



Exploring How EFL Young Learners Are Being Assessed in Ghat Primary Schools

Sumaya Ramadan Aoghala ^{1*}, Manana Alhasen Mohamed ²

¹ English Language Department, Faculty of Education, University of Sebha, Ghat, Libya

² English Language Department, Faculty of Arts & Education, Sabratha University,
Sabratha, Libya

استكشاف كيفية تقييم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لصغار المتعلمين في المدارس الابتدائية بغات

سمية رمضان أوغلة ^{1*}، مننه الحسن محمد ²

¹ قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة سبها، غات، ليبيا

² قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب والتربية، جامعة صبراتة، صبراتة، ليبيا

*Corresponding author: sum.aoghala@sebhau.edu.ly

Received: June 04, 2025

Accepted: July 23, 2025

Published: August 02, 2025

Abstract:

This study sought to investigate how EFL young learners are assessed at some primary schools in southern Libya (Ghat) and the challenges their teachers encounter when using classroom activities as alternative assessment techniques. The study employed a mixed-method approach, in which a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were employed. Twenty teachers, including males and females from different schools in the area, were invited to participate in the study. The results revealed that the majority of the targeted teachers preferred traditional assessment techniques in comparison to alternative ones. Furthermore, the results also showed that some targeted teachers lack appropriate knowledge of prevailing terms in the assessment field, such as feedback and alternative assessment tools such as portfolios. Another significant finding was that the teachers faced challenges in assessing young learners during classroom activities due to individual differences, large classes and the limited time allocated for English classes, disruptive behaviours of some students, difficulty in evaluating individual contributions in group activities, and students' anxiety and shyness to work in groups. The study suggests integrating topics about assessing language in young learners in the assessment module. Moreover, it also suggests organizing constant training sessions for teachers while at their work to enhance their knowledge of assessment, in general. Furthermore, the study also recommends more research studies on alternative assessment techniques and ratings could be conducted.

Keywords: EFL, young learners, alternative assessment, traditional assessment.

المخلص

سعت هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء كيفية تقييم صغار متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في بعض المدارس الابتدائية في جنوب ليبيا (غات) والتحديات التي يواجهها معلموهم عند استخدام الأنشطة الصفية كتقنيات تقييم بديلة. استخدمت الدراسة منهجاً مختلطاً، حيث تم استخدام استبيان مغلق ومقابلات شبه منظمة. وقد دُعي عشرون معلماً ومعلمة من مدارس مختلفة في المنطقة للمشاركة في الدراسة. كشفت النتائج أن معظم المعلمين المستهدفين فضلوا تقنيات التقييم التقليدية على التقنيات البديلة. علاوة على ذلك، أظهرت النتائج أيضاً أن بعض المعلمين المستهدفين يفتقرون إلى المعرفة المناسبة بالمصطلحات السائدة في مجال التقييم، مثل التغذية الراجعة وأدوات التقييم البديلة مثل الحقائق. ومن النتائج المهمة الأخرى أن المعلمين واجهوا تحديات في تقييم المتعلمين الصغار أثناء الأنشطة الصفية بسبب الفروق الفردية والصفوف الكبيرة والوقت المحدود المخصص لحصص اللغة الإنجليزية، والسلوكيات التخريبية لبعض الطلاب، وصعوبة تقييم المساهمات الفردية في الأنشطة

الجماعية، وقلق الطلاب وخجلهم من العمل في مجموعات. تقترح الدراسة دمج موضوعات حول تقييم اللغة لدى المتعلمين الصغار في وحدة التقييم. علاوة على ذلك، تقترح أيضًا تنظيم دورات تدريبية مستمرة للمعلمين أثناء عملهم لتعزيز معرفتهم بالتقييم بشكل عام. علاوة على ذلك، توصي الدراسة أيضًا بإجراء المزيد من الدراسات البحثية حول تقنيات التقييم البديلة والتقييمات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، المتعلمون الصغار، التقييم البديل، التقييم التقليدي.

1. Introduction

English as a lingua Franca is being used all over the world in academics, economy, medicine, etc. In countries where it is not the official language, it is often taught as a foreign language (EFL) such as in Libya, where this study took place. Consequently, considering this fact, it should be mentioned that such a thing places a huge responsibility on the teachers of Libyan young learners in many ways. This includes, for instance, the need to be capable of assessing this group of learners effectively because having this ability would enable these teachers to ensure many parties, including learners, their parents, and other educators such as their personal tutors and school managers, know about students' progress in the target language.

There are many factors without which teaching and learning processes would not be effectively run, among which is assessment, which plays a fundamental role in the two processes (Donald et al, 2003). This, in turn, necessitated that teachers are required to be aware of its meaning and the techniques used for conducting it.

Assessment, in generally, is known as a constant process of collecting information about the thing/person to be assessed from different sources. Then, such information is combined together and to be analysed for the sake of making a judgement or evaluation about improvement level or progress that has taken place overtime in the assessed entity or a person. This is what Huba and Freed (2000, p. 8) meant by defining assessing learners as "the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning".

Although there is an integration between teaching and assessment processes in which the latter should reflect what and how teachers teach, assessment has not been well developed compared to teaching methodologies even if that was clarified in the English curricula of EFL. According to Wolf and Bulter (2017), it was noticed that while English curricula in EFL countries often emphasize developing the communicative language skills of their students, evidence from research shows that instruction and assessment are not often conducted as planned in local/national curricula. It has been noticed that in EFL countries where English was recently introduced to primary schools more significance and focus was given to teaching methodologies rather than assessment. Yet, knowledge and/or experience are needed for assessing young learners too.

In literature, there have been calls for following the communicative approaches in assessing children claiming that "the summative form of testing that permeated the traditional curricula would not be fair to students whose studies are based on communicative activities" (Shaaban, 2007, p, 1). Consequently, this paper will focus in ways for assessing English for younger learners. The focus will be narrowed to investigate how EFL young learners in the targeted schools are being assessed.

1.1. Aim of the study

This study aims to gain insights into how EFL young learners in some of the Ghat area schools are assessed through classroom activities as well as to identify the challenges their teachers encounter in conducting this process.

1.2. Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following main questions

1. How are young EFL learners assessed in Ghat primary schools?
2. What challenges do EFL teachers encounter when assessing young learners through classroom activities?

Theoretically, the findings of this study should make a contribution to the study of assessing young learners of English as foreign language (EFL). It should supply English teachers with an encyclopedic knowledge of how to assess younger learners of English. This study also identifies the most significant challenges that primary school instructors face while implementing classroom activities, particularly those activities planned for formative assessment.

1.3. Significance of the study

Investigating assessment process is considered one of the most significant issues by which the quality of language teaching and learning is confirmed. Once this is achieved, it is expected to open doors for the teachers of young learners to precisely become aware of the techniques those are more appropriate in assessing them. In addition, the significance of the study also lies in finding effective ways for overcoming any likely challenges teachers may encounter while conducting assessment on this group of students.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Who are young learners?

The phrase "young learners" is a controversial term, as there is no consensus on which group of learners can it be precisely describe. It is well known that there are many factors and characteristics learners may share, and those may distinguish them. For instance, a certain group of learners may have learning motivations yet differs in age. Another example is that the needs of children in one society may differ from those of children in a neighboring one. Therefore, it can be argued that such factors (needs, motivations, age, etc.) cannot logically serve as criteria for classifying learners. This, in turn, necessitates agreeing upon a unique factor to be used.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18. Following this description, it is evident that the age factor is the only feature that was taken into account, and seems to be unbeatable for a child of 13-year-old in this country is the same as a 13-year-old elsewhere.

