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Refining Assessment Practices in Algerian Teaching Training Institutions: Voices from Former ENSC EFL Teacher Students

Affiner les pratiques d'évaluation dans les institutions de formation des enseignants algériens : Voix d'anciens étudiants d'anglais de l'ENSC

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Abstract: Assessment practices in teacher preparation institutions such as the ENSC (Ecole Normal Supérieure de Constantine) affect how future teachers understand assessment and prepare for their careers. However, little research has captured the voices of graduates about their experience in this regard. This exploratory study aims to gather the perspectives of former ENSC students on the effectiveness of assessment methods, the challenges they encountered, and their suggestions to improve assessment at their training institution and similar settings. Through a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with thirty in-service middle school and secondary school teachers, the study uncovers different viewpoints. While many participants critiqued the overreliance on summative assessments, others acknowledged their objectivity and effectiveness. Participants also emphasized the need for more formative approaches to assessment and actionable feedback. This research calls for maintaining meaningful contact with graduates, recognizing the importance of their overlooked insights to inform and enhance assessment practices in teacher education.

Keywords: assessment— ENSC— challenges —graduates—perspectives

Résumé : Dans les institutions de formation des enseignants telles que l'ENSC, les pratiques d'évaluations influencent leur préparation à la profession. Cependant, les recherches recueillant les opinions des anciens diplômés sont limitées. Cette étude vise à explorer les perceptions des anciens étudiants de l'ENSC sur l'efficacité des méthodes d'évaluation, les obstacles rencontrés et leurs suggestions pour améliorer les processus d'évaluations à l'ENSC et dans des contextes similaires. A travers des entretiens semi-structurés avec 30 enseignants en exercice, l'étude met en lumière des points de vue variés. Bien que beaucoup aient exprimé des critiques sur la dépendance à l'évaluation sommative, certains la considèrent objective et efficace. Les participants soulignent l'importance de l'évaluation formative, mais dénoncent la subjectivité et les critère mal définis. Cette recherche appelle à fair participer les anciens étudiants dans les réforme d'évaluation.

Mots-clés : évaluation— ENSC— obstacles—enseignants en exercice —perspectives—

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Introduction

The increased demand for language teaching has made quality teacher training highly important. Such training not only does it benefit student teachers but also enhances the overall quality of language instruction. As a result, evaluating teacher education programs becomes essential for promoting excellence, accountability, and continuous improvement in the field. Wallace (1991) emphasized the necessity of embedding systematic evaluation within pre-service teacher education programs. In the same vein, Peacock (2009) argued that program evaluations serve as a foundational step for the professionalization and improvement of ELT and training programs. Regular evaluation helps institutions identify areas of strength and weakness, address pedagogical gaps, and implement reforms that align with the best practices in ELT. Evaluation of programs generally relies on the perspectives of experts such as faculty members and administrators. D'Aniello (2008) highlighted a neglected perspective: that of student teachers after graduation. She underlined the importance of follow-up studies in teacher education and their role in the refinement of training. Graduates' feedback serves as an authentic reflective assessment of the training they received. Follow-up studies enable teacher education institutions to cultivate a culture of responsibility and commitment among graduates to contribute to the ongoing development of their institutions (NCATE, 2006).

In response to Zhong's (1985) question about the criteria for proper foreign language teacher training, many studies have evaluated different aspects of teacher education programs. Al-Gaeed (1983), for instance, found that both Saudi-Arabian pre-service teachers and graduates appreciated the teaching methods, faculty quality, and language courses but voiced concerns about gaps in oral skills preparation and the relevance of literature courses to their professional readiness. Whitney et al. (2002), based on focus group interviews with teacher graduates who taught in socioeconomically diverse settings, argued the need for future teachers to train in environments similar to their future classrooms and stressed the importance of good mentorship. Other studies, such as those by Khanjani, Vahdani, and Jafarigohar (2016) and Celen and Akcan (2017), evaluated various facets of EFL teacher education programs, including needs analysis, teaching materials, and practicum experiences to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Aim of the Study

