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EFL Language Assessment in Algerian Higher Education: Evidence from present works towards better future

تقييم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التعليم العالي الجزائري: أدلة من الأعمال
الحالية نحو مستقبل أفضل

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Abstract:

In order to grasp the main issues covered and the areas that require more investigation, this exploratory study looked through published research papers on English language assessment in Algeria. The findings and implications of the examined publications on the integration of technology in language assessment, validity and washback studies, language classroom assessment, and test takers/raters' perceptions will be used in this study to obtain information and serve as a foundation for further research. The analysis demonstrated the poor quality and lack of breadth of research in the domain of language assessment and testing in connection to higher education level. As a result, this report makes suggestions for additional investigation.

Keywords: Classroom assessment, Integration of technology, Language Assessment, test takers/testers' perceptions, Validity and washback studies

المخلص:

من أجل فهم القضايا الرئيسية التي تمت تغطيتها والمجالات التي تتطلب المزيد من التحقيق في مجال تقييم اللغة، نظرت هذه الدراسة الاستكشافية في أوراق بحثية منشورة حول تقييم اللغة الإنجليزية في الجزائر. تم استخدام نتائج وتداعيات المنشورات المدروسة حول دمج التكنولوجيا في تقييم اللغة، ودراسات الصلاحية والانعكاس، وتقييم الفصول الدراسية اللغوية، وتصورات المتقدمين للاختبار/المقيمين في هذه الدراسة للحصول على المعلومات والعمل بها كأساس للأبحاث القادمة. أظهرت نتائج التحليل نقص في جودة البحث وعدم اتساعه في مجال تقييم اللغة واختبارها فيما يتعلق بمستوى التعليم العالي. ونتيجة لذلك، يقدم هذا التقرير اقتراحات لإجراء أبحاث إضافية. الكلمات المفتاحية: تصورات المتقدمين للاختبار/الممتحنين؛ تقييم الفصول الدراسية؛ تقييم اللغة؛ دراسات الصلاحية والارتداد، دمج التكنولوجيا.

1. INTRODUCTION

The English language is gaining a large interest. Algerian national reforms in the educational sectors include English at different levels, aiming to push the growth of an internationalised education. Higher education institutions are aiming to use English as the language of instruction in different fields and departments to ameliorate scientific research. Such movement of replacing the French language as a language of instruction with English has brought a new thread of discussion. The latter included questions about the way and the content of the training of teachers at different departments to embrace the use of English in their classes after using French for many years. This new situation has inspired many stakeholders, teachers, English teachers, administrators and others to think about the possible ways to make this reform successful and attain its gains. However, to reach the aforementioned goal, we need to conduct a systematic investigation to gain fair knowledge and background about the matter. Accordingly, before thinking of designing the training, two important issues need to be covered: previous research gains and teachers' knowledgeability. In our project, we focus on gaining knowledge about language assessment research trends and teachers' language assessment skills and literacy. This paper takes the first step to gaining knowledge about language assessment research conducted over five years (from 2018 to 2022).

2. Selected Literature on the EFL Language Assessment Research

It was assured that the stakeholders faced new responsibilities referring to language testing and assessment due to different social and political issues (Fulcher, 2012). The latter related to the set of national and international responses to the effect of the legislation of No Child Left Behind, CEFR spread use, and

immigration policy. Another reason for investigating the roles and impacts of language testing is related to small-scale classroom testing, which is the spread of a 'culture of success' that encourages the use of assessment and testing to develop positive learning experiences.

Bachman (2000) also stresses the contact of language testing with different fields of knowledge which would certainly result in further advances. A good example of these fields are the teaching methods, learning theories, applied linguistics and technology. However, such integration will need to validate the practical path of research on these fields' results.

Analysing previous works that have the same concerns in our case the analysis and evaluation of previous research works will pave the way to explain the course of the research and its aims. The following section will explain some of the works that have analysed different research documents over different periods of times and in different contexts.

To begin with, in his reflective account of the development of language testing research, (Bachman, 2000) reported that works before the 70s focused on the hypothesis that believes that language proficiency is unitary and isolated. Language testing at that period focused mainly on language abilities and psychometric reliability. This changed with the work of Hymes in the 70s on communicative competence. The latter was the main subject of language testing research during the 80's. There was extensive work on "communicative competence, test-taking strategies, and language learners' developmental sequences. In the following two decades works included 'research methodology, practical advances, factors that affect language test performance, ethics and professionalism in language

assessment'. Bachman (2000) predicted about the future direction of research in the field of language assessment that further works on professionalism and validity will be tackled.

