing
Teacher 7	Female	Salahaddin University-Erbil	Master's	Advanced Reading Comprehension
Teacher 8	Male	Koya University	Master's	Reading Comprehension
Teacher 9	Male	Salahaddin University-Erbil	Master's	Advanced Speaking & Writing Skills
Teacher 10	Female	Salahadidn University-Erbil	Master's	Speaking

3.2 Data Collection Tools

In this study, data were collected using a triangulation method that involved teacher questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The primary tool for quantitative data collection was the questionnaire, which aimed to gather detailed information about teachers' assessment practices in language skills classes. This questionnaire was developed based on adaptations from various established studies, including those by Dessie (2015), Cheng, Rogers, & Hu (2004), and others. It includes two sections: Background Information and Assessment Questionnaire. The second section required responses measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Always" to "Never."

Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with language skills teachers. Additionally, document analysis was used to validate findings by examining teachers' coursebooks and exam papers. This analysis focused on formative and summative assessment practices, grading distribution, and alignment with learning objectives. The analyzed documents are summarized in Table 3 below:

Table (3): Documents Analyzed

Teachers	Skills Currently Teaching/Previously Taught	Coursebooks	Exam Papers
Teacher 1	Advanced Speaking	Learning Outcomes & Grading Rubrics	- List of Interview Questions



Teacher 2	Reading and Writing	Coursebook	Final
Teacher 3	Speaking	Coursebook	Describe Photos
Teacher 4	Reading and Writing	Coursebook	Final
Teacher 5	Listening and Speaking	Coursebook	N/A
Teacher 6	Writing	Coursebook	Midterm Final
Teacher 7	Advanced Reading Comprehension	Coursebook	Final
Teacher 8	Reading Comprehension	Coursebook	Midterm Final
Teacher 9	Reading Comprehension	Coursebook	Midterm
Teacher 10	Speaking	N/A	N/A

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

After developing the questionnaire, an online version was created using Google Forms and shared with Kurdish EFL teachers through personal contacts and Viber groups. The researcher also obtained emails from university websites to distribute the questionnaire widely. A few responses were collected through face-to-face interactions. The questionnaire, available in English, included an introduction, a consent form for voluntary participation, and assurances of confidentiality.

For qualitative data, interviews were conducted with randomly selected teachers from various universities. Most interviews were held online via Zoom, with a few conducted in person. Interviews were recorded with permission and lasted 30 to 40 minutes. At the end of each interview, teachers were asked to provide copies of their coursebooks and exam papers; nine teachers submitted coursebooks, and eight provided exam papers.

Before launching the questionnaire, in order to ensure data quality, the questionnaire underwent pilot testing and expert review to establish reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.91, indicating high internal consistency.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected through the questionnaire, interviews, and document analysis was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data from the questionnaires was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0.



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Qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed through content analysis. Audio recordings and interview notes were transcribed using the "Descript" program, which automatically transcribed and labeled the speakers. The transcribed data was then classified under specific themes, each of which was separately analyzed and supported by teacher quotes.

Document analysis followed a similar qualitative approach. Coursebooks and exam papers were carefully reviewed and categorized into themes. Coursebooks were examined for assessment methods and grade distribution to understand assessment strategies and grading practices. The alignment between assessment practices and learning objectives was also analyzed, ensuring that assessments accurately measured student attainment of learning outcomes. The exam papers were analyzed for three key aspects: question types, cognitive levels of questions, and alignment with learning objectives.

In order to evaluate the alignment of the teachers' overall assessment practices with the principles of AfL and AoL, an Assessment Evaluation Framework was developed based on the literature review (Table 4). The collected data were systematically examined using the framework's aspects and indicators. Data from questionnaires, interviews, and documents were triangulated to ensure reliability and validity. Consistent patterns across these data sources strengthened the conclusions. Based on the analysis, it was determined whether teachers predominantly implement AfL or AoL in their language skills classes.

