

Key Principles for Effective EFL Classroom-Based Assessment: A Theoretical Synoptic Review

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Abstract

Aligned with learner-centered approaches to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching and assessment, Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) has gained prominence as a key driver of formative feedback, learner engagement, and autonomous learning. The systematic use of CBA marks a shift from the traditional psychometric focus on measurement to a more inclusive, learner-centered model that incorporates assessment into the core of the instructional process. Students' role is becoming increasingly central in shaping assessment processes and outcomes. However, the implementation of CBA in EFL contexts often reveals a misaligned relationship between teachers' expected practices, as outlined in recent theories, and their actual application. This highlights teachers' limited awareness regarding the principles of effective CBA implementation, particularly in the context of local assessment policies and constraints. Drawing on the recent developments in theory and practice, this paper examines the most critical and pertinent concepts to CBA. By synthesizing the main principles of effective CBA, it provides a practical framework for teachers, researchers, and teacher education programs. This paper also concludes with significant implications for CBA policy and practice, and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Alternative assessment, feedback, formative assessment, principles, student involvement

Introduction

Over the last two decades, CBA has evolved into a collaborative process aimed at enhancing teaching and learning and measuring their outcomes (Brown, 2022; Fox, 2017; Price et al., 2011; Shepard, 2000). Both teachers and students are expected to play active roles in this process. This understanding is supported by the recognition that classrooms are complex learning environments where cognitive, social, and emotional factors interact, influencing both teachers' judgments and students' performance, including their beliefs about assessment and learning. Therefore, assessing students' learning progress is an ongoing, complex, and systematic process that involves the continuous collection

of various types of data that influence students' performance, including socio-emotional data.

In various EFL educational contexts, especially those characterized by high-stakes testing, CBA implementation faces several challenges, including accountability demands, inadequate training, and limited resources and infrastructure. In these circumstances, assessment continues to prioritize summative testing and exam-taking strategies, as evidenced by the ongoing dominance of objective techniques in shaping classroom practices (El zerk & Ichebah, 2025). Notably, the persistent reliance on discrete-item testing based on questionable constructs is indefensible. Instead, there is an increasing need to evaluate students' actual performance and the

cognitive and affective factors that influence it in both physical and digital learning environments.

During implementation, several factors influence CBA, including teachers' beliefs, assessment policies and guidelines, and the perceptions and involvement of both teachers and students in assessment decisions, not to mention the prevailing assessment culture within a specific educational context (e.g., high-stakes testing). To achieve positive washback on teaching and learning, CBA must strike a balance between summative and formative purposes. It should fundamentally shift to a learning culture (Tierney, 2013), where CBA is viewed as a process that communicates important learning objectives to students and motivates both teachers and students to focus on learning and teaching (Alonzo, 2019). The challenge remains how to use assessment data formatively to generate positive washback on the educational process while ensuring students' involvement and encouraging their autonomous learning, especially in the absence of an underlying framework for effective assessment implementation.

Aligned with the functional perspective, the emphasis is on using assessments to support quality education (Kane & Wools, 2019). A recent significant body of evidence emphasizes the importance of CBA in delivering constructive feedback to inform teaching and learning processes. Therefore, teachers and students are expected to act as partners, collaborating to achieve learning objectives through the formative use of feedback to close the gap between current and desired performance (Gan & Leung, 2020). Recently, with the growing integration of technology in education, AI-powered platforms have facilitated this process by adjusting assessment task difficulty based on students' responses and providing reflective prompting questions to help them develop their metacognitive skills. These platforms can also track emerging trends in student performance and detect areas of strength and difficulty in their learning. This facilitates the provision of immediate, detailed, and personalized diagnostic feedback to the students.

During actual CBA implementation, the use of a broad range of informal and formal techniques allows for the provision of diverse feedback forms intended for summative, formative, or combined purposes. Essentially, the ongoing collection of this data using diverse techniques is meant to provide constructive feedback on students' learning progress and instructional effectiveness through triangulation of data. This can be achieved only when CBA focuses on clear purposes, accurately reflects students' achievements, provides ongoing descriptive feedback, and actively involves students in the assessment process (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). It is also essential to adopt an integrative approach to EFL proficiency assessment that reflects communicative competence across multiple knowledge and skill dimensions.

Aligned with current developments in CBA theory and research, the focus is on students' operational skills and the use of higher-order thinking. This implies that CBA techniques should emphasize problem-solving, reasoning, and critical thinking. Accordingly, in EFL classrooms, it is necessary to integrate performance-based alternative assessments in diverse modes of work (i.e., individual, pairs, and groups). These techniques are expected to be varied, authentic, student-centered, and intended primarily for formative use. Equally significant is ensuring students' involvement in CBA processes, including their understanding of the learning objectives and the assessment criteria. Expanding on this, students remain the primary participants in CBA, underscoring the need to foster responsibility, collaboration, and autonomy as part of an overall approach to learner training and whole-person development.