Following this logic, Ellis (2014) in her article "Young learners: clarifying our terms" stated that the term (young learners) is frequently used in the ELT to be about all learners below the age of 18. However, the age factor, itself, created some kind of disagreement in that young learners were classified differently. For instance, according to Nunan, (2011), some researchers classified them into the *first group* that includes children three to five-year-olds (pre-school children). *The second group* includes of six and eight-year-olds, while the *third group* comprises of those ones around nine to fifteen-year-olds. Accordingly, apart from age, some would argue that a three-year-old child cannot be comparable to a fourteen-year-old in many aspects and therefore, it may be incorrect to consider age as the only characteristic that separates this group of learners. Other factors ought to be considered in this matter such as motivations and their significant role in learning (Riyanti, 2019) along with everything that influences children's learning process, whether positively or negatively.

In general, young learners can be easily distinguished from older ones in many ways. For instance, they are more self-conscious than others. Moreover, they are also unable to learn explicitly despite their noticeable enthusiasm compared to adult students. Their activeness is also another factor that makes them different. A further distinction is that they have a positive attitude towards language learning and they rely on the physical world to understand. In addition, it has been proved that being unable to develop language skills in their first language; they have a holistic approach to language in that they can understand a message but are unable to analyze it (Nunan, 2011, Kersten and Rohde, 2013; Puskás, 2017).

2.2. Assessing young learners

Assessing young learners is considered an important aspect of the teaching and learning processes as it demonstrates evidence of students' proficiency and progress. This evidence is required by stakeholders: learners themselves, parents, other educators including their tutors and school authorities (Loannou-Geotgiou and Pavlou, 2003). In the case of young learners, parents often express a strong desire to know how proficient their children are from early phase of learning assuming that "the proficiency achieved at an early stage of learning will automatically be maintained and build on over time" (Nikolov, 2016, p. 3).

2.3. Guidelines for assessing young learners

There is a necessity to consider some principles to carry out a well and effective language assessment. So, instead of designing an assessment of learning, a teacher should design an assessment to support active learning to confirm that this process is a central element in students' education (University of Reading, 2021).

According to Biggar (2005), a teacher of young learners must meet three requirements in order to conduct effective assessment. He mentioned that "to do a good job of assessing young children whose home language is not English requires skill, sensitivity, and knowledge-knowledge of child's culture and language, in particular" (p. 44). Similarly, Meneguetti (2017) also pointed out that effective assessment should recognize the children's cognitive-developmental, emotional and psychological phases. It should also build up the learners' confidence and self-esteem, and motivate them to learn (Crandall, 2019). In addition, it should also be pointed that assessment should also be conducted over time by means of using a variety of appropriate and effective techniques in order to obtain the required results.

2.4. Techniques of assessing English for young learners

In literature, it has been mentioned that there are different techniques used for assessing young learners of English. These techniques are classified in terms of both the quality and nature of assessment methods used for it. More specifically, the techniques can be categorized into traditional and alternative techniques (Puskás, 2017).

2.4.1. Traditional assessment techniques

Traditional assessment, also known as 'pen-and-paper tests' is controlled by 'summative evaluation'; it measures learners' knowledge of English; 'focusing on mastery of discrete language points and linguistic accuracy, rather than on communicative competence' (Shaaban, 2007, p. 1). This assessment does not necessarily concern with improving the learning and teaching process (Meneguetti, 2017) rather than identifying what and/or where a student performs well and vice-versa.

Similar to all other subjects, English teachers are frequently expected to provide evidence of their students' progress. So, they often make tests to measure their students' knowledge and check their progress by using the written form, achievement tests. In this case, the assessment is about 'grading and reporting'. After grades being calculated from a written test, a teacher classifies his/her students and writes a report to the school and/or parents, for example, to inform them about students' proficiency in English (Meneguetti, 2017).

Students are tested in the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For young learners, many task items are used in assessing them in this technique type. The most common ones are true/false items, multiple-choice items, matching, unstructured format, completion format (fill in the blank), and writing essays (Crandall, 2019; Hadi, 2008, Puskás, 2017).

Yet, traditional tasks and tests can have a negative impact. For instance, Loannou-Geotgiou and Pavlou (2003) mentioned that, even though traditional tests are generally accepted, they are not a perfect solution for children because of differences found between children and other groups of learners. They added that using traditional tests items for assessing young learners may influence their motivation, self-esteem as well as general attitudes towards learning English. This possibly occurs if these tests are boring and/or beyond the cognitive development stage of young learners (The UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD, n.d). Psychologically, Shaaban (2007) highlighted a further negative impact of the summative form of testing items and procedures used in traditional assessment on young learners. He argued that assessing them, using traditional classroom testing can increase the risk of causing anxiety for them, which, in turn, can deeply and negatively affect their self-esteem/confidence and language learning. He emphasized that teaching and evaluating children should occur in "an anxiety reduced or even 'anxiety-free environment'" (Shaaban, 2007, p. 1).

2.4.2. Alternative assessment techniques

There are various ways to refer to alternative assessment. For example, it indicates to any way of describing what a student understands or can do. It is different from a standardized or traditional test in that it is designed to demonstrate the growth and inform instruction (O'Malley, and Pierce, 1996). In addition, it is also less formal than traditional assessment which is conducted formally within the time of classroom by carrying out normal classroom activities to improve students' learning (Hargreaves et al, 2014).

It is sometimes referred to as assessment for learning, which Klenowski (2009, p. 264) stated that it is "part of everyday practice by students, teachers, and peers that seek, reflect upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration, and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning".

In contrast to traditional assessment tools which focus on 'grading and reporting, assessment for learning concentrates on developing students' ability to assess themselves, judge their performance and make improvement where needed (University of Reading, 2021). Thus, this process is described as formative assessment which allows integration between learning and assessment. This can bring advantages to learners' attitude toward learning English as it helps in reducing the levels of their anxiety that occur because of intense concentration on producing well-formed linguistics items/language, and instead, it boosts their comfort and self-esteem by emphasizing more in their communicative skills (Shabaan, 2007).

Alternative assessment adopts authentic assessment methods by motivating learners to be dynamic participants in assessment activities which aimed at showing the learners' ability and skills rather than emphasizing their defects. According to Meneguetti (2017), involving learners in such activities can be done first by giving them tasks that suit their cognitive development stage; then, these tasks should be familiar to learners in what they are used to do in class (i.e., tasks need to be real and relevant to children's lives). Last but not least, learners should receive positive feedback on their work through promoting their sense of success and security.

Many scholars such as Loannou-Geotgiou, and Pavlou, (2003), Lasardo, et al (2011), Shin and Crandall (2014), Pinter (2006), and Crandall (2019) mentioned several types of alternative assessment techniques for young learners, including observation, portfolios, self and peer assessment, and projects.

2.4.2.1. Observation

Observation is considered one of the most reliable techniques used for assessing the performance and attainment of young learners. Teachers constantly use it in their classrooms; as when they look at children's facial expressions while they are listening to a story to check their understanding, enjoyment, or engagement. Nevertheless, observation can only be seen as an assessment tool, when it is done regularly, and when learners' performance and progress are recorded (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996). This can be done by observing their performance and recording notes regularly on what a teacher sees using for example, "observation checklists or rating scales" (Puskás, 2017, p.73) (see next section).