The lack of similar research within the Algerian context presents an ideal opportunity to examine how well teacher training institutions assess language teachers, drawing on the perspectives of former ENSC students. Assessment approaches in such institutions play a critical role in shaping how future teachers perceive assessment and how they prepare for their professional roles. This follow-up study, therefore, aims to explore and analyze the current assessment practices of pre-service teachers used in Algerian teacher training institutions. It also seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices and identify areas for improvement. By doing so, the study aims to help improve assessment approaches through practical suggestions from those who have experienced the system.

Significance of the Study

This work reinforces student involvement in the assessment process which is underexplored in Algerian teacher education. Assessment is often considered a means to assign

grades, with little attention given to its potential as a tool for learning. As Falchikov (2004) noted, "At the center of any debate about assessment must be the student" (p.102). According to her, students have always been a part of the assessment process as test-takers, while the decision-making and marking process remains largely controlled by teachers. It is time to shift this narrative and send the right message to the students by involving them in meaningful ways.

By exploring how former student teachers perceive the assessment methods used during their training, this research draws attention to the need for more participatory practices. Encouraging inclusive spaces where trainees can share their thoughts supports reflection, accountability, and maintains a strong focus on learning. This not only deepens the student teachers' understanding of assessment purposes but also nurtures a sense of agency, that is their ability to see themselves not as mere subjects of assessment but as active participants in the process.

Research Questions

This research is propelled by the following questions:

1- To what extent did the ENSC students find their school's assessment methods effective in shaping their learning and teaching experiences?
2- What challenges did the former pre-service teachers encounter with their training institution's assessment practices?
3- What suggestions do former ENSC students have to enhance the assessment process in the training institution?

This article is structured into five main sections. It starts with a review of the literature on assessment in teacher education, with particular emphasis on graduate student involvement. The methodology section is described next, including the research design, the study participants, data gathering tools, and analysis procedures. The third section presents the key findings and discusses them in light of previous studies. This is followed by a section on practical implications for teacher training. The article concludes by summarizing the key findings and suggesting directions for future research.

1. Literature Review

1.1.The Role of Assessment in Pre-service Teacher Education

"*ITE [Initial Teacher Education] holds a dual role of teaching through content and practice, whereby Pre-Service Teachers (PST) are assessed for learning while learning to assess*" (Brunker, Spandagou and Grice, 89: 2019). In essence, pre-service teachers undergo a comprehensive learning experience where they not only receive instruction but also actively engage in the practice of teaching. Assessment processes serve as opportunities for learning for student teachers (Matsumoto-Royo, Solidad Ramirez-Montoya and David, 2022). In experiential learning, which prioritizes active and practical involvement, many essential skills related to teaching and assessment necessitate hands-on training. This hands-on approach allows student teachers to go beyond theoretical understanding and actively apply their knowledge in real-world educational contexts (Allen and Wright, 2014). On the one hand, pre-service teachers are assessed for their learning. This includes assessing their mastery of the subject matter, and pedagogical and professional competencies. The assessment process, in this case, ensures that pre-service teachers have acquired the foundational knowledge necessary to carry out their

future jobs as teachers. On the other hand, as pre-service teachers are immersed in their learning environment, they also learn how to assess others. In this respect, DeLuca, Cowie, Harrison, and Coombs stated that pre-service teachers' "*reflections on assessment events and how these events are valued and presented by their teachers, and responded by others in their community, build a conceptual image of assessment purposes and uses that they carry forward as they begin to teach*" (132: 2023). By being actively involved in both sides of the assessment process, pre-service teachers gain insights into effective assessment strategies.

