**Research Article**

# TEACHER ASSESSMENT IDENTITY AND CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT BELIEFS

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**ABSTRACT**

*Assessment reforms in Vietnam and other countries place a substantial demand on the part of English-language teachers to follow classroom-based assessment (CBA). The practice of CBA, however, varies. This paper aims to explore EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers' beliefs about CBA, using the grounded theory approach. Data were collected from interviews with four EFL teachers. Results show that the core category "Teachers' beliefs about CBA" was centred around three emerging sub-categories: "Beliefs and Feelings", "Knowledge and Skills" and "Perception of Roles". The findings suggest that the underlying complexity of the teachers' decision-making process in CBA should be understood by a model known as Teacher Assessment Identity. Pedagogical implications include the need to account for teacher identity to bridge the gap between policy and practice of assessment.*

*Keywords:* assessment for learning; classroom-based assessment; classroom assessment beliefs; teacher assessment identity; teacher identity

## 1. Introduction

Assessment is vital for teaching and learning, and it is often categorized into summative and formative types. However, in different frames of reference, the formative-summative distinction has fine nuances. Formative assessment has been known by various names over time, such as assessment for learning, teacher-based assessment, alternative assessment, informal assessment (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Clapham, 2000; Hamayan, 1995), and more recently, classroom-based assessment (Lewkowicz & Leung, 2021). In this article, the term "classroom-based assessment" (CBA) will be used to describe formative assessment in the EFL classroom. It includes all activities conducted by teachers or students to collect information about a student's performance or language use, which is then used to adjust teaching and learning activities.

Increasingly seen as a key tool for change, assessment is crucial for school reforms. In many parts of the world, education policy makers pay much attention to the important role

of teachers in CBA (Davison & Leung, 2009; Lewkowicz & Leung, 2021; Pham, 2021). In Vietnam, the National Foreign Language 2020 project emphasizes that foreign language teachers need to be trained and guided on practical assessment techniques, how to select and evaluate tasks, utilize assessment results, and leverage assessment to support learning outcomes (Nguyen, 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023; Sheehan, 2023).

There are many challenges faced by the EFL teachers as classroom assessors in Vietnam. It was found that they had inadequate assessment literacy, unclear assessment identity and inadequate professional training and discussions (Nguyen, 2022). The researcher suggests that the teachers "do not seem to actively take action to overcome their challenges" and that "it is the teachers themselves who were expected to pro-actively address their own challenges" (p.48). However, few studies have been undertaken to explore and theorise the EFL teachers' perception of CBA.

Therefore, this study is intended to explore the EFL teachers' beliefs about English-language CBA.

## 2.    Subjects and Methods

### 2.1.   Literature Review

Theoretically, CBA is designed to empower teachers and students to actively control the assessment process. Nevertheless, the practical application of these methods presents difficulties, including the obsession with scoring, concern of fairness, and learners' limited ability to work independently (Lam, 2017). Many researchers believe that CBA fails because of the lack of language assessment literacy. Assessment literacy is defined as the teachers' knowledge and skills of assessment (Taylor, 2009). Without a good collaborative network, the teachers struggled to navigate through institutional constraints, such as coming to terms with the rating scales (Nguyen, 2022).

However, recent studies suggest that teachers' beliefs should be accounted for the effectiveness of CBA. (Looney, 2017) contend that teachers might have the necessary knowledge and confidence, yet they might not believe in the efficacy of assessment processes. Therefore, it's crucial to acknowledge teachers' beliefs and give them a voice. Doing so allows us to understand their professional practice and, importantly, supports them in making well-informed choices to navigate the complexity of the teaching-learning process (Haddadian et al., 2024).

### 2.2.   Methods

A broad research question this study aims to address is: What are EFL teachers' beliefs about CBA?

### 2.2.1. Subjects

The participants of this study were four EFL teachers working in a Vietnamese university. They have master's degrees in education and working experience of at least five years. They are identified by pseudonyms (Teacher H, K, Q, M) in this study to protect their

privacy. The subjects these teachers were teaching include, respectively, speaking skill, listening skill, writing skill and language for multimedia.

The research context is a one-year foundational program where the students are trained to be ready for English-medium instruction. This program, after several changes in curriculum design, follows a competency-based structure. The students can pass the program if they meet all academic requirements about attendance and minimum score of assessment.