2.4.2.2. Portfolios

Simply, a portfolio is known as a collection of a student's work used to display his or her progress over time (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996; UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD, n.d). A young learner's ESL/EFL portfolio can include a variety of works. For example, audio and/or video recordings, artwork including drawings, charts, and photographs, writing samples as journal entries/information, logs and book reports, test and quizzes samples used by a teacher for assessing the learner's performance and achievement, and self-evaluation checklists (Shabaan, 2007; Puskás, 2017). Many advantages can be gained in applying these assessment techniques in assessing children in ESL/EFL classrooms. For instance, offering a complete picture of learner's language skills performing in a range of diverse tasks; identifying the learner's strengths and weaknesses in the English language, promoting a learner's ownership of the learning process, and integrating teaching and assessment in a nonstop process (UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD, n.d, Shabaan, 2007)

2.4.2.3. Self- and peer assessment

Self- and peer assessment are seen as a strategy used in teaching and assessment processes. It is considered an effective approach to improve the students' learning. Among other learners, teaching children how to assess their performance and their peers can bring many advantages to them. For example, it helps in raising their language awareness, increases their sense of responsibility towards their work, strengthens their sense of participating in the classroom, and encourages them to become more independent (McKay, 2006; A NSW Government website, 2021). However, learners are required to practice assessing themselves regularly as a part of the learner-centered approach to develop their skills in reflecting and critical thinking (UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD, n.d; Puskás, 2017; Tennant, 2020).

2.4.2.4. Projects

Projects are accounted as a form of performance-based assessment commonly used in ESL/EFL classroom which is often seen as "an approach to learning which complements mainstream methods and which can be used with almost all levels, ages and abilities of students" (Haines 1989: 1 as cited in Garza and Aceves, 2016). Haines also classified a project into:

- Production projects involve the creation of bulletin boards, DVDs, radio programs, posters, written reports, photos, essays, letters, handbooks, brochures, etc.
- Performance projects may be presented as debates, oral presentations, theatrical performances, food fairs, or fashion shows.
- Organizational projects involve the planning and formation of a club, conversation table, or forums. (1989 cited in Garza, and Aceves, 2016, p.152-153).

2.5. Rating students' work in alternative assessment

In terms of alternative assessment or as called performance-based assessment, scoring would be different and more demanding. To assess young learners' performance, 'rubrics' are generally used. Rubric or as called 'instruction sheets'/'criteria sheets' (Puskás, 2017, p.118) are 'scoring guides' used to score learners whether for one particular task or a variety of tasks. Generalized and/or approved rubrics are often effective and easy to apply for teachers.

Yet, there are range forms of rubrics in assessment. Scoring young learners' performance often comes in the form of 'observation checklists' or 'rating scales' (Puskás, 2017, Shin-Crandall 2014; McKay 2006). The checklists and rating scale are used to obtain useful valuable information about young learners' communication skills, language proficiency, participation level, behaviors, choices and/or interests (Banerjee, 2016); when they are used as assessment tools, a teacher can decide how much such criteria have been achieved. So they are considered valuable tools for assessing young learners. The difference between these tools is simple. Measuring the criteria in checklist is done by yes or no means, while the criteria in rating scale is measured by the extent to which the student has met the objective of the activity. In this tool, the performance statements are listed in one column, and the range of accomplishment is listed in descriptive words in the other column; it might include the number (score) which refers to the level of the student (Banerjee, 2016).

2.6. Feedback

Feedback can broadly be referred to as information provided to learners on how well they are performing. This information can be given by the learners' teacher or another learner for the purposes of assisting the learner in improving certain points. Giving and receiving feedback is a crucial component of classroom instruction (Cheng and Zhang, 2021). It can be in a variety of forms and can be given immediately, during an activity, or after it has ended as part of a learning programme (BRITISH COUNCIL: Teaching English, n.d).

There are two main ways available for providing feedback. It can be given orally or written. The oral feedback is considered to be less formal, but it is still a powerful and successful method since it can be given in *teachable moment* during the lesson, while written feedback takes the form of a record and includes the comments on learner's performance as well as their needs for future improvement (NSW Government-Education, n.d).

Written feedback must be also sent on time, written in a way that a learner can comprehend, and it contains instructions that can be followed so that the learner may make changes (NSW Government-Education, n.d).

With regard to its effectiveness, a teacher's written feedback has been a controversial and much disputed subject within the fields of education. Cheng and Zhang (2021) reviewed this topic in their recent study concerning with *Teacher Written Feedback on English as a Foreign Language Learners' Writing*. They stated that the debate has started by John Truscott, a linguist who was interested in second language acquisition, cognitive science, linguistic theory and syntax. John Truscott in his publication in 1996 combined various early empirical research that strongly opposed the teachers written feedback concluding that this type of feedback is unproductive and even harmful to L2 writing and that teachers should avoid it. Yet, the researchers highlight that at the present, it is widely agreed that WCF has a positive impact on new writing and text revision (Cheng and Zhang, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

Different research methods are being used to investigate how EFL learners are assessed. A mixed methods approach is employed in this research using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to provide valuable insights into research phenomena that would not be possible with merely one method (Dawadi, et al, 2021). According to Poth and Munce, "A mixed-methods design can integrate and synergize multiple data sources, which can assist in studying complex problems" (Poth & Munce, 2020 cited in Dawadi, et al, (2021, p. 27).

In the current study, both a questionnaire and an interview were used. A questionnaire is a widely used and practical tool for collecting data across various disciplines. It is simply defined as "a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents" (Kumar, 2011, p. 138). This study adopted this tool due to its numerous advantages compared to its disadvantages. For instance, the results obtained from a questionnaire tend to be quite reliable, as this method provides adequate time for participants to formulate well-considered responses (Kothari, 2004). Moreover, it offers an anonymity feature that aids in acquiring accurate information (Kumar, 2011). Furthermore, this approach is recognized as the most cost-effective method and requires the least effort in data collection, particularly when dealing with a large number of respondents who are geographically dispersed (Kothari, 2004). Consequently, this enables researchers to reach the necessary number of respondents who teach in various primary schools across different regions of Ghat-Libya.

The second tool is an interview, which is considered one of the qualitative data collection instruments that relies on asking questions to gather data (George, 2022). The questions are asked of people with expertise, experience, or opinions about a specific topic or subject (Study Smarter, n.d.). This tool enables researchers to gather detailed information that may not be available using other research methods (Study Smarter, n.d.). Consequently, in the current study, this instrument was employed to gain detailed information about how EFL younger learners are being assessed by using formative assessment techniques (by applying classroom activities during class time).

