**SHIHAB JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES**
Volume (2), Issue (3) (Sept, 2026)
ISSN: 3136-2958

**مجلة الشهاب للعلوم الإنسانية**
**المجلد (2) العدد 3 سبتمبر 2026**
ردمد: 3136-2958

# *Assessing Assessment: A Study of Libyan Schools EFL Teachers*

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***Received: 15/9/2026 Revised: 20/9/2026 Accepted: 05/10/2026 Publication: 16/10/2026***

## Abstract

Assessment lies at the heart of language learning, but inside many Libyan EFL classrooms, a clear disconnect has emerged between how we teach and how we evaluate. For decades, traditional paper-and pencil tests have dominated English language instruction across Libyan schools, placing far more weight on memorization and grammar drills than on real world communication. However, today's students belong to a digital generation. They engage with technology daily, acquire information differently, and require assessment methods that reflect how language is actually used in the 21st century. This study investigates why these legacy evaluation practices persist in Libyan public and private schools and examines how they fall short of meeting modern learners' needs. Using a mixed-methods approach combining teacher surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews the research explores the day to day realities facing EFL educators. The findings show that while many teachers are fully aware that traditional testing is out of touch with their students' lives, systemic hurdles like rigid national curricula, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of training in digital and formative assessment prevent them from making a change. Ultimately, this paper calls for a practical shift toward flexible, technology assisted, and student centered assessment practices that truly empower Libyan learners.

**Keywords:** EFL Assessment, Modern Evaluation Practices, Digital-Native Learners, Language Assessment Literacy, Libyan Classrooms, Applied Linguistics.

## Introduction

Assessment lies at the very heart of effective English language teaching (EFL). It is not only a tool for grading students at the end of a term, but an ongoing educational process that shapes how teachers instruct and how learners grow. Over the past few decades, language learning theories have clearly shifted: we no longer view assessment as just testing memory (Assessment *of* Learning), but rather as a continuous way to guide and support actual communication. Today's students belong to a digital native generation. Outside the classroom, they interact with technology, visual media, and real time English every day. Because of this, traditional paper and pencil tests no longer reflect their true language ability, nor do they keep them engaged in the learning process.

In Libyan schools, despite ongoing efforts to update English textbooks and adopt communicative teaching methods (Orafi & Borg, 2009), classroom evaluation remains largely unchanged. In practice, many EFL teachers in both public and private Libyan schools still rely almost entirely on traditional, high-stakes written exams. These legacy testing methods focus heavily on memorizing grammar rules and isolated vocabulary rather than assessing functional, real-world language use. This creates a noticeable gap between modern classroom goals and actual evaluation practices, leaving students evaluated by methods that do not match their learning styles or digital realities.

This study investigates the assessment methods currently used by EFL teachers in Libyan primary and secondary schools. It examines how well these methods align with the needs of 21st-century students and identifies the daily, institutional challenges that prevent teachers from adopting modern, technology-enhanced evaluation tools. Specifically, this research addresses three core questions:

1. **What assessment methods are predominantly used by EFL teachers in Libyan schools?**
2. **How do Libyan EFL teachers view the alignment between traditional paper-based tests and the needs of digital-native students?**
3. **What institutional and practical challenges hinder teachers from integrating modern, technology-assisted assessment practices?**

By exploring these questions from an insider perspective within Libyan schools, this paper aims to offer clear, realistic insights for administrators, curriculum planners, and fellow educators working to bridge the gap between traditional testing and modern language education in Libya.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 From Summative Testing to Formative Assessment

For decades, language evaluation relied almost exclusively on Assessment of Learning summative testing designed to measure student performance at the end of an instructional cycle (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). While summative exams generate grades for administrative record-keeping, they offer very little diagnostic feedback to help students understand their learning gaps or improve their skills. In response, applied linguistics has shifted toward Assessment for Learning . This formative approach integrates assessment directly into daily classroom instruction, treating evaluation not as a final judgment, but as a continuous tool to guide teaching and build communicative competence (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Fulcher, 2012).

### 2.2 Digital Natives and Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)

Today’s language learners interact with information in ways fundamentally different from previous generations. As digital natives, they respond far better to interactive, visual, and

technology-assisted feedback than to static printed text (Prensky, 2001). Evaluating these students through traditional paper-and-pencil exams creates an obvious disconnect between their daily digital habits and their classroom realities. Bridging this gap requires high Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)—the practical knowledge and skills teachers need to design, choose, and manage dynamic assessment tools (Popham, 2011). Without adequate LAL training, educators naturally fall back on the traditional testing methods they experienced as students themselves.