Table (4): Assessment Evaluation Framework

Criteria	AfL Indicators	AoL Indicators
1. Assessment Purposes	Assessment improves student learning.	Assessment primarily measures learning.
2. Assessment Methods	A variety of formative methods of assessment are used to focus on the learning process.	Limited summative methods of assessment are used to focus on the outcome of learning.
3. Student Involvement	Students are actively engaged in the assessment process.	Student involvement in the assessment process is minimal.
4. Feedback	Descriptive feedback is given to students.	Grades and scores are primarily used for feedback.
5. Informing Instruction	Assessment data is used to determine the next steps in teaching.	Instruction is generally not adjusted based on assessment data.
	-	





6.Questioning	Questioning and discussions are encouraged and facilitated.	Questioning and discussion activities are limited in the assessment process.
7.Types and Cognitive Level of Exams Questions	Various cognitive levels are assessed through a variety of question types that align with learning objectives	Cognitive Levels and question types may not align closely with learning objectives.
8.Alignment of Assessment and Learning	Assessment methods and objectives align closely with class activities and learning outcomes.	Assessment methods and objectives may lack alignment with learning activities and outcomes.
9.Teachers' Perspectives Towards AfL and AoL	Teachers have positive views on the effectiveness of assessment in improving learning.	Teachers have negative views on the effectiveness of assessment in improving learning.

4. Results

To respond to the research questions, the data concerning the assessment purposes, methods, and procedures from the three instruments are analyzed separately.

With regard to the purposes of assessment, the analysis of the questionnaire shows that teachers hold various objectives in their assessments.

Table (5): Assessment Purposes

A: In my language skills classes, I use assessment to:	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
1.Categorize my students into different groups.	3.32	.96	9
2.Identify my students' progress.	4.25	.78	3
3.Assign grades to my students and document their progress in learning	4.31	.68	2
4.Diagnose strengths and weaknesses in my students' performance.	4.21	.82	4
5.Provide feedback to my students on their progress throughout the course.	4.02	.85	6
6.Help students monitor their own learning.	3.98	.86	8
7.Improve my students' learning.	4.25	.72	3
8.Motivate my students to learn.	4.53	.72	1
9.Prepare my students for future international tests (TOEFL, IELTS, PTE, ...).	3.26	1.05	10
10.Diagnose strengths and weaknesses in my own teaching.	4.01	.87	7
11.Modify my teaching strategies and plan what to teach next.	4.05	.87	5



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The data in the table shows that teachers used assessment for motivation, grading, progress identification, learning enhancement, and diagnosis purposes. The analysis of the interviews revealed that teachers reported different purposes: to check student understanding, to improve learning, to determine the level and progress of students, to motivate students to take part in class discussions.

As for the assessment methods the teachers employed in their classes, the data from the questionnaire, as illustrated in Table 6 below, interviews, and document analysis showed similar results.

Table (6): Results of the Assessment Methods

In my language skills classes, I employ:	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
1. Quizzes and tests	4.18	.85	2
2. Class participation (questioning and discussion)	4.61	.58	1
3. Projects	3.27	.99	8
4. Portfolios	2.81	.96	12
5. Self-assessment	3.31	1.07	7
6. Peer-assessment	3.2	1.02	10
7. Presentations	3.91	.98	3
8. Report writing	3.1	1.08	11
9. Feedback (verbal and/or written)	3.9	.85	4
10. Role-plays	3.23	.95	9
11. Reading out loud	3.48	1.01	6
12. Debates	3.61	.89	5

As shown in the table above, the most commonly used assessment methods comprise class participation (questioning and discussion) and exams (quizzes and tests), followed by presentations and feedback. Similarly, the analysis of the interview revealed that exams and questioning are the most popular methods, followed by feedback, writing tasks, and presentations. The data from the analysis of the teachers' coursebooks, shown in Table 7 below, uncovered similar findings.

Table (7): Assessment Methods and Tools and Distribution of Grades

Teacher 1: Advanced Speaking	
Final exam (oral): 40 marks	Midterm exam: 10 marks
Daily participation: 10 marks	Presentation: 10 marks
Group work: 10 marks	Individual assignments: 10 marks
Attendance: 5 marks	Poster: 5 marks