Grounded in fundamental theories of educational assessment, this paper aims to extract and synthesize core assessment principles to support instructional material designers, educators, and researchers in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of CBA implementation, especially in EFL contexts, while addressing specific contextual demands and challenges (e.g., large, mixed-ability classes). Consequently, these prin-

ciples align with McMillan's (2013a) comprehensive framework for CBA practices, which emphasizes alignment with learning objectives, the use of a variety of assessment techniques, the use of formative assessment for instructional decision-making, ensuring student involvement, meeting ethical assessment practices, and encouraging transparency in assessment data. In this regard, it is worth noting the absence of an explicit, empirically validated framework for the effective implementation of assessment in EFL contexts.

Aligned with the paper's overall aim of informing CBA implementation and guiding future research, the search protocol primarily targeted the key constructs of CBA techniques, formative assessment, and student involvement, with an emphasis on theoretical insights published in English, particularly those from the last two decades. The search was conducted using electronic databases, including *Google Scholar* and *ResearchGate*. This theoretical foundation is not meant to be exhaustive, and the references checked in this paper were chosen for their theoretical significance and direct relevance to CBA implementation and research in EFL educational contexts. In line with this, the paper outlines several valuable implications for CBA policy and practice while highlighting key issues for future research.

Building on the insights discussed earlier and in pursuit of the aims outlined above, this paper presents key principles for the effective implementation of CBA in EFL educational contexts while suggesting implications for future research. Therefore, it addresses the following questions:

1. What does the literature suggest about principled CBA implementation?
2. What implications can be drawn for policy, practice, and research?

Classroom-Based Assessment: Definition, Purposes, Key Features and Challenges

As noted earlier, CBA is a complex data-collection and multifaceted process that employs

diverse formal and informal techniques. Recently, it has evolved to highlight its intricate, process-oriented nature as a tool for enhancing educational experiences using various methods. Tomlinson and Moon (2013) argue that it comprises "both formal and informal means by which teachers and students can monitor the progress of a learner towards meeting or surpassing the level of knowledge, understanding, and skills designated as essential in the curriculum" (p. 418). Formal techniques are often planned and structured, such as written quizzes and systematic classroom observations, whereas informal CBA frequently involves spontaneous data collection moments when teachers observe students engaging in student-centered CBA activities (e.g., class discussions and role plays).

Students' participation in diverse alternative CBA techniques, such as class discussions, role plays, and projects, generates rich, comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data (e.g., cognitive and socio-emotional data) throughout the instructional cycle. By triangulating formal and informal data collection techniques, teachers, and presumably students, gain consistent input from multiple sources such as tests and other alternative assessments. Significant emphasis should be placed on alternative assessments, such as projects, reflection-based portfolios, peer assessment, and self-assessment in both physical and digital learning environments. These student-centered techniques should primarily support systematic formative decision-making to enhance teaching and learning, with tests serving a complementary and more limited role. Essentially, students are expected to play an active role in collecting, interpreting, and using CBA to improve their learning process.

Therefore, CBA is neither a static process nor limited in scope. Instead, it is a collaborative process in which both teachers and, ideally, students take on active roles. It is a complex process that involves several stages. In the absence of a comprehensive and empirically validated framework, Ruiz-Primo and Li (2013) outline a coherent assessment cycle involving

four key steps: “(1) clarifying learning goals, (2) eliciting evidence of student understanding, (3) interpreting that evidence, and (4) taking action based on the findings” (p. 221). Furthermore, Ferrara et al. (2019) argue that it involves the collection, interpretation, and use of assessment information within the classroom context, with teachers serving as the primary designers of assessments and working collaboratively with students to support learning. However, systematic use of CBA requires sound assessment literacy, coupled with networking and collaboration with other stakeholders, such as administrative staff and teacher supervisors.

Furthermore, CBA is intended to collect data for summative, formative, or a combination of both purposes. When applied to summative purposes, it supports decision-making processes such as certification, selection, and evaluation of the quality of teachers’ practices and school performance. It also serves formative purposes like offering descriptive feedback on students’ progress, grouping them for instructional purposes, and planning lessons accordingly (El zerk, 2025). Traditionally, CBA has focused primarily on the summative measurement of students’ learning outcomes through structured techniques (e.g., tests). However, as Brown (2022) argues, it is not only expected to serve as a tool for summative accountability but also to act as a lever for formative feedback. Gan and Leung (2020) consider formative assessment to be the most influential method for supporting students’ motivation and learning. Markedly, monitoring and scaffolding of learning progress as well as adjustments to learning needs and contexts are at the center of CBA’s effective implementation (El zerk & Ichebah, 2025).