3.1. Sampling and data collection procedures

The sampling method refers to "selecting a portion of the population" (Lankshear 2004, p. 147) from which, a researcher can decide upon the sample size. The sample size is defines as "the number of participants in a study" (Larson-Hall, 2009, p. 401). In qualitative and quantitative studies there are several approaches of samplings. Some of these include random sampling, convenience sampling and purposive sampling (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

The choice is left for a researcher as to which mode is to be considered suitable for his or her study to collect the date that can best help in answering the research question(s), (Coleman, et al, 1996). Accordingly, it was decided for the current study to use the purposeful sampling approach which is defined as "a strategy in which participants are included in a study on the basis of their ability, as judged by the researcher, to provide information relevant to the central purposes of the research." (Patton, 1990 cited in Borg, 2006, p. 9). In addition, purposeful sampling was also selected because it is specifically undertaken when a *small size* of participants (20 teachers) is targeted from which depth and narrative data is to be collected as Teddlie and Yu (2007) stated. Random sampling, for instance, was not a suitable choice because it is associated "with larger- scale and quantitative studies" as mentioned by Tonkiss (2004, p. 199).

So, considering the above factors, it was decided to conduct the study merely in Ghat schools where it was easy to find the sufficient number of teachers to take part in it. Therefore, a number of only 20 EFL teachers were selected. This sample represents the majority of teachers in primary schools in the area.

With regard to the procedures of participants' selection as well as for data collection, the participants were recruited from nine schools across Ghat, including six public and three private ones. Their teaching experience of English as a foreign language, and more particularly in teaching children, ranged from one year to 30 years. As for the process of data collection, it lasted approximately a month. Following the completion of the questionnaires by the participants, nine randomly chosen ones were interviewed after the questionnaires were collected and examined. The main goal of this is to learn more about the reasons for these targeted teachers' use of classroom activities as well as the difficulties they face in the classroom.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Data analysis and discussion of questionnaire

The first set of questions aimed to discover how EFL young learners are assessed through traditional assessment techniques (summative assessment). The participants were asked to tick the test items they use to test their students in each skill.

The following diagrams illustrate their answers.

4.1.1. Testing listening skills

The participants were asked whether or not they test listening skills. They replied as can be seen in figure 1.

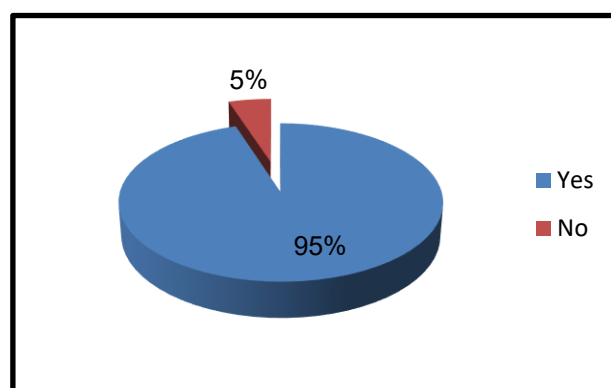


Figure 1: Testing Listening Skills.

The participants who answered positively were asked to tick the task(s) they use. Their selection(s) is/are displayed in the following figure.

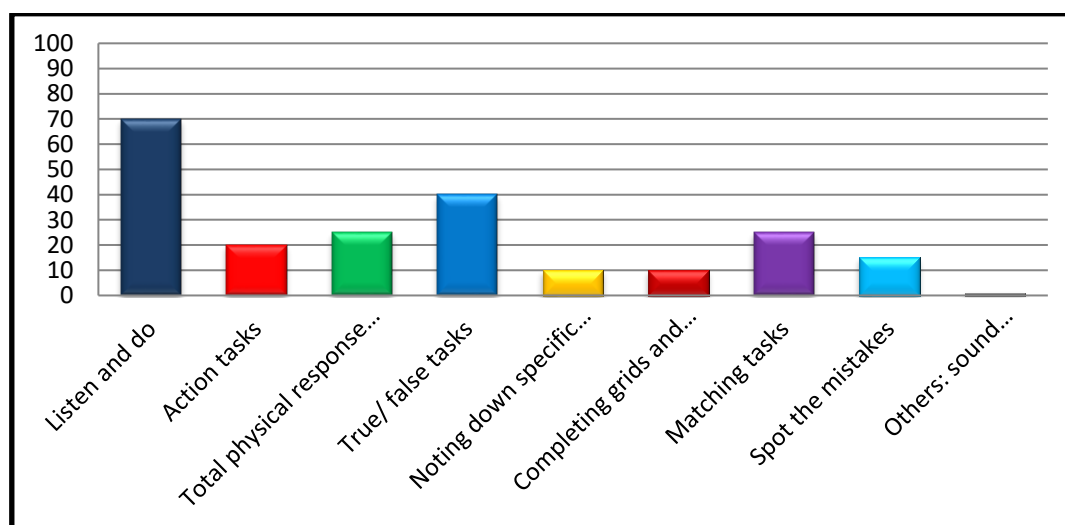


Figure 2: Listening Test Items.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of teachers do test the listening skill, while, figure 2 illustrates that there is diversity in using different methods to test young learners in this skill. Some EFL teachers think that formal listening tests for young students can be difficult and may not precisely reflect their real listening ability for a variety of reasons, including educational concerns and developmental considerations.

Although the participants were given the opportunity to propose other ways for testing listening, the majority of them picked methods involving physical responses (listen and do, total physical responses and action tasks) or simple answer (multiple choice and yes/no testing item tasks). This may suggest that their choice is appropriate, which in turn reflects their understanding of the needs of this group of learners. Nuraeni (2019) has proved this in his/her study by mentioning that young learners have a lot of energy and need to move around. They have short attention spans and are more interested in physical activities. Thus, it is critical to prepare them, especially those under the age of seven, with activities that do not require the use of a pencil and paper. Consequently, it may be claimed that such a result may also prove the extent to which the teachers' answers reflect how appropriate their use is successful.

4.1.2. Testing speaking skills

The participants were asked whether or not they test speaking skills. They replied as can be seen in figure 3.

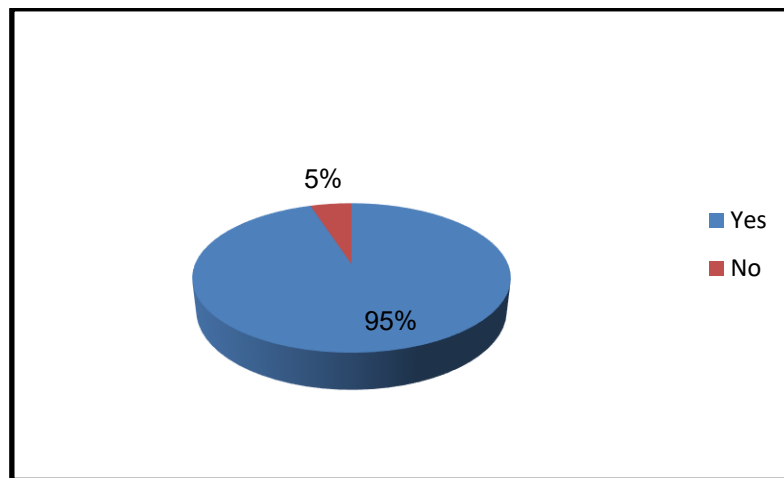


Figure 3: Testing Speaking Skills.

Figure 3 shows that 95% that represent the majority of the participants test speaking skills, while only 5% do not.