*2.2.2. Data collection*

I, initially, recruited seven EFL teachers from the foundational program who gave consent to the research participation. The initial interviews were scheduled at the convenient time and location of the participants. Because I was living far from the participants' location, I used synchronous video conferencing tools, such as Zoom, to conduct the interviews. I made demographic questions to collect background information of the participants, took note of those who were willing to voice their opinions and share the experiences, and asked for their permission to join follow-up interviews.

In the follow-up interviews, four out of the seven teachers agreed to meet and share their thoughts. The semi-structured individual interviews, guided by Hill and McNamara (2012), produced richer ideas and revealed more emerging themes. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

*2.2.3. Data analysis*

I followed the grounded and iterative coding process as suggested by Hill and McNamara (2012). Coding occurred in parallel with data collection and transcription and can be divided into three levels (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). First, in the open coding, I assigned labels or codes to every line of the interview transcript, without restriction on any preconceived categories. Second, in the axial coding, I refined the initial codes, examining and interlinking categories of thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. Third, in the selective coding, I synthesised the categories from axial coding to form core categories and developed the emergent theory that abstracts the underlying relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of CBA. The validity of categories was ensured by comparison with an external coder, a colleague of mine familiar with EFL research (Dornyei, 2007).

## 3.    Results and discussion

This study was aimed to explore EFL teachers' beliefs about CBA. I conducted semi-structured interviews, following Hill and McNamara (2012),  to collect the data. After the cyclic data collection process and coding analysis, the core category "Teachers' beliefs about CBA" was centred around three emerging sub-categories: "Beliefs and Feelings", "Knowledge and Skills" and "Perception of Roles". These themes are illustrated below.

### 3.1.    *Beliefs and feelings*

All the teachers in the study expressed a positive attitude towards CBA. They believed that formative assessment helped them understand students' learning more comprehensively

than summative assessment and CBA has long-term benefits for the students. They made conscious efforts to pursue these beliefs and feelings by planning the teaching activities relevant to students' needs, providing feedback, and making observations.

### 3.1.1. Benefits of CBA

CBA could have long-term benefits to the student's development of skills. The teachers believed that it is important to provide the students with opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in ways that are real and leave a long-lasting impression on the students. The teachers placed the importance of formative assessment over summative assessment in improving teaching and learning. One reason, according to teacher Q, is formative assessment reflects the learners' performance over a long period of time. Teacher K stated:

Formative assessment includes on-going feedback and opportunities given to students to apply their knowledge and skills in the long run. At least when they are out of class, these opportunities allow them to have real and impressionable experience, and leave a long-lasting impression on them.

### 3.1.2. Efforts to pursue beliefs

Aligning with the belief in formative nature of assessment, the teachers employed classroom activities which were outside of the official syllabus and designed to connect skills and content with real tasks. The authentic approach was adopted because the teachers felt that it is responsive to the students' needs. For CBA to be successful, teachers' support was necessary, exemplified by their feedback practice. Since the teachers felt that the impact of CBA varies across different groups of students, the feedback was intentionally geared towards less proficient population of the class. CBA is beneficial to low-level students whose language development requires substantial feedback from the teachers. As teacher H noted, the weaker students in a class appreciated her feedback and made quick progress. Although it is time-consuming, the teachers were aware of the necessity of the feedback process and made efforts to manage time and other resources.

Since the teachers understand the importance of monitoring students' performance, they made continuous and acute observations to adjust their pedagogical activities. For example, observing the students' participation in classroom activities was an effective strategy to assess the student's learning process. The teachers believed that CBA could provide more detailed information about the students' performance, which summative assessment may not be able to do. Consequently, in their teaching, the teachers would not care so much on the scores. They would rather observe the students during the process of instruction to provide appropriate support and improve teaching.

### 3.2. Knowledge and skills

The teachers' responses to the interviews showed that their conceptual knowledge of assessment is solid. They were knowledgeable of different approaches of assessment, and they can articulate their justification for using formative assessments. The findings also

indicate that the teachers have socio-emotional competence by which they understand the ethical principles and social impacts of assessment. They also have contextual sensitivity, meaning they are aware of institutional constraints and adapt themselves to the norms and classroom-based contexts. However, what the teachers appear to lack is practical skills of CBA. This might be due to the institutional constraints of syllabus inadequacy, lack of training, awareness of the more important summative assessment, etc. This lack of skills might be a limiting factor which hinders the teachers from pursuing their beliefs and feelings.