Based on the above, CBA is characterized by several distinct features. It serves both formative and summative purposes while supporting educational decision making (Bailey & Durán, 2019). Additionally, by utilizing diverse task formats (Lane, 2013), CBA enables a more comprehensive assessment of students’ knowledge, skills and processes. This approach holds significant potential for providing diagnostic insights and

developing detailed and nuanced profiles of students’ strengths and areas for improvement (Schneider et al., 2013). Importantly, the data generated by CBA are readily accessible to both teachers and students (Ghaicha, 2016). This posits that CBA fundamentally serves to inform learners about their progress, identify their achievement gaps, and support them in overcoming these weaknesses by collaboratively devising remedial work (El zerk & Ichebah, 2025). Hence, the data are interpreted and applied within the local context (Kane & Wools, 2019). In essence, CBA is a context-specific data collection and analysis process that plays a critical role in shaping instructional practices and improving student learning outcomes.

Despite its distinctive merits, CBA faces various theoretical, methodological, and logistical challenges. As a result, its implementation often has a limited impact and washback on the educational process. Black and Wiliam (1998) identified three key factors that hinder the effectiveness of CBA practices. While highlighted a long time ago, they still resonate with current EFL CBA realities. These include teachers’ limited understanding of formative assessment, national and local demands for certification and accountability, and teachers’ perceptions of their roles and classroom practices when using assessment for formative purposes. These factors hinder the practical application of CBA and place considerable pressure on it. This assertion is substantiated by Gan and Leung’s (2020) observation regarding the insufficient understanding of what fundamentally constitutes formative assessment and how it can be integrated into routine practice. More recently, a pressing emerging issue has been students’ perceptions, motivation, and engagement in CBA processes across physical and digital learning environments.

Toward Effective CBA Implementation: Reflections on Key Principles

In various EFL educational contexts, classroom teachers are expected to use effective evidence-gathering techniques that support student learning and provide meaningful

feedback to teachers and students. This can only be achieved with the support of clear principles and guidelines for implementing quality assessments. According to Andrade (2013), effective CBA is characterized by several merits: it provides constructive feedback to both teachers and students on performance related to learning objectives, prompts adjustments to teaching and positive changes in learning, and encourages students to reflect on their work. Below is an overview of the main principles of effective CBA implementation, synthesized from the relevant literature within the last two decades. As noted earlier, the publications were selected for their theoretical significance and direct relevance to CBA in EFL educational contexts.

Principle 1: CBA Practices Require Both Alignment and Transparency as Foundational Aspects

CBA aims to monitor students' progress and assess their achievements against identified learning objectives based on pre-established standards, with students playing an active role in the process. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure alignment among curriculum objectives, assessment standards, and CBA techniques. According to Randel and Clark (2013), "an early step in sound classroom assessment practice is the specification of clear and specific learning objectives that are linked to the curriculum and content standards" (p. 147). Therefore, alignment is a necessary concept for summarizing students' learning and learning needs (Ferrara et al., 2019). Specifically, assessment techniques should align directly with the defined learning objectives and subject-matter standards. As highlighted previously, to obtain a comprehensive overview of students' competence, it is necessary to employ multiple and diverse techniques, with an emphasis on performance-based techniques.

In addition to diversifying CBA techniques, it is essential to ensure that the constructs being assessed and the techniques used align with the specific assessment type being implemented (Parr, 2013). A clear link between learning

objectives and assessment techniques for monitoring progress is a key principle of the CBA (Xu, 2013). This alignment shapes students' perceptions of assessment, influences their responses to performance, and supports their acceptance of feedback (McMillan, 2019). For example, assessing the appropriate use of a communicative function (i.e., EFL pragmatics) through multiple-choice questions would be unreasonable. In this regard, Kane and Wools (2019) note that CBA can "shape the students' perceptions of the goals being pursued by the teacher in the class, and thereby support the goals of instruction by communicating and reinforcing these goals" (p. 18). Thus, aligning techniques with assessed constructs is fundamental to fostering positive views toward both CBA and feedback.

As far as transparency is concerned, effective assessment practices are incomplete unless stakeholders, primarily students, share a common understanding of the CBA techniques used to derive and communicate feedback. In this respect, Ferrara et al. (2019) argue that the purposes of formative assessment will be undermined if students are unaware of what they are expected to learn. Consequently, they will not be able to demonstrate their current level of understanding. In contrast, they are more likely to aim for performance goals (i.e., obtaining high grades). Therefore, it is important to involve students in generating the learning objectives of their lessons and specifying the success criteria. Students' understanding of these factors will enable them to self-regulate their learning and work independently to achieve their goals. By extension, it fosters autonomous learning and promotes positive attitudes toward assessments and learning.