Teacher 2: Reading and Writing	
Quizzes: 15 marks	Midterm: 25 marks
Attendance: 5 marks	Final Exam: 50 marks
Class Activity (Class Participation): 5 marks	
Teacher 3: Speaking	
Daily participation: 50 marks	Final assessment: 25 marks
Students' activity (individual/in pairs): 25 marks	
Teacher 4: Reading and Writing	
Final exam: 60 marks	1st Midterm: 20 marks
Project, quiz, assignment, and report: 10 marks	2nd Midterm: 10 marks
Teacher 5: Listening and Speaking	
Quizzes: 7 marks	Assignments: 7 marks
Presentation and poster: 16 marks	Midterm exam: 30 marks
Final exam: 40 marks	
Teacher 6: Writing	
First written exam: 15 marks	Daily participation: 5 marks
Quiz, assignment: 5 marks	Second written exam: 15 marks
Final exam: 60 marks	
Teacher 7: Advanced Reading Comprehension	
Attendance and participation: 10 marks	Midterm exam: 30 marks
Final exam: 60 marks	
Teacher 8: Reading Comprehension	
Homework (Assignment): 15 marks	Report writing: 20 marks
Quiz: 5 marks	Daily participation: 5 marks
Midterm exam: 15 marks	Final exam: 40 marks
Teacher 9: Reading Comprehension	
Midterm exam: 25 marks	Daily participation: 5
Attendance: 5 marks	Quiz: 5 marks
Final exam: 60 marks	



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The data in Table 7 shows that teachers employ a wide range of methods, with the most widespread method being exams (midterm and final), followed by class participation, quizzes, and assignments. However, exams are greatly emphasized and they take most of the weight in the total marks.

With regard to the assessment procedures, the relevant data from the questionnaires and interviews are analyzed. The questionnaire section with regard to the teachers' assessment procedures consists of 13 items which are theoretically parallel to techniques and strategies used to adopt AfL. The teachers' responses to this section are summarized in Table 8 illustrated below.

Table (8): Results of the Assessment Procedures

Assessment procedures I implement in my language skills classes:	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
1. I share learning objectives and success criteria with my students before starting the unit.	4.08	.90	2
2. I provide examples of quality work that shows the standards required.	3.81	.69	6
3. I offer descriptive, written and/or oral feedback during the learning process.	3.95	.67	4
4. I provide students with opportunities to act on feedback provided.	3.75	.75	9
5. I teach and encourage students to assess their own and/or their peers' work against the learning objectives.	3.48	1.06	11
6. I use assessment techniques to encourage and facilitate questioning and discussions.	3.78	.82	8
7. I use student learning needs as evidence to determine next steps in teaching.	4.01	.64	3
8. I focus on the process of assessment rather than its product.	3.37	1.05	12
9. I design student-centered assessment methods and tasks.	3.67	.88	10
10. I give students tasks that are authentic.	4.08	.69	2
11. I emphasize on what the students are able to remember.	3.8	.8	7
12. My assessment examines what students understand.	4.13	.74	1
13. I assess students' higher order thinking skills (i.e., problem solving, analysis, synthesis, ...)	3.88	.77	5

According to the data, the results reflect a diverse set of priorities in language skills assessment. The most common assessment procedures include items 12, 1, 10, and 7. Teachers prioritized assessing student



understanding providing clear learning objectives, authentic tasks, and using student needs to inform instruction. Following closely behind are items 3, 13, 2, and 11, indicating that the teachers value offering descriptive feedback, assessing higher-order thinking skills, providing quality work examples, and assessing student recall were also considered important.

As for the interview data, it was found that teachers highlighted giving feedback, giving students learning objectives and success criteria, incorporating peer and self-assessment, using collaborative activities, and using questioning and discussions. While various types of feedback were given through various strategies, some teachers explained that they did not give students chances to work on the feedback. With regard to the questions asked by the teachers, some teachers asked simple questions, some others challenged students with complex questions that require deeper understanding.

As for the learning outcomes outlined in the teachers' coursebooks, a diverse range of objectives were found to address specific language skills. Each teacher emphasized different aspects of language proficiency, reflecting the unique requirements of their respective courses. The learning outcomes were broadly categorized into speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, with some overlap where integrated skills were necessary. In short, the learning outcomes across these courses reflect a wide range of objectives aimed at developing various language skills. Each teacher has tailored their outcomes to address specific competencies in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The focus ranges from practical communication skills to academic proficiency, highlighting the diverse needs of students in different language learning contexts. This comprehensive approach ensures that students are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in both academic and real-world environments.