In the same vein, aiming to prevail research themes in the field of language testing, Plakans (2018) reviewed published articles in three influential journals in two years over a decade (2007 and 2017). She has recognised four major themes of research, validity, performance assessment, classroom assessment, and technology. As expected, the research works on validity appeared to have a large amount of interest, yet the 2007 works on validity focused on the unitary nature of the language, while research in 2017, being affected by new approaches, regarded validity approaches beyond construct. Performance assessment focuses on the measurement of language use via performance. Since its appearance in the 1970's, it has remained a mainstay theme. Classroom assessment, on the other hand, has focused early on the stakeholders of assessment, and the studies were context-driven. Afterwards, research on assessment in different contexts was still at the front in addition to the trials of bridging the possible divide between large-scale standardised testing and assessment for classrooms. In 2007, the work on integrating technology in the field of assessment attracted works on automation of test delivery. Afterwards, in 2017, the development of technology has driven focus towards automated scoring, corpus linguistics, and test-takers' issues with technology.

Another classification of research works on language testing was suggested through the work of (Aryadoust & Fox, 2016). They have suggested six broad trends on language assessment research in the Middle East and Pacific Rim region. They have collected the works on psychometrics and

technology, the effect of individual variation in assessment outcomes, diagnostic assessment effect on learning, language proficiency construct, washback consideration, future directions to the language assessment (Li, 2019).

Drawing on the predictions in (Bachman, 2000), Li (2019) after two decades decides to analyse to what extent research on the two themes, professionalism and validity in language assessment, are researched by Chinese scholars. Li (2019) states that the various domains related to language assessment and testing will drive to different classifications and themes. However, he believes that the classification of documentary analysis to the articles will not be very practical to be discussed and analysed. The author after reviewing previous works he decided to analyse articles based on seven themes, validity and professionalization as predicted by (Bachman, 2000), technology, performance test, classroom assessment, rater/test-taker differences, and China's standards of English language ability. The research sought to investigate the amount of conducting research works on the previously mentioned categories and predict future directions for language testing in China. He analysed 269 empirical articles published from 2000 to 2019 and discussed works on related themes and they took place in China mainland. Only 217 articles have successfully fallen under the seven categories.

Li (2019) found that articles on validity were at the top outperforming articles on the other six themes. This remarkably supports Bachman's (2000) prediction that works on validity will always be a source of interest in the field. This is mainly due to the importance and inclusion of validity in most of assessment and test development and interpretation. The theme that attracted researchers' interests in the

second place was test performance, influenced by communicative language ability. Researchers sought to design reliable and authentic performance generated tasks. Raters/test-taker differences was the least researched theme.

Li (2019) went further with the analysis to observe the tendencies of the themes over two decades (2000-2010/2010-2019). The comparison results showed dramatic increase in the research on China's standards of English language ability where researchers sought to propose a set of national English tests. Most of the themes' articles number was increased only for the research works on technology fell down in the second decade. This is due to the fact that computers' use and integration formed a novelty in the first decade which is not the case for the second decade where learners and teachers are becoming familiar with technology, yet there are some promising areas and topics to be researched in the future such as learning-based automatic scoring system and computer literacy in internet-based tests.

Following these works that aimed to prevail major themes and trends in the field of language testing research in different contexts, we believe that our present research work will meet the need to compare, analyse, and summarise previous works on English as foreign language assessment research in Algeria. Therefore, this study, being a part of the exploratory, pilot, feasibility stage of a PhD project, intends to analyse the trends of language assessment in Algeria under the realm of the new reforms of the current EFL status in the educational sector.

To make the study feasible and organized, we have decided to select published articles during a period of time of five years and the research work will be in one of four themes, works on Technology integration,

Validity/washback, Classroom assessment, and Test takers/raters. We have asked the following research questions:

- 1- How much research conducted on language assessment in Algeria over the last five years?
- 2- What are the future directions for language assessment researchers in Algeria?

3. Methodology of the Study

Seeking to understand the research studies conducted in the field of English language assessment in relation to higher education, this study opted for qualitative research approach. To organise this study, we opted for using documentary analysis since we our first question seeks to collect information about the published articles on the main issue, language assessment in Algerian tertiary level. This approach to qualitative research is based on selecting and collecting a set of previously published research works that match predisposed criteria (Morgan, 2022).