Furthermore, other assessment stakeholders are expected to understand the rationale behind various CBA techniques and their purposes, particularly the formative use of assessment. According to Malone (2008), the focus on test users has expanded beyond language instructors to include other participants such as parents and administrators. In this context, parents are more

likely to value assessment practices focused on learning when they recognize how these practices enhance their children's learning and success (Earl, 2003). This can, in turn, help transform the prevailing assessment culture across various EFL educational contexts, which is often dominated by accountability measures and summative evaluations. Building on this, the first step is to make course descriptions, learning objectives, and the CBA protocol, including assessment criteria, explicitly available to teachers, students, and parents by holding conferences and meetings to explain them, especially at the beginning of the academic year.

Principle 2: CBA Relies on Strong Assessment Literacy (AL)

Assessment literacy is a prerequisite for effective CBA implementation. Teachers need strong pre-service and in-service training to develop effective AL. CBA literacy, as defined by Gan and Lam (2024), generally refers to “teachers’ ability to conduct valid, reliable, and instructional goal-oriented classroom-based assessment to promote student learning” (p. 1). This ability allows them to systematically use CBA to enhance teaching and learning. Notably, without adequate content knowledge and pedagogical skills, teachers cannot design assessments that reveal student learning gaps (Schneider et al., 2013). There is broad agreement on the importance of both pre- and in-service AL (Turner, 2012). Inbar-Lourie (2017) explains that this AL includes “the reasoning or rationale for assessment (“why”), the description of the trait to be assessed (“the what”), and the assessment process (“the how”)” (p. 264). Hence, it is a complex set of skills that requires intensive training and practical strategy development.

Therefore, teachers need a solid understanding of assessment interpretation. More critical is how to systematically use assessment data for formative decision-making, along with practical strategies to engage students in the process (e.g., how to use feedback for learning improvement). According to Gan and Lam (2024), teachers are expected to confront their

contextual challenges and proactively depend on themselves to develop their AL amid their tried and tested CBA practices. This was further supported by qualitative insights that highlighted the role of teachers’ prior assessment experiences in developing their AL. Building on this, reflective practice, accompanied by action research and networking with experienced practitioners, is essential for enhancing in-service teachers’ professional skills. Additionally, digital platforms (e.g., MOOCs, Coursera) provide in-service teachers with a wealth of online, self-paced Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities in both teaching and assessment.

Principle 3: CBA Involves Interactive Techniques that Serve Diverse Purposes and Address Student Differences

In mixed-ability EFL classes, CBA requires the use of various techniques to gain a comprehensive picture of students’ learning progress, although assessment methods are not necessarily associated with specific uses (Randel & Clark, 2013). According to Shepard (2000), “the best strategy is to use multiple data sources for purposes of triangulation without presuming that one assessment mode is more accurate than others” (p. 49). Therefore, new forms of assessment must also be appreciated for their impact on teaching and learning processes (Gipps, 1994). The virtue of variety in assessment techniques lies not only in the fact that different assessments are linked to different learning goals, but also in how the assessment mode interacts with what is being assessed in complex ways. Thus, teachers are expected to use techniques that best capture the intended knowledge and skills (Shepard, 2000). In other words, different learning constructs require varied and multiple assessment techniques that effectively capture their dimensions, aligned with learning objectives, assessment standards, and the intended purposes of using CBA.

In this context, alternative assessments offer a wide range of techniques, each with distinct purposes, focal areas, and underlying rationales.

Therefore, CBA should adopt an integrative approach to language assessment to reflect actual language performance. For example, speaking and listening deserve adequate coverage within the CBA and should be integrated (El zerk & Ichebah, 2025). Furthermore, recent shifts have emphasized integrated tasks involving multiple skills, which better mirror authentic communication (Llosa, 2017; Wigglesworth & Frost, 2008). Such tasks often require human judgment because they assess EFL in ways that are not easily captured by objective measures (Spolsky, 2017). Alternative assessments provide a rich array of techniques, each serving a specific purpose and addressing particular areas of focus. These techniques, such as oral tasks, written products, investigations, or collaborative activities, support higher-order thinking and offer insights into students' understanding (Lane, 2013). Overall, grounded in sociocultural theory, CBA must be interactive, enabling teachers to identify misconceptions, scaffold learning, and assess performance within students' Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Gipps, 1994).