### 2.3 The Libyan Context

Research on English language teaching in Libya highlights a persistent gap between educational policy and actual classroom practice. Orafi and Borg (2009) noted that even when secondary school textbooks were modernized to promote communicative language teaching, teachers continued using grammar-translation methods and traditional written tests due to heavy examination pressures. Recent studies in local publications, including *Al-Farooq Journal of Sciences* and *Journal of Comprehensive Sciences*, reinforce these findings. They show that overcrowded classrooms, rigid national testing requirements, and limited digital resources remain major obstacles to modernizing assessment across Libyan schools (Abidin & Al-Hassani, 2012).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, blending quantitative and qualitative approaches to build a practical, grounded picture of assessment practices in Libyan EFL classrooms. The quantitative side uses a teacher survey to identify broad patterns and tendencies across schools. To complement these statistics, qualitative semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were conducted to capture the personal experiences, institutional pressures, and day-to-day realities behind teachers' choices.

### 3.2 Participants and Context

The research took place in public and private primary and secondary schools across Libya. A total of 60 active EFL teachers participated in the survey. To gain deeper qualitative insight, 10 teachers were interviewed, and 5 classroom observation sessions were carried out to see firsthand how teachers handle assessment during actual lessons.

**Table 1:** *Demographic Breakdown of Participating Teachers ($N = 60$)*

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **School Type** | Public Schools | 38 | 63.3% |
| | Private Schools | 22 | 36.7% |
| **Teaching Experience** | 1–5 Years | 14 | 23.3% |
| | 6–12 Years | 28 | 46.7% |
| | Over 12 Years | 18 | 30.0% |
| **Qualification** | B.A. in English / Education | 49 | 81.7% |
| | M.A. in Applied Linguistics / ELT | 11 | 18.3% |

### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments

To capture both broader trends and individual teacher experiences, data were gathered using three complementary instruments over a four-week period:

1. **Teacher Questionnaire:** A concise 15-item survey scored on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from *1 = Strongly Disagree* to *5 = Strongly Agree*). The questionnaire was divided into three core sections:
    - The frequency and types of assessment methods currently used in class.
    - Teachers' perspectives on whether paper-and-pencil testing meets the needs of digital-native students.
    - Institutional, technological, and logistical barriers faced in daily teaching.
2. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Follow-up, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 10 selected teachers from both public and private schools. These open-ended discussions provided a comfortable space for teachers to share personal experiences, explain why they default to traditional exams, and describe the practical frustration of trying to implement modern evaluation tools within a rigid examination system.
3. **Classroom Observations:** To complement self-reported survey responses, 5 full-period classroom observation sessions were conducted across primary and secondary classrooms. Using a simple structured checklist alongside qualitative field notes, observations focused on how teachers deliver real-time feedback, conduct informal comprehension checks during lessons, and manage formal test administration in everyday settings.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed systematically to build a well-rounded picture of assessment practices:

**Quantitative Analysis:** Survey responses were entered into SPSS (Version 26.0) for statistical processing. Descriptive statistics—including frequencies, percentages, mean scores ($M$), and standard deviations ($SD$)—were computed to summarize overall trends, measure agreement levels, and identify prevailing patterns in teachers' choices.

**Qualitative Analysis:** Audio recordings from interviews were transcribed verbatim, and field notes from classroom observations were compiled into organized transcripts. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s

framework. Transcripts were read repeatedly to identify recurring codes, which were then grouped into major themes such as *systemic exam pressure*, *classroom overcrowding*, and *the digital disconnect*. These qualitative themes were integrated directly with the survey findings to provide context and human depth to the numerical results.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Dominance of Traditional Assessment Methods

The survey findings confirm what many educators witness daily: traditional paper-and-pencil testing remains the standard way of evaluating EFL students in Libyan schools. As shown in Table 2, an overwhelming \$86.7\%\$ of surveyed teachers rely primarily on written exams and paper quizzes. These tests focus heavily on memorizing grammar rules, filling in blanks, and translating isolated vocabulary, rather than measuring how well students can actually communicate.