The analysis of data in this study was thematic. This method is based on pattern recognition and careful selection of themes after reviewing large amount of data (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016). This method provides flexibility in data selection and analysis. The steps followed to analyse data included, respectively, familiarization with different themes in the field of language assessment research internationally and nationally. Developing set of themes based on literature review. Then, reviewing different articles published by Algerian that matches the date and themes to be afterwards described, interpreted, and discussed.

The Sources of Data

Echoing the systematic organisation of previous research works mentioned in the literature review, we have decided to select and gather data from five platforms of research

display that are largely known among Algerian higher education EFL researchers. These platforms are AWEJ, ASPJ, Semantic Scholar, Research Gate, and Google Scholar. However, due to loaded data and unrelated sources we decided to rely on AWEJ, ASJP, and semantic scholar websites since most of sources-published articles- are directly related to the aim of the study.

AWEJ: The Arab World English Journal platform is open access e-journal the publishes research on English language of interest of different stakeholders. This journal is peer-reviewed and refereed. Globalisation made English the language of science and international communication. This leads Arab countries to integrate English in their curriculums seeking to internationalise their programs. AWEJ comes to bring all the English language teachers, researchers, scholars, and stakeholders to share their interests and works, and discuss issues related to English language (Al-zubaidi,n.d).

ASJP: the Algerian Scientific journal Platform is a platform that aims to publish the volumes of the Algerian scientific journals. This platform is managed by CERIST which is a public scientific and technological institution under the supervision of minister of higher education and scientific research.

Semantic scholar is an online tool that is based on artificial intelligence to conduct searches and provide the possible resources in the global research community. It collects different works from accessible platforms

The Criteria of Data Collected

There was a number of criteria to select articles for further analysis. First, we decided to track language assessment research in Algeria in the last five years which means the articles published should be in the time span from 2018 to 2022. Second, the articles need to display empirical and exploratory results of

studies carried out in relation to the university level. Third, affiliation of the author should be in mainland Algeria and even the research's data should be collected in mainland Algeria. The selected articles have pdf files for review; so, we can find names of theses or paid articles that we could not reach easily; henceforth, they were disregarded in this review.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we provide a summary and analysis of data collected. The following table summarises the selected published articles on research works on technology integration, validity and washback, classroom assessment, and test takers/raters over time period of five years, 2018 to 2022.

Table 1. Works on language assessment from 2018 to 2022

	Technology Integration	Validity / Washback	Classroom Assessment	Test takers/raters
2018			- Boumedienne, Kaid Berrahal, and Bava Hardji (2018).	
2019	- Boukhemis, (2019)	- Bemmoussat and Bouyakoub (2019) - Boukhentache (2019)	- Benmihoub and Boukhadem (2019)	-Ghouar (2019) -Houadjli and Khidar (2019)
2020		-Belarbi and Bensafa (2020) -Boureguig (2020)		-Boubris and Haddam (2020) -Othmane and Bouyakoub (2020)
2021	-Ghouali and Cecilia	-Boureguig (2021b) -Djebbari	-Abbassi and Djabari	-Nedjari and Bassou

	(2021) -Rahmani (2021) -Achouri and Mehiri (2021) -Sabbah and Maouche (2021) - Benghale m and Melouk (2021)	(2021)	- Boureguig (2021a)	(2021)
202 2			-Djaidja and Bacher (2022)	-Hichour (2022)

During the years 2018 and 2022, there was a scarcity in the publication works on language assessment. The published works were mainly interested in reporting some of the practices of classroom assessment and the reflections of the test takers towards those practices. Boumediene et al., (2018) have suggested assessing reflective writing using e-portfolios which proved to be an effective method to promote students' reflective writing in language classrooms.

Djaidja and Bacher (2022) implemented Chen's and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale to assess intercultural communication culture and gain knowledge about students' behaviours towards different cultures in the language learning context, Hichour (2022) reported teachers' experiences in using e-assessment. She has asserted that teachers communicated their positive attitudes towards the e-assessment in language classrooms due to mainly its practicality and promotion of students' achievements, regardless of the technical challenges and the uniformity of assessment type, summative assessment.

These works suggest the use of technology in assessment to enhance the quality of language learning in classrooms and promote given language skill. However, no detailed regulations are provided about the ways of such integration, besides, although examining the experiences of language teachers as test raters needs further datum about for example, possible scales used and item writing choice.