Viewed through this lens, assessment serves to identify each learner's ZPD through thoughtfully designed tasks that gradually increase complexity. Aligned with this, CBA should offer every student the chance to meet and potentially surpass key learning targets, particularly in a differentiated classroom setting (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). As McMillan (2019) notes, "the challenge for classroom teachers is to efficiently understand and account for individual student differences in designing and implementing their assessments" (p. 86). For this reason, just as instruction is differentiated, assessment must be adapted to reflect these differences (Bonner, 2013). In mixed-ability classes, this ensures that all students can show their progress and are supported in advancing from their current level of understanding (Heritage, 2013). The implication, then, is that beyond differentiation, CBA should be humanized to consider students' individual affective factors that may influence their ability to demonstrate what they know and can do. This supports fairness, strengthens validity,

and fosters a learning culture within a supportive and productive environment.

Principle 4: Formative Use of Assessment Feedback is an Essential Component of CBA

Formative feedback encourages meaningful dialogues that improve learning. Such dialogue, as Amua-Sekyi (2016) notes, breaks the traditional top-down flow of knowledge and promotes a deeper understanding. Feedback, defined as "any information provided to a learner" (William, 2013, p. 198), supports learning and enhances cognitive and metacognitive skills. It is worth noting that feedback may refer to any information generated through CBA techniques; however, improving learning depends on providing timely and meaningful descriptive feedback while ensuring that students understand it. In this respect, Gan and Leung (2020) illustrated how formative assessment can be naturally incorporated by engaging students in dialogue throughout task-based activities. Besides, Brookhart (2019) notes that "using feedback to improve is arguably the most important intended consequence of decisions based on formative classroom assessment information" (p. 76). For this reason, in the Finnish educational system, students regularly receive feedback on their strengths and areas for improvement, in addition to mid-year or end-of-year reports (Hendrickson, 2012).

Building on the above, facilitating the learning process requires effective feedback that identifies students' strengths and areas for improvement, along with guidance on how to improve. As Brookhart (2019) explains, it helps students recognize what learning means ("Where am I going?"), assess their present achievement ("Where am I now?"), and consider future actions ("Where to next?") (p. 66). Simply showing the gap between the present and expected performance is insufficient; feedback should also explicitly indicate how to close this gap (William, 2013). Correspondingly, Ruiz-Primo and Li (2013) emphasized that effective feedback should clarify the evidence of learning and the criteria for achieving the intended learning objectives.

Owing to recent innovations in educational technology, AI-assisted tools offer students complex and personalized diagnostic profiles; however, unlike human-mediated feedback, this constructive feedback lacks a social dimension. Regardless of the source, what matters most is students' understanding of the feedback and their ability to use it to improve their learning. This implies the need to train students to use feedback to improve their learning.

Principle 5: CBA Should Reflect Authentic, Real-World Language Use

As previously highlighted, CBA should integrate authentic, student-centered, and performance-based activities that reflect real-world situations and demands. Shepard (2000) stressed the significance of revisiting subject content to ensure that it meaningfully reflects real-world situations. Authentic activities, as Wiliam (2001) notes, generate valid inferences about student performance across the key dimensions of the sampling domain. These are often disregarded in written multiple-choice or short-answer item formats. For example, demonstrations, exhibitions, projects, and portfolios are marked by their alignment with learning objectives, measurable components, and their capacity to ensure valid and reliable assessments of learning (Ghaicha, 2016). Linking EFL classroom instruction to practical, real-life situations not only enhances student engagement and motivation but also promotes their ability to transfer knowledge to real-world contexts. Nevertheless, assessing student performance in this context is challenging because many performance-based activities are unstructured, and their evaluation criteria are abstract.

Proceeding with the authenticity of CBA activities, one pressing issue is the generalizability of assessment outcomes on students' overall proficiency (Wigglesworth & Frost, 2008). Student performance may depend on the particular assessment task and is subject to diverse internal (e.g., anxiety) and external factors (e.g.,

time of the day). Consequently, it is challenging to ensure that the results truly reflect the genuine attainment of learning objectives, including transferability. To account for this, educational assessment experts advocate moderation practices (Darling-Hammond & McCloskey, 2008; Parr, 2013; Shepard, 2000), along with the use of shared modal works to reduce subjectivity and promote scoring consistency, especially in high-stakes assessment contexts. These strategies ensure adequate understanding of targeted skills or concepts and support a more consistent interpretation (Gipps, 1994). Moreover, Antón (2012) emphasizes collaborative assessment for greater transparency and validity, while model student work can serve as a reference to improve reliability (Topping, 2013). Furthermore, employing assessment criteria generated in collaboration with students enhances consistency while ensuring their involvement. These practices require sound AL, coupled with practical skills; however, further research is needed in this area, particularly regarding inter-rater reliability among teachers with different qualifications.