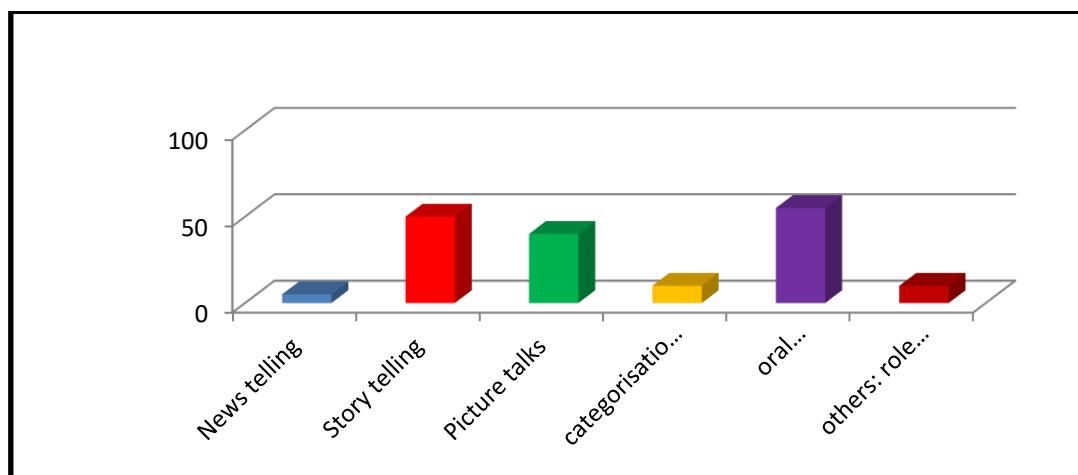


Figure 4: Speaking Test Items.

As with regards to testing listening skills, it can be seen in figure 3 that the majority of teachers perform speaking skills test, while only 5% of them do not. Although this percentage is very small, it represents a number of teachers in primary schools in the region. Yet, figure 4 reveals little diversity in the speaking test items used by the teachers; and only two test items were suggested which are role-playing and dialogue activities.

Figure 4 also shows that the oral presentation and storytelling methods, as well as the picture talks, had the highest percentages. Such methods depend on the presence of pictures or drawings that stimulate speech. Perhaps this result explains the success of such methods in stimulating speech in this age group. Studies have been found to support such methods of stimulating speech as well as reducing anxiety of EFL young learners, such as studies by San Martin, et al (2020), Zahran and Qoura (2022), and Jaolath, et al (2024). For example, a study by San Martin, et al, (2020) revealed that pupils in their study were able to use pictures as visual aids to link concepts and construct a narrative from a real-life experience by employing the picture description technique. Besides, Zahran and Qoura (2022) concluded that the picture-narrating strategy enhances EFL students' speaking skills by providing sequential pictures and a rubric for vocabulary and grammar in each story. Similarly, in a study by Jaolath et al (2024), the findings indicated that picture descriptive technique can help young learners enhance their speaking skills. Furthermore, this strategy helped pupils expand their vocabulary, enhance their pronunciation, and become more comfortable speaking.

4.1.3. Testing reading skills

The participants were asked whether or not they test reading skills. They replied as can be seen in figure 5.

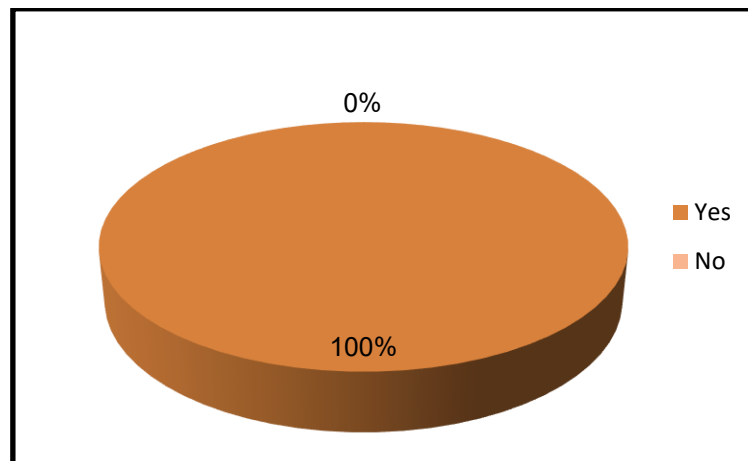


Figure 5: Testing Reading Skills.

Accordingly, the teachers picked up the task(s) they use. Their response(s) is/are displayed in the following figure.

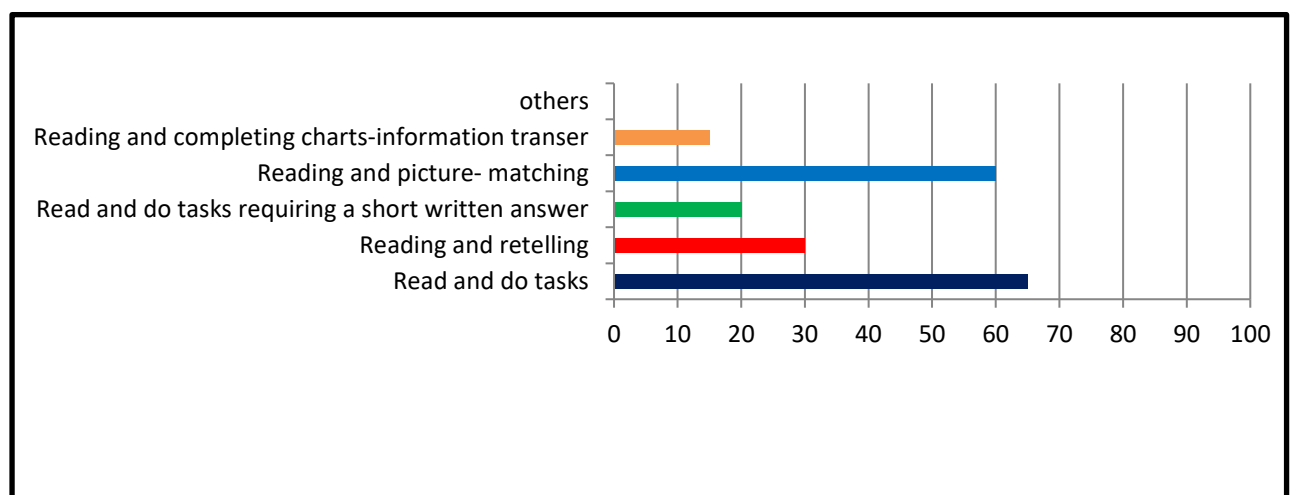


Figure 6: Reading Test Items.

In figure 5, it can obviously be seen that 100% which represent all the targeted participants in Ghat schools do test their students in speaking skills. However, looking at figure 6, it is evident that the most frequently used tasks rely on simple responses from the learner. The most frequently used, at 65%, is (read-and-do tasks), which is similar to the physical response tasks used in testing the listening skills. This is followed by reading and picture-matching at 60%. These are objective testing items in which simple movement is required to answer. This is followed by reading and retelling, at 30%, which is similar to a speaking skill testing item. The least frequently used exercises were those for which writing is required. These include (read-and-do' tasks requiring a short written answer) and (reading and completing charts-information transfer).

According to what is revealed in figure 6, it can be argued that this appears to prove participants' understanding of the age group they are teaching. Selecting these types provides insight into teachers' perceptions of the compatibility of young learners' cognitive capacities with their age group. According to Taylor L. (n.d.), tasks must be appropriate for young learners' cognitive development, as some cognitive and linguistic techniques are acquired later than others. As a result, different forms of challenging reading tasks that demand cognitive thinking can be suitable for pupils in preparatory or secondary schools.