**Table 2:** *EFL Teachers' Assessment Practices and Perceptions (\$N = 60\$)*

| Survey Item | Mean (M) | Std. Dev. (SD) | Agreement (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. I rely primarily on paper-and-pencil exams to evaluate my students.** | 4.42 | 0.72 | 86.7% |
| **2. Traditional paper tests accurately measure students' real-life English ability.** | 2.15 | 0.91 | 18.3% |
| **3. Current assessment methods fail to engage digital-native learners.** | 4.30 | 0.81 | 83.3% |
| **4. Overcrowded classrooms prevent me from giving continuous formative feedback.** | 4.51 | 0.65 | 90.0% |
| **5. I lack practical training in digital and alternative assessment tools.** | 4.18 | 0.88 | 78.3% |

*Note: Scale ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).*

Classroom observations closely mirrored these numbers. In four out of the five classes observed, assessment was limited to checking homework on the board or asking quick recall questions, followed by reminders about an upcoming written exam. Interactive or continuous feedback tools—such as student self-assessments, group projects, or digital quizzes—were absent in public school classrooms and appeared only rarely in private school settings.

### 4.2 The Disconnect with Digital-Native Learners

There is a clear gap between how teachers evaluate students and what students actually need. While \$86.7\%\$ of teachers use paper tests, only \$18.3\%\$ believe these tests reflect real-world language ability. Furthermore, \$83.3\%\$ agreed that static written exams fail to keep today's digital-native generation engaged (\$M = 4.30, SD = 0.81\$).

During interviews, teachers spoke openly about this disconnect. One experienced secondary school teacher shared:

*"Our students spend hours watching videos, playing games, and interacting in English on their phones outside of school. But when they walk into the classroom, we hand them a printed paper and ask them to memorize grammar rules. They lose interest because the test feels completely disconnected from their real lives."*

This matches Prensky's (2001) observations on digital-native learners and echoes findings from local studies in *Al-Farooq Journal of Sciences* (2021), which noted that legacy testing in Libyan schools encourages passive memorization rather than meaningful language use.

### 4.3 Systemic and Practical Barriers

If teachers realize that traditional tests fall short, why do they continue using them? The interviews and survey data highlight three main real-world challenges:

1. **Overcrowded Classrooms:** Class size emerged as the biggest obstacle ($M = 4.51, SD = 0.65$, with $90.0\%$ agreement). Managing 35 to 45 students in a single room leaves teachers with little time or energy to provide individualized formative feedback or performance-based assessments.
2. **Teaching to the Test:** Rigid national examination policies force teachers to align classroom instruction with high-stakes written exams. Because official assessments prioritize grammar accuracy over fluency, teachers feel obligated to prepare students specifically for those traditional formats (Orafi & Borg, 2009).
3. **Limited Training and Resources:** Most participants ($78.3\%$) reported having received little to no practical training in modern assessment tools or Language Assessment Literacy ($M = 4.18, SD = 0.88$). In many public schools, inconsistent internet connection and a lack of hardware make it even harder to introduce technology-assisted evaluation.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to explore the reality of classroom assessment in Libyan primary and secondary schools, specifically looking at the growing gap between traditional paper-based testing and the needs of today's digital-native students.

The findings bring a clear paradox to light: while most Libyan EFL teachers continue to rely heavily on traditional written exams that focus on grammar drills and rote memorization, they openly acknowledge that these tests fall short. They recognize that static written exams neither measure true communicative ability nor keep today's tech-savvy learners engaged.

However, this reliance on legacy testing is not simply a matter of teacher preference. It is driven by real, everyday pressures inside Libyan schools. Overcrowded classrooms, heavy reliance on high-stakes national exams, limited hardware, and a lack of practical training in modern evaluation methods leave teachers with few alternatives. Bridging this gap will

require more than just updating textbook content—it demands a real shift in how we measure language progress inside our classrooms.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Based on the experiences and insights shared by teachers in this study, several practical steps can help modernize language assessment in Libyan schools:

1. **Focus on Practical Assessment Training:** School authorities and training programs should provide teachers with hands-on professional development in Language Assessment Literacy (LAL). Training should focus on simple, realistic strategies—such as creating clear speaking rubrics, giving meaningful ongoing feedback, and using accessible digital tools.
2. **Encourage Accessible, Student-Centered Tools:** Where resources permit—especially in private schools and equipped public classrooms—educators should be encouraged to use simple, low-bandwidth tools like interactive quizzes, brief oral presentations, and group tasks that reflect how students use English outside school.
3. **Balance Continuous and Final Assessment:** School administrators and curriculum leaders should rebalance the weight given to final written exams. Assigning a larger portion of the final grade to ongoing classroom tasks encourages students to practice speaking and communicating throughout the term, rather than just studying for a end-of-term test.
4. **Modernize National Examination Formats:** Centralized examination boards in Libya should gradually update national exam structures to include practical listening and speaking components, encouraging teachers to focus on real communication rather than pure exam preparation.

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