Principle 6: CBA Follows a Criterion-Referenced Approach, Aligned with Learning Progressions

To reduce uncertainty in evaluating students' strengths and weaknesses, inferences should be based on qualitative descriptions or observed samples rather than a single scaled score (Kane & Wools, 2019). Using well-defined criteria minimizes subjectivity and bias by outlining what quality work entails (Andrade, 2013). Without shared criteria, teaching may lack focus, and students may be negatively impacted (Moss, 2013). To illustrate, the CEFR¹ is a widely adopted framework for describing and teaching language proficiency across Europe (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2008). Equipped with the assessment criteria, assessment specialists and classroom teachers are expected to have a clear understanding of the developmental pathways that lead to increased expertise in a given domain. Combined with their professional expe-

¹ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed during the 1919s and was published in its complete version by the Council of Europe in 2001.

rience, teachers can gather meaningful evidence of learning for formative purposes, primarily to support positive learning outcomes that are aligned with an empirically validated learning progression.

Therefore, the assessment criteria should align with clearly defined learning progressions. Grounded in cognitive theories, the criteria for each level must reflect distinct stages of development, showing how students construct their understanding within a domain. Learning progressions outline pathways that guide students toward learning outcomes through appropriate and targeted instructions (Heritage, 2013). These pathways describe partial and emerging understandings that lead to deeper learning (Shepard et al., 2020). Hence, CBA shifts from isolated knowledge checks to assessing cognitive and metacognitive skills across domains, aided by advanced technologies for monitoring learners' cognitive development (Jang, 2017). The socio-cultural learning context is another important aspect in this regard. Researchers and practitioners in EFL educational contexts are encouraged to develop empirically validated learning progressions congruent with local specificities and demands.

Principle 7: CBA Should Foster Advanced Cognitive Skills in Physical and Digital Learning Environments

As noted earlier, assessing higher-order thinking skills requires the employment of diverse assessment techniques. This is because understanding extends beyond facts to include “principles, fundamental relationships, familiar analogies and models, rules of thumb, problem-solving approaches, as well as schema for knowing when to use what” (Shepard, 2000, p. 20). Brown (2022) further supports this by emphasizing the need for assessment techniques that evaluate complex thinking, problem solving, creativity, and analysis, despite their inherent challenges. From another perspective, Pellegrino (2004) warns that: “decontextualized, drop-in-from-the-sky assessments consisting of isolated tasks and performances will have zero

validity as indices of educational attainments” (p. 12). This means that students need reflective and problem-solving activities to develop their analytical thinking, which will progressively enable them to perform creatively in work environments. More significantly, students hone their analytical skills, such as comparing, contrasting, evaluating, and synthesizing, before performance (Hock et al., 2022). This practice is considered one of the key principles of the student-centered approach to educational assessment.

Substantially, decontextualized CBA that targets discrete items to support result generalizability fails to accurately reflect what students know and can do, as domains and constructs are complex and multi-dimensional. Moreover, assessing achievements is not an exact science (Gipps, 1994). Of particular importance are 21st-century skills, which are increasingly emphasized in curriculum and assessment frameworks across Europe and Asia. These include “the abilities to find and organize information to solve problems, frame and conduct investigations, analyze and synthesize data, apply learning to new situations, self-monitor and improve one’s own learning and performance, communicate well in multiple forms, work in teams, and learn independently” (Darling-Hammond & McCloskey, 2008, p. 264). Therefore, CBA should aim to enhance students’ ability to critically analyze and apply knowledge through meaningful, open-ended, and authentic performance-based tasks accompanied by explicit evaluation criteria.

In digital learning environments, educational technology has revolutionized assessment by making the collection, storage, and organization of assessment data more efficient. Language corpora also offer authentic audio, visual, and transcript data, supporting a more valid evaluation of young language learners, even by less experienced teachers (Bailey, 2017). In addition, learning analytics and data mining offer promising approaches for analyzing CBA data; they enable sophisticated tracking of diverse data types and facilitate the delivery of personalized feedback. As discussed earlier, AI-as-

sisted digital platforms can monitor students' performance in authentic tasks, such as e-projects and e-portfolios; identify patterns in students' responses and peer assessments; and provide multidimensional, diagnostic, and personalized feedback for learning improvement. Concerning the social dimension of learning, this raises questions related to the nature and impact of virtual interactions and collaboration on social dynamics and authenticity. Learners' digital skills and competence, and their understanding of assessment in digital environments, represent other areas for research and exploration in EFL educational contexts.