4.1.4. Testing writing skills

The participants were asked whether or not they test writing skills. They replied as can be seen in the following figure.

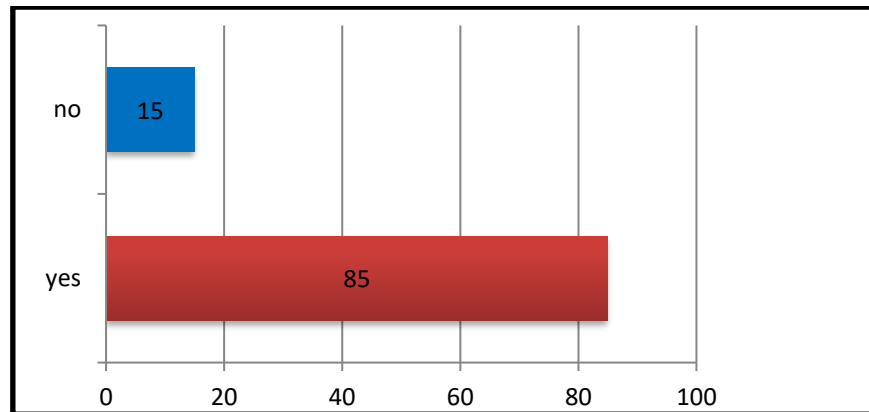


Figure 7: Testing Writing.

The following figure displays the kind of task(s) they use in their tests.

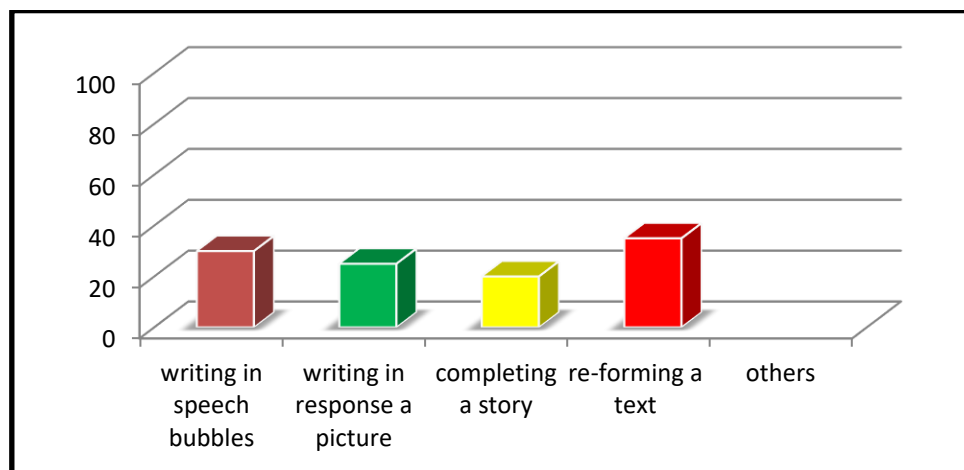


Figure 8: Writing Test Items.

Compared to the other language skills, writing is the least assessed language skill, as illustrated in Figure 7, which reveals that only 15% of the participants do not measure their students' writing skills using any of the approaches mentioned earlier and do not recommend any additional ways. This percentage (15%) of these teachers is found to teach the first three primary grades, with students ranging from six to eight years old. So, this result is compatible with the advice of Caudwell (n.d.), who concluded that testing writing skills with children aged five to eight is not recommended due to the challenges they face, even in their first language, because they are still learning about the world around them, as well as proper grammar and communication skills, which they still lack.

As with regard to the remaining respondents (85%), who indicated that they test their young students, it may be argued that the only explanation for this is their ignorance and lack of appropriate understanding about teaching this particular group of learners.

Figure 8 also demonstrates low percentages of employing the suggested question types, with the most chosen task accounting for less than 35%. After checking the participants' choices of the different tasks through their responses is the survey. It becomes clear that the majority of teachers of the first grades chose the "writing in speech bubbles" and "writing in response to a picture" tasks, while the "completing a story" and "re-forming a text" tasks were chosen by teachers of the advanced grades whose students are above ten years old. This result again shows the relationship between the tasks utilized and the cognitive development of learners, as the younger the learner, the fewer or easier the writing skill assessments are.

The second set of analyses examined how EFL young learners are assessed through alternative assessment techniques (formative assessment). Figure 9 below illustrates the proportion of different categories of alternative assessment techniques used for assessing EFL:

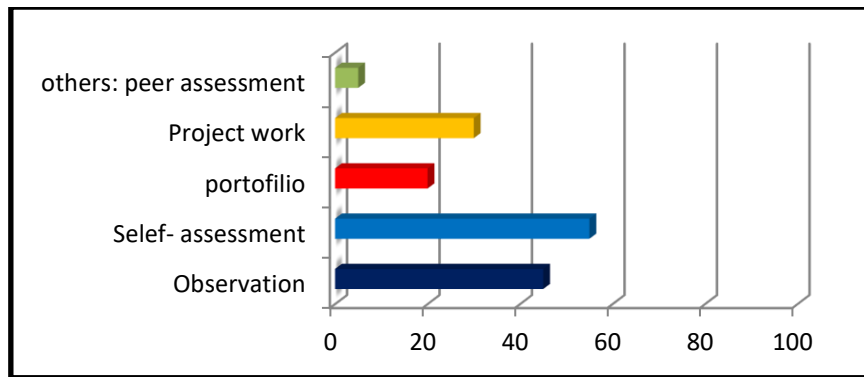


Figure 9: Alternative Assessment Techniques.

Figure 9 displays various methods teachers use to assess young learners using alternative assessment techniques (formative assessment). Yet, the percentages are near and small compared to the proportion of traditional assessment techniques. It was also discovered that most teachers use only one or two of these techniques. Figure 9 also shows that the learner's self-assessment method recorded the highest percentage among other mentioned methods, approximately 55%. This is an unexpected and questionable result. It is unclear whether this method is fully understood by teachers: when, how, and why it is used, or whether they use it as it is included at the end of each unit in some primary course books.

The observation method is the second most commonly used alternative assessment technique in the study, accounting for 45% of the total. This method is anticipated to be the most prevalent, as the ministerial plan for evaluating and distributing grades in the early primary years is to be based on classroom activities rather than monthly tests, with the observation method considered the most suitable for this approach. Additionally, the portfolio method does not seem to be widespread, as it was selected by only 20% of the sample. It is assumed that the cause is that the individuals were unfamiliar with the term, and consequently, they do not use this technique to evaluate students. In short, when compared to earlier forms, the participants interacted significantly more with traditional techniques of assessment than the alternative way.

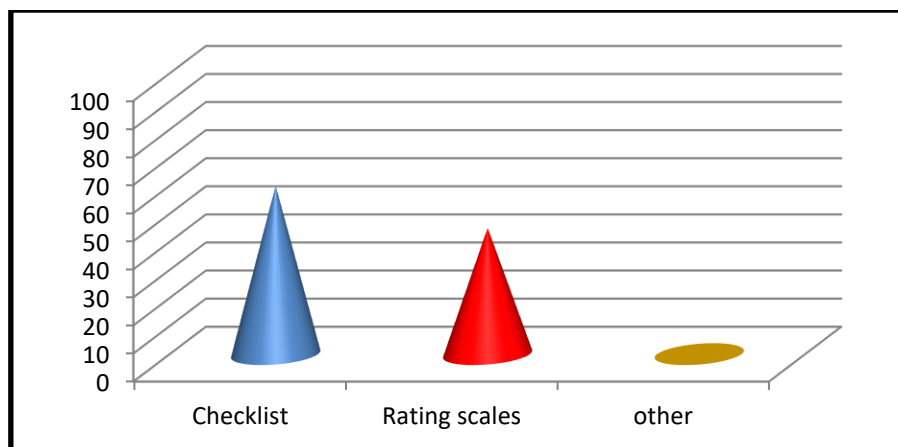


Figure 10: Rating the Learners' Work.