Finally, the analysis of exam paper focused on two key dimensions: question types and cognitive levels. The findings revealed significant variations in the types of questions used and the cognitive levels addressed. A balanced mix of question types, as seen in Teachers 2, 4, 6, 7, and 9, ensures comprehensive assessment across various skills and knowledge areas. Limited variety, as observed in Teachers 1 and 3, restricts the assessment's effectiveness in evaluating higher-order thinking skills. As for the difficulty level of the questions, the exams varied in their emphasis on cognitive levels. Teachers who incorporated a range of





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cognitive levels, particularly higher-order thinking skills (e.g., Teachers 4 and 6), provided more robust and comprehensive assessments. Teachers who focused primarily on lower cognitive levels (e.g., Teacher 1) missed opportunities to engage students in deeper learning and critical thinking.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The data from questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis reveal that Kurdish EFL teachers use a variety of assessment methods in their language skills classes. Using the Assessment Evaluation Framework, the results reveal varied degrees of alignment between the assessment practices and procedures and the principles of AfL and AoL.

•**Assessment Purpose:** The analysis of the purposes of assessment in language skills classes indicates that teachers implement a combination of both AfL and AoL. The predominant purposes, such as motivating students to learn, improving learning, identifying progress, and diagnosing strengths and weaknesses prioritize AfL by focusing on continuous monitoring and enhancement of learning. These purposes highlight the teachers' commitment to using assessment as a formative tool to support and enhance student learning continuously. On the other hand, there are also some significant elements of AoL, particularly in assigning grades and documenting progress, as they involve summative evaluation of student performance. Thus, while the teachers primarily lean towards AfL to foster a more engaging and supportive learning environment, integrating elements of AoL is crucial to meet institutional requirements and accountability standards. This dual use of assessment purposes indicates the teachers' awareness of a balanced approach that aims to enhance learning while also fulfilling the requirements of measuring and reporting academic progress.

•**Assessment Methods:** The analysis of the assessment methods indicated that teachers employ a mix of AfL and AoL methods. This is consistent with the findings of Ounis (2017). However, there is a noticeable inclination towards AoL, particularly through the use of exams and quizzes and the heavy reliance on them in determining students' grades. The common use of exams and quizzes in this study is similar to the findings of Mussawy (2009) and Sewagegn (2019) in which paper-and-pencil assessment methods were mostly relied on by teachers.



However, there is evidence of a growing recognition and incorporation of AfL practices. For example, the use of questioning and discussion as a daily routine aligns with AfL principles of using assessment to support learning. Similarly, the emphasis on feedback, particularly when given during the learning process, and presentations reflects an AfL approach. This suggests only a partial implementation of AfL principles, where student engagement and participation are also valued. However, the emphasis on exams and the significant portion of the total marks allocated to them, particularly due to departmental and university policies, indicates a stronger and predominant focus on AoL.

•**Student Involvement:** The analysis of student involvement in assessment practices reveals that the teachers demonstrate a mixed approach to assessment. While some practices, like sharing learning objectives, collaborative activities, and authentic tasks, align well with AfL principles and promote student involvement, others, such as self and peer assessment and student-centered methods, are underutilized. This suggests a tendency towards a blend of AfL and AoL practices.

•**Feedback:** There is a substantial application of AfL practices in providing descriptive feedback and various feedback strategies. This aligns with the study of Yilmazer and Özkan (2017) in which teachers were found to provide students with verbal and written feedback. However, the limited opportunities for students to act on feedback highlight a partial alignment with AfL.

•**Informing Instruction:** While there is evidence of an understanding and acknowledgement of using assessment to inform teaching (AfL), the actual implementation is limited. Some teachers may effectively use assessment to guide their teaching, but most do not consistently apply these practices, supporting the popularity of AoL practices. Furthermore, teachers may have positive attitudes towards using assessment to inform instruction, but they may lack the necessary skills, training, guidance, or support to integrate these practices effectively into their teaching routines.

•**Questioning and Discussion:** The results indicate that while teachers perceive questioning and discussion as important, there is a possible gap between the intention and practice. The gap is evident in the recognition of the importance of questioning and discussion as tools and their systematic implementation. Teachers may not fully employ assessment techniques to maximize their effectiveness and the low weight given to them may diminish the role they play in improving learning.





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Additionally, the data also suggests that teachers generally aim to assess a range of cognitive skills, with a strong emphasis on understanding and a moderate inclusion of higher-order thinking skills. A potential reason is that the curriculum might emphasize factual knowledge and comprehension over critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Another might be related to the teachers not being adequately familiar with the cognitive levels of Bloom's Taxonomy or not being prepared to design and implement assessments that target higher-order thinking skills. This predominant use of questioning and discussion and the complexity of the questions align more with AfL than AoL, yet, there is potential for further enhancement. This is in line with Sardareh (2014) in that teachers use questioning to a good extent, and against it in the difficulty level of the questions employed.