Principle 8: CBA Requires Careful Consideration of Contextual Constraints

The first intervention centers on streamlining the subject matter content. To ensure sufficient time for meaningful CBA that supports dynamic and relevant learning goals, it is essential to reduce the syllabus load and emphasize cognitive skill development. This encourages broader curriculum coverage through authentic, teacher-developed assessment. This approach, known as curriculum fidelity, counters the tendency to limit assessments to easily measurable techniques (Gipps, 1994). Comparative curriculum analyses show that high-performing systems “teach fewer topics more deeply each year” and prioritize reasoning and knowledge transfer over surface coverage, with topics sequenced according to developmental learning progressions (Darling-Hammond & McCloskey, 2008, p. 264). Quality EFL teaching and learning, therefore, require streamlined content, integrated higher-order thinking skills, and realistic, developmentally aligned objectives.

Streamlining content remains insufficient without moving away from objective, high-stakes assessment techniques. Standardized high-stakes tests are often criticized for failing to promote meaningful learning. As Gipps (1994) notes, “the higher the stakes, the greater the likelihood of cheating and unethical practices” (p. 165). Shepard (2000) also emphasizes that these objective assessments often fail to reflect

the ongoing nature of the learning process because they are uniform and time-bound. In comparison, Finland, whose education system is recognized for its high ranking, has largely abolished standardized testing. Consequently, less emphasis is placed on memorization-based examinations. Alternatively, the focus has shifted toward teacher-led continuous CBA and school-based evaluations to support accountability and improve teaching quality (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2018). Therefore, limiting assessment practices to a range of teacher-controlled, continuous assessments can promote meaningful learning. Teachers have an insider perspective to enact this shift, given their ability to understand local specificities while addressing psychometric criteria through alternatives such as moderation and model examples.

As highlighted previously, CBA needs to utilize various data collection techniques. To achieve this, teachers need substantial autonomy to design instruction and plan teaching and assessment independently based on both local and national curricula. In practice, this entails moving away from summarizing student achievement with a single static score toward more detailed representations, such as achievement profiles and performance descriptors (Gipps, 1994). Wiliam (2001) suggests that one way to prevent curriculum narrowing caused by objective techniques (e.g., tests) is to use a wide range of assessments perceived as high-stakes within the classroom. From another perspective, as noted earlier, reform efforts will remain ineffective unless teachers are relieved of the pressure to prepare students for traditional basic skills tests (Shepard, 2000). They also require adequate guidance and assistance to incorporate formative assessments (Gan & Leung, 2020). In essence, a reasonable alternative is to eliminate high-stakes standardized assessments and emphasize systematic, criterion-referenced, teacher-led, and continuous CBA.

Conclusion

CBA is a complex data collection process that uses diverse formal and informal techniques to inform various decisions. This paper synthesizes the principles of effective CBA, drawing on insights from the relevant literature, primarily over the last two decades. The framework primarily aims to improve CBA implementation and guide CBA research in EFL contexts. Based on the key principles discussed above, effective CBA requires aligning assessment practices with learning objectives and standards while ensuring the explicit sharing of assessment-related information, such as course goals, criteria, and purposes. Sound implementation also necessitates equipping teachers with strong Assessment Literacy (AL) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities.

Furthermore, in EFL classrooms, assessment should encompass multiple, authentic, interactive, and performance-based techniques (e.g., projects, portfolios, etc.) in both physical and digital learning environments, with an emphasis on formative feedback use and student involvement. To provide quality formative feedback, adopting a criterion-referenced approach aligned with an empirically validated learning progression is necessary. This type of assessment ensures a deep understanding as well as the development of higher-order thinking skills. However, context-specific challenges and specificities (e.g., mixed-ability classes, high-stakes testing) must also be considered. AI-assisted platforms have the potential to transform formative assessments by enhancing data storage, analysis and the provision of personalized feedback, especially in digital learning environments.

While this theoretical overview has established a foundation of key principles for effective CBA implementation, synthesized from the relevant theoretical basis reviewed, it remains necessary to move beyond theoretical synthesis toward systematic reviews that emphasize recent empirical work supported by diverse evidence across multiple EFL educational contexts. This is especially important for providing empirically

validated principles for effective CBA practices. Equally important is highlighting the methodological limitations and areas that are under-researched in the current CBA literature within EFL contexts. Furthermore, future systematic reviews should adhere to a well-defined and valid search protocol to standardize the search processes. Based on the insights discussed earlier, the following are implications for assessment policy and practice, along with recommendations for future research:

Implications for Classroom Policy and Practice

A principled framework grounded in cognitivist, socio-cultural and constructivist learning theories should be developed to enhance CBA practices. This framework should incorporate clear learning progressions and detailed criteria, such as those outlined in the CEFR, to support monitoring learning progress using empirically validated rubrics. Furthermore, alternative and performance-based assessments should be embedded as core components of CBA implementation, used not merely as supplementary techniques but as essential components serving both formative and summative purposes through a balanced and integrative approach. Shifting the exam-oriented mindset requires reducing the emphasis on standardized, high-stakes testing and numerical scoring, as these practices drive instruction toward performance-based goals and prioritize test-taking strategies over meaningful learning.