Figure 10 shows that the targeted teachers used both methods, but the checklist method was 15% higher than the rating scales. This is likely due to the ease and speed of applying this method during classroom activities and its advantages. As the National Highway Institute (NHI) (n.d.) stated, checklists with "Yes" or "No" answers allow participants and instructors to monitor learning and record observations during demonstrations or performances, allowing for effective observation and evaluation of skills and attitudes.

The following figure shows the extent to which feedback is provided by EFL teachers.

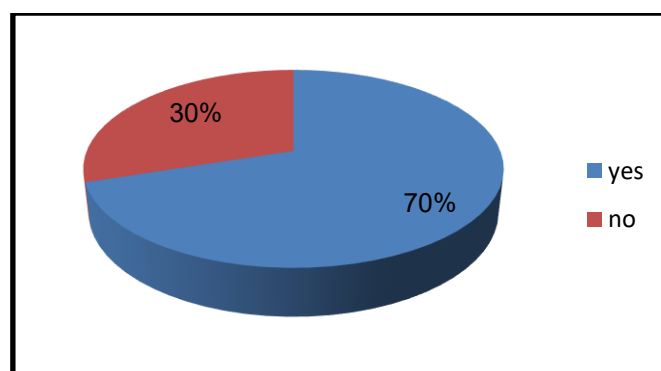


Figure 11: Giving Feedback.

Figure 11 illustrates the percentage of teachers who provide feedback to their students. A portion of 30% of them does not provide it, which is considered a significant rate. This result may suggest that these teachers seem unaware of how significant role feedback plays in students' learning process in that it is considered a crucial component of classroom instruction (Cheng and Zhang, 2021) and, more significantly, it is associated with learners' achievements (Hattie and Timperley, 2007) because of the vast and powerful influences it has. However, many of the teachers who responded to the question (40%) mentioned that they gave it according to the assessment they were carrying out. They added that they provide it orally or in a written form (NSW Government-Education, n.d). Their main intention, as they mentioned, was to reinforce correct answers and help their students' correct errors, which in turn helped them cognitively develop.

4.2. Data Analysis and Discussion of Interviews

The first question of the interview aimed to explore the role of classroom activities as formative assessment tools for evaluating students. The analysis of the participants' responses illustrates the most common types of classroom activities employed to assess students, along with the teachers' views on these methods, their purposes, and the extent to which they utilize them for student evaluation.

After examining the teachers' responses, it was concluded that they acknowledged the significance of classroom activities as listed in the following points:

1. Allowing the teacher to determine the pupils' levels by assigning tasks in the classroom and then grouping them based on their level.
2. Understanding their (teachers') capabilities and skills in delivering knowledge.
3. Assisting in evaluating students' critical thinking by providing an immediate insight into how pupils are processing the teaching contents.
4. Evaluate students in ways that traditional approaches cannot do
5. Providing a more comprehensive picture of the student's talents, beyond his ability to recall and retrieve data.

In addition, the participants also mentioned that they mostly depend on classroom activities to keep young students interested. A few of these activities are the following:

dialogue activities, oral presentations, debates, role-playing, quizzes, peer assessment, group projects, writing activities as homework, spelling games and activities, answering workbook exercises, reading aloud English words, and picture talk activities.

It is worth mentioning that quizzes and workbook exercises are often employed merely to summarise learning, manifesting as traditional tests aimed at evaluating students, commonly referred to in Arabic as "tatbiq", rather than as classroom activities meant for learning.

The purpose of the second interview question was to investigate the challenges teachers experience while using classroom activities to evaluate students in EFL classes. Once the responses of the interviewees were analysed, it was revealed that teachers faced several challenges, including the following:

- 1) There are large individual differences among students and many of them are weak, compared to their peers, in reading skills, which has led to their inability to perform the required task successfully.
- 2) The large number of students in the classroom, combined with the insufficient time allocated for the lesson, hindered the students' ability to complete the exercises successfully.
- 3) Disruptive behavior from some students may slow down class activities.
- 4) It can be difficult to evaluate pupils in dynamic environments, particularly when evaluating individual contributions in group activities. It can be challenging to gauge how much each student is contributing when working in groups and occasionally results in erroneous assessments, the interviewee confirmed.
- 5) Teachers may encounter some challenges while evaluating these tasks, as it might take a lot of time, particularly when evaluating numerous students at once. "I often find it challenging to give each student the attention s/he needs during activities, particularly when a class is large," said one interviewee.
- 6) Another challenge is related to students' anxiety. It's difficult to evaluate kids who are shy or who struggle in group situations, according to one interviewee.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how EFL young learners are assessed in the targeted schools, as well as the obstacles that EFL teachers experience when employing classroom activities as alternative methods for assessment (formative assessment).

This study has identified the most frequent language skills test items, and the alternative assessment techniques used for assessing students. The tasks in the traditional assessment are found to be appropriate for young learners' cognitive development. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that participants interacted significantly more with traditional techniques of evaluation than the alternative way. Moreover, the results also imply a lack of sufficient knowledge of common assessment terms such as feedback and alternative assessment techniques as portfolios. Another significant finding is that teachers may face several challenges in assessing young learners during classroom activities due to a) individual differences among students, b) large classes and limited class time to complete activities successfully, c) disruptive behaviors of some students, d) difficulty in evaluating individual contributions in group activities, e) students' anxiety and shyness to work in groups

Taken together, these results suggest that future EFL teachers are supposed to study EFL assessment modules, including topics for assessing young learners of EFL during their preparation phase or by taking teaching training courses. Additionally, there is a need to include such training lectures for former teachers who are currently teaching in primary schools to raise their cognitive competence in assessing EFL young learners.

A limitation of this study is that it was conducted in a small, Ghat, area, and therefore its results can be cautiously generalized to the rest parts of the country since the whole system is similar and more particularly is that the teachers are being qualified in similar institutions.

In spite of its limitations, it can be claimed that the study would likely be valuable in increasing teachers' understanding of the traditional and alternative assessment techniques, as well as shedding light on some frequent challenges faced by EFL teachers of young learners.

For future studies, more information on alternative assessment techniques and their rating in EFL classrooms would help us to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter.