•**Types and Cognitive Level of Exam Questions:** The analysis of the questions used in the final and/or midterm exams from eight teachers revealed a significant variation in the types of questions and cognitive levels used across different courses and teachers. A diverse array of assessment practices was found across various courses and teachers. Some teachers incorporate aspects of AfL by using a variety of question types targeting various cognitive levels. However, there is also evidence of practices that lean toward AoL, particularly with the limited emphasis on higher-order cognitive skills.

•**Criterion 8: Alignment of Assessment and Learning:** The analysis of alignment between the assessment methods and learning outcomes and between exam questions and learning outcomes showed varied results. The initial analysis of coursebook assessment methods suggested strong alignment for some teachers but partial alignment for others, indicating the existence of some gaps and mismatches, especially regarding the assessment of higher-order skills, practical applications, and reflective learning. Traditional assessment methods could assess certain knowledge-based outcomes, but they fall short in measuring more dynamic and interactive skills. This implied a focus on AfL alongside measuring final achievement (AoL) for some teachers, while others might rely more on AoL. However, the actual assessment methods used by teachers, as reported in interviews, revealed discrepancies with the coursebook



methods. This mismatch led to variations in the learning outcomes actually measured. With regard to the degree of alignment in the exam questions and learning outcomes, the findings appear more consistent with AoL. While some teachers incorporate aspects of AfL by aligning exam questions with learning outcomes, there is also strong evidence of practices that lean toward AoL.

•**Teachers' Perspectives Towards AfL and AoL:** The analysis of the data indicates a mixed picture with a general leaning towards AfL. The majority of the teachers showed positive perspectives on the effectiveness of assessment in improving learning, suggesting a preference for AfL practices. However, there are still some teachers who favor AoL, or a balanced approach. This positive perspective is almost the same as those found in Denman and Al-Mahrooqi (2018) in which the majority of the teachers demonstrated their awareness with regard to the role of assessment in improving learning.

To conclude, the findings reveal that teachers in the Kurdistan Region universities employ a combination of both AfL and AoL practices in their language skills classes. While there is a noticeable emphasis on AoL, particularly through the use of exams and quizzes, there is also evidence of a growing recognition and incorporation of AfL practices, which is likely due to factors like teacher awareness and understanding of the potential benefits of AfL for student learning. Teachers recognize the value of formative assessment to enhance learning but face challenges in fully integrating these practices due to factors such as large class sizes, time constraints, limited training, and institutional demands.

The teachers' positive perspectives on the role of assessment in improving learning and the predominant use of AfL in areas such as having formative purposes, providing descriptive feedback, using collaborative activities and authentic tasks, and ensuring clarity and transparency in learning objectives suggests a commitment to supporting continuous learning and student engagement. This finding aligns with the results found in Ho (2015) in which Vietnamese teachers implemented AfL procedures to some extent through the use of questioning and feedback. However, it contrasts with Ho (2015) in that observation and peer assessment were also used to enhance the potential effectiveness of





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AfL in improving student learning. On the contrary, some principles of AfL used by the teachers in the current study were more conceptual than actual and do not fully align with the AfL principles in theory, which is similar to the findings of Yilmazer and Özkan (2017).

The limited use of AfL practices in areas such as employing peer- and self-assessment, providing students with opportunities to act on feedback, adjusting instruction, and aligning assessment methods with learning activities highlights a need for a more comprehensive implementation of AfL principles to effectively support and enhance student learning. This can be achieved by:

- Enhancing opportunities for students to act on feedback for improvement.
- Promoting student reflection and self-evaluation through self and peer assessment practices.
- Incorporating higher-order thinking skills in questioning, discussions, and exams.
- Bridging the gap between teachers' understanding and actual implementation of using assessment to inform instruction.
- Ensuring clearer alignment between intended assessment practices and learning outcomes.
- Reducing the weight of midterm and final exams in grading.
- Reducing class sizes to facilitate more detailed and actionable feedback.
- Providing training on AfL, effective feedback strategies, and integrating assessment into instruction.

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