EFL teachers deserve high-quality pre-service and in-service AL and training tailored to their professional needs within their local contexts. This training should integrate both theoretical foundations and hands-on practice to strengthen teachers' assessment competency. In this respect, reflective practice, action research, networking with experienced colleagues, and peer observation can significantly enhance teachers' assessment skills. Consequently, fostering collaboration among teachers is strongly encouraged, as it supports consistency, particularly in overcoming inter-rater reliability. To

enhance this process, it is necessary to develop a digital repository of items, tasks, and tutorials that will enable teachers to readily incorporate innovative methods into their practice. As for digital learning environments, software for “big data” mining and learning analytics is worth establishing to facilitate the provision of a more sophisticated analysis of students’ learning progress, as part of an overall approach toward promoting autonomous and digital learning.

For teachers to act as agents of change in effectively integrating formative and alternative assessments, they need accessible models for implementation. In this regard, teachers play a crucial role in training students on CBA as a collaborative process in which they act as responsible partners concerned primarily with assessment as a Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) process. In turn, teachers and other concerned stakeholders are called upon to promote positive attitudes toward CBA practices and feedback. To achieve this aim, it is critical to involve students in understanding relevant learning objectives and success criteria. This practice must be complemented by active participation in self-directed activities such as reflective portfolios, self-assessment, peer assessment, and collaborative CBA tasks (e.g., projects).

Furthermore, to enhance students’ experiences with CBA, teachers are encouraged to humanize its processes by making them more supportive, transparent, and responsive to individual needs, particularly in high-stakes testing contexts. As highlighted earlier, this requires informing students in advance about the assessment procedures to ensure transparency and preparedness. Furthermore, meaningful student involvement depends on their ability to use feedback to support learning. As Scott (2001) suggests, this shift places greater responsibility on the learner, requiring a change in how students perceive learning. For this to be effective, students must understand and value feedback and be able to apply it productively through adequate training and constant monitoring. This shift can be supported by reducing the emphasis on summative testing and promoting

assessment for learning and learning through mistakes. As noted earlier, inviting students to use self-directed assessment activities enhances their agency and, by extension, leads to their growth as independent learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

Shifting to research, further empirical work is still needed to better understand the realities of CBA application through research agendas that refine its definition and more firmly link it to the current theoretical foundation (Turner, 2012). Nonetheless, McMillan (2013b) notes that field-based inquiries in this area face challenges related to variations across educational contexts, often resulting in inconsistent or inconclusive findings. Accordingly, the first step is to clearly define the constructs under examination. In addition, assessing the quality of CBA practices can be difficult because findings are often influenced by individual learner differences and contextual factors (Jang, 2017). In response, Randel and Clark (2013) suggest developing and using improved or newly designed instruments to examine issues such as how well students grasp the material and the criteria they apply during self-assessment, including those used by their teachers.

Furthermore, the practical aspects above highlight several areas that need further exploration to enhance the quality of CBA implementation. In this respect, it is important to investigate the specific CBA techniques and feedback practices used in EFL classrooms, including their impact on students’ motivation, engagement, and achievement. Equally, research should examine how teachers use and interpret alternative assessment data to support formative decisions meant to enhance teaching and learning. To move beyond an exam-driven culture and promote a learning-focused approach, students’ perceptions of CBA and their involvement in its processes require an in-depth examination. The washback of assessment on concerned participants (e.g., parents), particularly in high-stakes contexts, is worth investigating. Methodologically, future research should go beyond self-reports by using

direct tools such as classroom observations and gathering perspectives on diverse issues from both teachers and students.

As research progresses, several issues remain pertinent to the current educational assessment literature. Initially, improving educational quality requires well-designed research to reinforce the foundations of effective CBA (McMillan, 2013b). Another central challenge is narrowing the gap between assessment theory and classroom practice (Inbar-Lourie, 2017). Furthermore, a largely unexamined area is the disconnect between teachers' CBA knowledge and its implementation, as well as how to balance formative and summative functions to support quality education (Wiliam, 2001). From the students' perspective, further studies should explore students' experiences with CBA techniques and feedback (McMillan, 2013b), the effects of clearly communicated learning goals (Andrade, 2013), and students' perceptions of the assessment process, its purposes, and its consequences.

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