The works on the year 2019, unlike 2018, included research studies on language assessment, although being incommensurate, with different themes. The research on technology integration Boukhemis (2019) states that language assessment at the university level needs reforms that include computer-assisted language learning principles and practices. She has reported learners' and teachers' dissatisfaction with the current assessment practices that do not suit the changes like learning, knowledge and learners' modern skills.

Under the theme of test takers research work, Ghaouar (2019) investigated the phenomenon of test anxiety among language learners. This study revealed that although students, with master 1 level, have experience with testing, they still face anxiety while sitting for tests due to the fear of failure. The researcher confirms that students lack anxiety management skills and she suggests that students need to be enlightened and sensitised with a set of strategies to minimise test-related anxiety and stress. In the same area, Hoadjli and Khidar (2019) investigated students' attitudes about integrating oral test to ameliorate the results and reflection of English language assessment and testing. They found that language learners had positive attitudes since the reformed test exhibits their ability to use language and not only their knowledge about it.

To promote classroom assessment, Benmihoub and Boukhedimi (2019) reported the negative feedback of students towards their teachers' classroom assessment practices. They suggested that dynamic assessment, which includes practices that embrace both teachers' and learners' interests and promote learning via assessment, could promote a positive attitude among both learners and teachers.

Two articles with the theme of validity/washback were published during 2019. Both works aimed to examine the communicative needs at the level of English language testing in the BAC exam, be it 'the visa entry to university'. Boukhentache (2019) reported that the questions in this exam seem too narrow, focusing merely on knowledge of language. The questions appeared to lack real-life and higher education academic life skills like 'problem-solving, synthesising, comprehending communication situations, and reacting appropriately'. The second work claimed for a reform and suggested a program to make the BAC exam suitable to prepare learners ready for the university level. Benmoussat and Bouyakoub (2019) claimed against the approach of teach-to-test because it is ineffective, students become incompetent language users. The researchers offered a communicative-based course to learners who showed a positive attitude towards the course's activities which contributed to the upgrade of learners' communicative abilities.

Works in 2020 focused on two main themes. Publications under the theme of washback sought to explain the extent BAC English exam resembles communicative traits. While calling for the reforms in BAC exam, the study conducted by Boureguig (2021) asserted that teachers consider BAC exam of the English language incomplete since it disregards oral skills. In their descriptive

content analysis, Belarbi and Bensafa (2020) investigated the measurement of cognitive skills via BAC exam. They found that this exam assesses neither higher-order skills nor communicative skills. According to the study, instructors' evaluation practises were influenced by their interactive notion of reading. The teaching and evaluation of reading also revealed some of their unhealthy views. The teaching environment is strongly impacted by theoretical tendencies, which in turn affects how well or poorly students comprehend the material and are motivated to read.

Othmane and Bouyakoub (2020), within the framework of the Licence- Master-Doctorate (LMD) reform, made an effort to provide a systematic description of instruction and evaluation in the Algerian educational landscape. The study used classroom action research to assess learners' communicative competence using multimodal tasks like videos, games, songs, role-plays, oral presentations, and discussion. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to investigate effectiveness and explore the study area. Teachers should use innovative approaches. Considering language teachers as test raters, Boubri and Haddam (2020) investigated teachers' beliefs about reading skill and their correspondence with their classroom-evaluative practices.

The most remarkable research works were conducted during 2021. As expected, after the covid-19, the embracement of online teaching was wide, works on integration of technology in language assessment outperform the number of works in other themes. Researchers sought to explore the e-assessment effects on the learning and teaching trajectories. For example, descriptive research works conducted by (Rahmani, 2021) and (Benghalem & Melouk, 2021) deduced

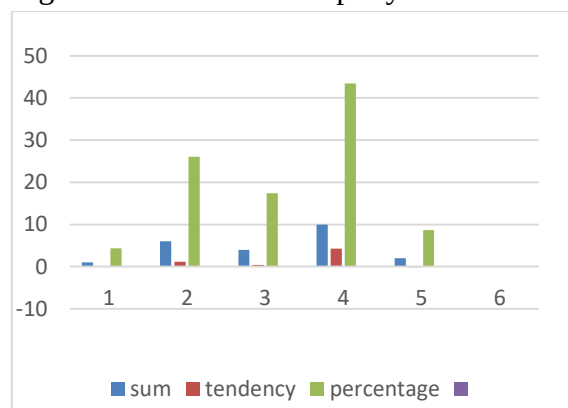
that teachers and learners reported negative attitudes towards the use of online assessment and testing due to different issues like poor internet connectivity and the technical skills of both learners and teachers. In their experimental studies, implementing the e-assessment inside language classrooms, Ghouali and Cecilia (2021), Sabbah and Maouche (2021), and Achouri and Mehiri (2021) confirmed that learners' results have outperformed, in writing and reading, with the use of online assessment.