*3.2.1. Conceptual knowledge*

Conceptual knowledge refers to the fundamental knowledge of assessment that the teachers have (Chi, 2022). All the teachers in this study were aware of alternative forms of assessment, which could be helpful in achieving educational goals. They believe that CBA encourages students' involvement and improve teachers' support because it provides more information about the learner.

All the teacher participants were able to articulate what assessment is and why CBA is a useful tool to monitor and improve students' learning. Assessment was viewed as a reflective mirror (Teacher M), an administrative procedure (Teacher H) and a motivating element for learning (Teacher Q). Summative assessment was believed to "not reflect accurate performance" (Teacher H), which is why formative assessment is preferred in the classroom-based contexts. For instance, teacher K was well aware of the general role of assessment, focusing on its evidence of and effect on learning. This knowledge of learning-oriented assessment is reflective of the teacher's cognition of the pedagogical value of assessment and awareness of the use of assessment for administrative purposes and the involvement of psychological variables in students' learning.

Teacher Q believed in the potential of alternative assessment activities, citing Writing Portfolio as an example which he liked. The reason is "portfolio would be like a learning journal, giving the teacher more information from the learners' perspective".

*3.2.2. Contextual sensitivity*

While the teachers have strong knowledge of assessment options, the contextual sensitivity allows them to fit into their inadequate curriculum and their restricted freedom to make decisions. The curriculum, on the one hand, sets ambitious objectives and fancy models of planning; it, on the other, neglects the insufficient physical resources and practical guidance that the teachers need for implementation. The authority available to the teachers does not give them sufficient confidence to make radical changes, but rather necessary adaptation within reasonable constraints.

Teacher Q was not convinced of the idea of Backward Design (Utami & Bram, 2023) as described in the syllabus document. This curriculum planning starts with a desired outcome of learning and ends with teaching activities to help students attain the results. The syllabus, however, did not give a good guide on how to design teaching activities. To cope

with the lack of reliable teaching resources for the Language of Multimedia course, teacher M compiled her own available materials, despite her awareness of the challenges of assessment. Additionally, the teachers saw themselves as not having the right to make decisions about the final and midterm tests. Finally, the teachers could see some shortcomings of the syllabus; in terms of the authentic exposure it provides to the students. However, teacher K was not confident that he could make it better, because of his lacking experience in designing course materials, and uncertainty over the soundness of his own perspectives.

*3.2.3. Socio-emotional competence*

All the teachers are aware of their moral and legal duties in carrying out assessment (Brookhart, 2024; Nguyen, 2022); however, they are adaptive to contexts. They understand that assessment has strong social impacts on both students and teachers. Washback effect, or effects of testing (Alderson & Banerjee, 2002), may lead to the motivation to strive for better learning outcomes but it also creates pressure on the stakeholders (e.g. students, teachers, and community). Teacher K believed that testing pushed ambitious students to work hard to achieve good results, whereas it caused stress and anxiety to the students and teachers as well. Teacher K himself experienced a situation where he was asked for leniency by a test candidate. He was confused but did not reveal which final decision he made.

Regarding the effects of assessment on teachers, according to teacher H, assessment holds the teachers accountable for students' learning outcomes. The teachers, therefore, must be responsible for the learners' good or bad performance. Overall, the socio-emotional competence demonstrates the teachers' ability to consider the fairness and impacts of assessment that called for their social empathy and professional integrity.

*3.2.4. Practical skills of assessment*

Although all the teachers were well-qualified and well aware of the teaching contexts, they faced difficulties in putting the knowledge into practice. The skills they lack seem to be classroom management, assessment strategies, feedback provision, and interpretation of assessment results. This may stem from the challenges of online learning, the lack of strategies, the teaching workload and limited working experience.

The online classroom, for example, caused numerous challenges to teachers who wanted to arrange group discussions for students of low-level proficiency. Because of limited repertoire of strategies for formative assessment (Brookhart, 2024), it was hard to maintain an engaging class session. The language of multimedia class taught by teacher M is a case in point. She thought that the available assessment activities were not as varied in formats as expected. Due to time constraints, it was seemingly impossible to provide detailed feedback to every student. In the writing class, teacher Q gave feedback to some samples while the whole class was watching and self-checking their works. Similarly, teacher H had

a huge workload, so the type of feedback was, for most of the time, limited to general feedback for a large audience.