References

- A NSW Government website-Education. (2021) Peer and self- assessment for students. [WWW] NSW Government. Available from <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/teacher-quality-and-accreditation/strong-start-great-teachers/refining-practice/peer-and-self-assessment-for-students> [Accessed on Feb, the 8th, 2021]
- Banerjee, R. (2016) Checklists and Rating Scales. In The SAGE Encyclopedia of Contemporary Early Childhood Education. Thousand Oaks: Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc. p 196
- Biggar, H. (2005) NAEYC Recommendations on Screening and Assessment of Young English-Language Learners. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 60 (6) pp. 44-46
- BRITISH COUNCIL: Teaching English (n.d) Feedback [WWW] British Council. Available from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/knowning-subject/d-h/feedback> [Accessed on Feb, the 26th, 2023]
- Caudwell, G (n.d) Assessing Young Learners. [WWW] British Council. Available from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/projects/assessment-literacy/assessing-young-learners> [Accessed on Jan, the 30th 2021]
- Cheng X and Zhang LJ (2021) Teacher Written Feedback on English as a Foreign Language Learners' Writing: Examining Native and Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers' Practices in Feedback Provision. Front. Psychol. 12:629921. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.629921
- Crandall, J (2019) Assessing Young Learners. National Geographic Learning ELT [WWW] Available from https://www.eltnl.com/assets/html/conferences/webinars/downloads/ylpt4-assessing-young-learners_webinar.pdf [Accessed on Jan, the 30th 2021]
- Coleman, T. et al (1996) 'Sampling for qualitative research using quantitative methods. 1. Measuring GPs' attitudes towards discussing smoking with patients', 13, pp. 526-530, Available from:
- Dawadi, et al (2021). Mixed-methods research: A discussion on its types, challenges, and criticisms. *Journal of Practical Studies in Education*, 2(2), 25-36.
- Donald, et al, (2003). The Act of Teaching, 3rd ed. McGraw Hill, New York.
- Garza, A and Aceves, M (2016) Using Project Work in Alternative Assessment. In Grajales, W. P. (Ed.) Alternative Forms of Assessment in Second Language Teacher Education. México: Derechos reservados UNACH.
- George, T. (2022) Types of Interviews in Research: Guide and examples. [WWW] Scribbr. Available at <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/interviews-research/> [Accessed on 07/01/2025]

- Hadi, D. (2008) Introduction to Language Testing. Chapter 4. Weblog.[online] 7/12/2008. Available from <https://dyahrochmawati08.wordpress.com/2008/12/07/lang/> [Accessed on Dec, the 7th, 2021]
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77, 81-112. Available from: <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/185731/1/185731.pdf> [Accessed on 12. 3.2025]
- Hargreaves, E, Gipps, C and Pickering, A (2014) Assessment for Learning: Formative Approaches. In Cremin, T and Arthur, J (Eds.) *Learning to Teach in the Primary School*. London and New York: Routledge. 313-323.
- Huba, M. E. and Freed, J. E (2000) Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: Sifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning. *Community college Journal of Research and Practice*.
- Jaolath, M., et al (2024). Improving Young Learners' Speaking Skills with Picture Description Technique. *MATAI: International Journal of Language Education*, 4(2), 199-213. <https://doi.org/10.30598/matail.v4i2.13720>
- Kersten K and Rohde, A (2013) Teaching English to young learners. In Flyman Mattsson, A and Norrby, C (Eds), *Language Acquisition and Use in Multilingual Contexts*. Travaux de l'Institut de Linguistique de Lund; Vol (52), 107-121.
- Klenowski, V. (2009). Editorial: Assessment for learning revisited: An Asia-Pacific perspective. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy, and Practice*, 16(3), 263–268.)
- Kothari, C. R (2004) *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* (2nd Ed). New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.
- Kumar, R (2011) *Research Methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Lankshear, C. and. Knoble, M (2004) 'A handbook for teacher research: from design to implementation', Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Larson-Hall, J (2009) 'A Guide to Doing Statistics in Second Language Research Using SPSS', New York: Routledge.
- Lasardo, A, Notari-Syverson, A and Bricker, D (2011) *Alternative Approaches To Assessing Young Learners*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- Loannou-Geotgiou, S. and Pavlou, P (2003) *Assessing Younger Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McKay, P (2006) *Assessing Young Language Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matthews, B. and Ross, L (2010) 'Research methods: A practical guide for the social sciences', Harlow: Longman.
- Meneguetti, Beatriz (2017) Assessment Types For Young Learners. RichmonSHAREBLOG. Webblog [Online] Available from: <https://www.richmondshare.com.br/assessment-types-for-young-learners/> [Accessed on Jan, the 1st, 2021]
- National Highway Institute (NHI) (n.d) Assessment Checklists [WWW] Available at <https://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov/LearnersFirst/assessment-checklists.htm> 06/01/2025
- Nikolov, M (2016) Trends, Issue and Challenges in Assessing Young Language Learners. In Nikolov, M (Ed,) *Assessing Young Learners of English: Global and Local Perspective*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- NSW Government-Education (n.d) Types of Feedback [WWW] A NSW Government website-Education. Available at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/teacher-quality-and-accreditation/strong-start-great-teachers/refining-practice/feedback-to-students/types-of-feedback> [Accessed on Feb, the 6th, 2023]
- Nunan, D (2011) *Teaching English to Young Learners*. Anaheim: Anaheim University Press.
- Nuraeni, C. (2019). Using total physical response (TPR) method on young learners English language teaching. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, 3(1), 26-34.
- O'Malley, J. M., and Pierce, L. V. (1996). *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners. Practical Approach for Teachers*. The United States of America: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.
- Pinter A. (2006) *Teaching Young Language Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pinter, A (2011) *Children Learning Second Language*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Puskás, A (2017) *Assessing Young Learners in the English Language Classroom*. Szeged: Belvedere Meridionale.
- San Martin, et al., (2020). Storytelling through Picture Description to Enhance Very Young EFL Learners' Oral Production. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, 5(2), 115-134.
- Shaaban, K. (2007) *Assessment of Young Learners*. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. 39 (4). P1-4
- Shin Joan K. and Crandall J (2014) *Teaching Young Learners English: From Theory to Practice*. Boston: National Geography Learning.
- StudySmarter (n.d) Interview in Research [WWW] Studysmarter available at <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/marketing/marketing-information-management/interview-in-research/> [Accessed on Jan, the 7th, 2025]

- Taylor L. (n.d.), young learner testing [WWW] British Council TeachingEnglish. Available at <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/assessing-learning/articles/young-learner-testing> 05/01/2025
- Tennant, A (2020) Assessment matters: Assessing young learners. [WWW] Macmillan Education. Available from <https://www.onestopenglish.com/assessing-learning/assessment-matters-assessing-young-learners/157495.article> [Accessed on Jan, the 1st, 2021]
- Teddlie, C. and Yu, F (2007) 'Mixed methods sampling a typology with examples', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), pp. 77-100.
- Tonkiss, F (2004) 'Using focus group', in C. Seale, (ed), *Research society and culture*. pp. 194-205.
- UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD (n. d) Assessing young learners: A toolkit for teachers development, [WWW] British Council. Available from: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/assessing-young-learners> [Accessed on Jan, the 1st, 2021]
- UNIVERSITY OF READING (2021) Engage in Assessment. [WWW] University of Reading. Available from: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/engageinassessment/why-is-assessment-important/eia-why-is-assessment-important.aspx> [Accessed on Jan, the 1st, 2021]
- Wolf, M. K. and Butler, Y G (2017) An overview of English Language Proficiency Assessment for Young Learners. In: Wolf, M. K. and Butler, Y G (eds.) *English Language Proficiency Assessment for Young Learners*. New York: Routledge. pp. 3-22
- Zahran, F., & Qoura, Y. (2022). The impact of using picture narrating strategy on primary school pupils' speaking skills and anxiety. *Journal of Faculty Of Education, Damietta University*, 37(83.03).