Researches about themes of validity and washback during the year 2021 summarized in two studies. Following previous works on these themes, Boureguig (2021) analysed BAC exam in terms of its congruence with the pedagogical requirements applied, competency-based approach. Likewise similar studies, this research work found that teachers consider BAC exam without considering oral competency testing is deficient. The second study in this trend was conducted by (Djabbari, 2021) who sought to examine the presence of washback in classroom. The researcher found that the washback was present and it was positive for teachers who aimed to adjust and ameliorate their teaching strategies and methods. However, learners had been affected by negative washback since their first and foremost aim of studying is to get good scores which made learning for tests rather than learning to gain knowledge.

For the research work in terms of classroom assessment, the solo work appeared to be conducted by (Abbassi & Djebbari, 2021) in ESP classroom. They confirmed that the variation in assessment methods created a positive attitude in the classroom. The results assured that such variation helped with the understanding of learners' competencies and embark the urge to create

innovative instructions. As language teachers' perceptions and practices are important to revisit, the study conducted by (Nedjari & Bassou, 2021) to investigate current assessment practices by teachers, results showed that EFL teachers in Algeria had a clear misunderstanding of the assessment process as a whole, and that their classroom practises seemed to run counter to the assessment theory. However, it became clear from the study that the responding participants left some area for alternative assessment, which offers a wide range of assessment chances to accommodate the learners' various learning styles.

Figure 1. research works per year



* 1. 2018 2.2019 3.2020 4.2021 5.2022

This bar chart summarises the research works sum, tendency, and percentage each year. Research on language assessment and testing reached higher numbers during 2019 and 2021. This could be highly regarded as a consequence of the global issue, the lockdown during the pandemic of covid-19, that affected the socio-economic dimension of worldwide. Scientific research was no exception. Different topics were emerged within this time and as remarked the topics were generally seeking to investigate the use of online and technology related teaching and assessment. This matches the findings in (Plakans, 2018) which deduced that recent works in the field of technology-based language assessment revisit test-takers issues with technology.

A remarkable note is that research works mainly focus on communicative competence and reflections of teachers upon the effects of learning. This supports the findings of (Bachman, 2000). Validity research will remain an area of discussion in different context, especially works on Baccalaureat exam. Most data collected as linked to the baccalaureate exam being the national standardized exam. Yet, classroom assessment and testing still need to be revisited and revised to be equipped with the world changes.

The promising areas that could gain more interest and investments in our context are the classroom assessment, test takers/raters' perceptions towards assessment practices, and the use of E-assessment. These areas need further explorations and innovations to ameliorate both learning and teaching through assessment. This type of assessment requires detailed experimental research studies on different strategies, tools, and the test-takers/ raters' practices and attitudes.

5. Implications and Recommendations

This study provides significance conclusions that would afford meaningful and effective implications for researchers to embark supplementary research studies and recommendations for teachers to gain knowledge about useful assessment and testing practices.

The implications for researchers could be summarized as follows:

- Conduct an expanded research study on the trends researched over a period of time more than five years
- Conduct experimental research works on the use of E-assessment and its effect on the classroom
- Explore the area of classroom assessment validity which is

disregarded in previous validity research works in favour of examining the validity of the BAC exam.

The implications for teachers as suggested by the results of this report are:

- Teachers of English language should consider the implementation of different genres of assessment for learning
- Teachers should be acquitted with the utility and benefits of new tools of assessment and testing
- Integration of technology in language assessment would help teachers to save time and money while administering the tests and analysing their students' results
- Teachers need to mind the fairness in their designed assessment tasks in regards of different abilities of learners
- Teachers need to expand their knowledge about assessment design

6. CONCLUSION

National reforms in Algeria aim to encourage the expansion of the educational system by utilising English at various levels of education. A background for future efforts to improve the integration of English in various industries will be provided by conducting an inquiry into the research studies that have been done in this area. In the present work, four themes—technology integration, validity/washback, classroom assessment, and test takers/raters—were used to summarise the works published about language assessment from 2018 to 2022. The results highlight the dearth of knowledge on language assessment and demand more research. The findings highlight how crucial it is for teachers to understand how to administer assessment and testing assignments because this will have an impact on how well English language instruction goes.

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