Most teachers paid scant attention to analysing assessment results with reference to international and national standards of language proficiency. Teacher K viewed himself as having limited experience in working with CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and VSTEP (Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency) but believed that the forms of assessment used in his course were more or less similar to that in other general listening assessment standards.

### 3.3. Perception of roles

An important theme emerged from the data is how the teachers perceived their roles in CBA. Even though they have positive attitudes towards CBA, what might hamper its implementation is the multiple roles that a teacher takes (Looney, 2017). In the present study, most teachers are aware of their distinctive roles in CBA, except teacher M. In their perception of CBA, they could be the user (teacher K), the creator (teacher H) and the facilitator (teacher Q).

Teacher K perceived CBA as practical tools that he, as a user, is free to choose which one fits his context. What determines his choice of tools is not the tools themselves, but his beliefs and institutional regulations. Teacher H viewed her role not just a user, but a creative user of CBA. In this perception, a teacher acts as creator of engaging CBA that are relevant to students' experiences (Brookhart, 2024). Considering the difficulties of online teaching, teacher K emphasized the importance of being creative and innovative under the pandemic circumstances. Teacher H understood that "if what we teach isn't relevant to students, they won't focus, especially if they're learning online and have their cameras off. Sharing similar ideas about using CBA, teacher Q viewed his role as a facilitative user that motivates students' learning. In his writing class, he assigned regular tasks to the students and monitored their progress.

Unlike the rest of participants, teacher M was confused with her role of being a language teacher or a subject-matter teacher. She was in charge of an ESP class (English for Specific Purposes), and she often gave her students to complete practical projects that are relevant to their special field. However, she was afraid that if the students were too busy with doing the project, they might not take care of the English language they are learning. This poses a tension to the teacher since she cannot decide on being a teacher of specialised major or a teacher of foreign language or both.

### 3.4. Discussion

This study was aimed to explore EFL teachers' beliefs about CBA. The findings show that there are three emerging themes or sub-categories: "Beliefs and Feelings", "Knowledge and Skills" and "Perception of Roles". All the teacher participants advocated CBA and enacted practices such as pedagogical planning and giving feedback to support students'

learning. The data revealed that the teachers have strong knowledge of assessment, acute socio-emotional competence, and sharp awareness of contexts, while the practical skills of CBA were limited. One intriguing category is the teachers' perception of their complex multi-roles that guide their utilitarian, creative and facilitative uses of CBA.

The results highlight the teacher belief as a contributing factor to the CBA practice. This is corroborated by recent studies (Asamoah et al., 2024; Doyle et al., 2024; Haddadian et al., 2024) whereby the context can shape the belief. For example, the teachers may be aware of the value of formative assessment, but their institutions prioritize summative assessment (Asamoah et al., 2024), thus affecting their attitudes towards CBA. By contrast, as this present study demonstrates, the teachers may not be totally convinced of the efficacy of CBA and adapted themselves to the institutional context. For instance, due to time constraints and heavy workload, they had to reduce the feedback practice to more collective feedback and less individual feedback.

A more suitable model, arguably, which can explain the complexity of teachers' practice of assessment should incorporate the element of teachers' belief. Specifically, Looney (2017) described a model known as Teacher Assessment Identity (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Looney's (2017) model of TAI*

The model consists of five dimensions: teachers' assessment literacy (I know), teachers' emotion about assessment (I feel), teachers' beliefs about assessment (I believe), teachers' sense of self-efficacy in assessment (I am confident), and teachers' perception of role as assessor (My role). These dimensions may interact with each other in complex ways and influence the teacher's assessment practice. For example, the teacher may have knowledge of CBA, but not the skills to conduct it effectively. Even when they have the knowledge and skills, the teacher may not believe that a particular CBA process is beneficial.

*3.4.1. A proposed model*

Based on the study findings and Looney (2017), I propose a model that represents the relationship between the individuality of teachers and their practice of CBA (Figure 2). The individuality of teachers, or Teacher Assessment Identity, is constituted by beliefs & feelings,

knowledge & skills, and perception of roles. This acts as a mediator between the context (e.g. classroom context) and the practice (e.g. how teachers assess their students). This relationship is not static but dynamic because teachers' identities evolve over their careers. It means that the identity should be open to diverse interpretation, depending on the time, experience and context. For example, teachers' knowledge and skills need to be updated. Brookhart (2024) added new dimensions of cultural knowledge to Brookhart (2011) educational assessment knowledge and skills for teachers. Brookhart (2024) suggests that classroom teachers need to know about their students' cultural backgrounds and how these backgrounds affect their learning goals. Similarly, more dimensions can be incorporated into the TAI. As this study shows, online learning in the context of COVID pandemic posed great challenges to the teachers as assessors. Therefore, teachers need to have digital competence of dealing with technological advances for off-campus learning (Estaji et al., 2024). In fact, empirical evidence shows that there was significant correlation between the self-perception of teacher's digital competence and the perception of using formative assessment. Thus it is likely that a digitally competent teacher tends to practice formative assessment (Cano Garcia et al., 2024).
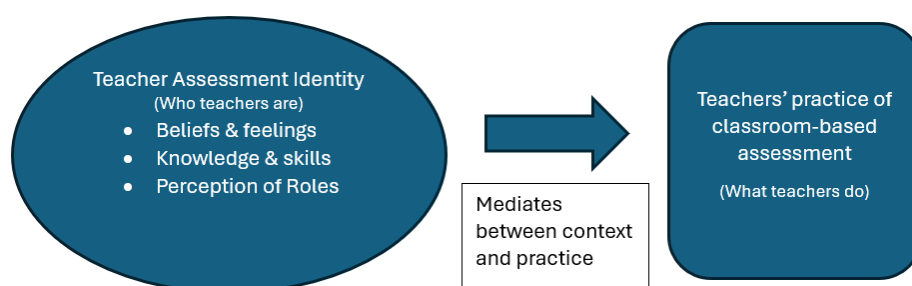


*Figure 2. A proposed model of TAI and teachers' practice CBA*

## 4.    Conclusion

This study aims to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs about English-language Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA). Four EFL teachers from a Vietnamese university participated in this study. Data was collected from the online interviews and analyzed by the grounded and iterative coding process. The study's results reveal three main themes or sub-categories: "Beliefs and Feelings," "Knowledge and Skills," and "Perception of Roles." All the teachers in the study supported CBA and actively used practices like planning lessons and giving feedback to help their students learn. The study revealed that the teachers had a solid grasp of assessment concepts, socio-emotional competence, and a clear understanding of their contexts, but they lacked in the practical application of CBA. One interesting finding is how teachers see their complex roles, which then influences their practical, creative, and supportive ways of using CBA. I argue that in order to understand the complex practice of CBA, it is necessary to account for the concept of Teacher Assessment Identity. I proposed a model that describes the relationship between the individuality of teachers and their

practice of CBA. This model invites future research into updating components of TAI and exploring TAI in the consideration of various contexts. In terms of educational policy, this paper calls for the need to account for teacher identity if we wish to implement any assessment reforms in Vietnam.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** *Author have no conflict of interest to declare.*

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# BẢN SẮC ĐÁNH GIÁ CỦA GIÁO VIÊN VÀ NIỀM TIN ĐÁNH GIÁ TRONG LỚP HỌC

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**TÓM TẮT**

*Các cải cách về đánh giá ở Việt Nam và các quốc gia khác đặt ra yêu cầu đáng kể đối với giáo viên tiếng Anh trong việc áp dụng đánh giá trên lớp học (CBA). Tuy nhiên, việc thực hành CBA lại khác nhau. Bài viết này nhằm mục đích khám phá niềm tin của giáo viên EFL (tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ) về CBA, sử dụng phương pháp định tính. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ phỏng vấn bốn giáo viên EFL. Kết quả cho thấy danh mục cốt lõi "Niềm tin của giáo viên về CBA" xoay quanh ba tiểu danh mục nổi bật: "Niềm tin và Cảm xúc", "Kiến thức và Kĩ năng", và "Nhận thức về Vai trò". Những phát hiện này cho thấy sự phức tạp tiềm ẩn trong quá trình ra quyết định của giáo viên trong CBA cần được hiểu thông qua một mô hình được gọi là Bản sắc đánh giá của giáo viên. Các hàm ý sư phạm bao gồm sự cần thiết phải tính đến bản sắc của giáo viên để thu hẹp khoảng cách giữa chính sách và thực tiễn đánh giá.*

*__Từ khóa:__ đánh giá để học tập; đánh giá trên lớp học; niềm tin đánh giá trong lớp học; bản sắc đánh giá của giáo viên; bản sắc giáo viên*