1.1.1. Changing Trends of Assessment

Assessment in teacher training fulfills various roles, thereby making it a multifaceted concept (Smith, 2016). Smith argued that it serves various explicit and implicit functions crucial for shaping future teachers in teacher education programs. Explicitly, according to her, assessment acts as a gatekeeper to make sure that graduates are equipped with the necessary competencies they need to start their teaching. Implicitly, it serves as a model. In other words, as they engage with different assessments, future teachers internalize norms, values, and beliefs about them. These hidden messages about assessment impact student teachers' identities, self-awareness, and how they use them in their classrooms.

Over the past several decades, teacher education has gone through historical shifts. From training-focused models in the mid-20th century, the field moved towards a learning-focused model in the 1980s and 2000s, and eventually towards an emphasis on accountability and standards in the 2000s (Smith, 2016). These changes have resulted in the emergence of ideas like Assessment for Learning (AfL), which advocates formative assessment practices to enhance student learning. Educators and researchers, worldwide, in countries like the UK, the US, New Zealand, and Australia have been calling for a balanced approach to assessment that combines both summative and formative assessment methods in teacher education. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the prevalence of standardized testing for accountability purposes continues to grow, raising concerns among educators who prioritize formative assessment and reflective teaching practices. These discussions reveal a wider debate: Should assessment be about measurement, or should it serve learning? In some teacher education settings, there is still a lack of awareness of how assessment connects to learning. This poses challenges in aligning assessment strategies with effective teaching methods. Overall, these trends illustrate the evolving landscape of assessment in teacher education. They also point to the need to strike a balance between accountability measures and growth to promote student teachers learning and development.

1.2. Graduate Students as Collaborative Evaluators: Students' Perceptions on Assessment Practices

Teachers' conceptualization of assessment deeply influences the way they design it and use it, which, in turn, can have a powerful effect on how their students learn (Brown, 2008; Daneen and Brown, 2016; DeLuca, Coombs and LaPointe McEwan, 2019). Since initial teacher education marks the onset of professional development for future teachers and plays a critical role in shaping their professional identity and practices, it becomes imperative to explore teacher perceptions, attitudes, and understanding of assessment practices. The experiences teachers undergo as students during their time in training schools are likely to influence their perspectives on assessment (Brown and Remesal, 2012), which underscores the rationale behind teacher education programs relying on alumni "*for continuous stream of information to improve programs*" (Loadman, Freeman Brookhart, Rahman and McCauge, 76: 1999). When involved in

follow-up studies, graduates offer opinions concerning their preparation for teaching, make recommendations for improvement, and validate all or some of the practices of the teacher educational institutions from which they graduated.

With the increased emphasis on learner-centered methods of education, there is a growing acknowledgment of the importance of students actively participating in the evaluation process. According to Muzaffar, Rahim, and Jesse (2011), the first guiding concept to successful pre-service teacher education programs is a shared vision or common understanding that fosters purpose, ownership, and commitment. By obtaining retrospective observations, researchers can provide additional insight into the influence of assessments on student teachers' learning experiences, skill development, and overall educational journey. This makes it easier to identify assessment practices' strengths and limitations, as well as evaluate their fairness, validity, and long-term consequences on career preparedness. Reflections from former students provide valuable insights into the motivational and engagement dimensions of assessment practices. Indisputably, former students offer insightful recommendations for enhancement that support ongoing institutional practice improvement. This helps improve the body of knowledge on assessment procedures in academia and provides data for evidence-based adjustments that better match training institutions to the changing demands of students and the field of education.

1.3.EFL Pre-service Training and Assessment in the ENSC

The preparation of EFL teachers in Algeria has undergone an evolution over time, mirroring shifts in language policies and educational objectives. The training is primarily offered at teacher training schools (ENS), where students obtain university-level education upon passing the baccalaureate examination. Teachers undergo training programs tailored to the specific educational levels they will teach. The programs span three years for primary school teachers, four years for middle school teachers, and five years for those preparing to teach in high schools. The curriculum covers a wide range of topics and combines theory, research, and hands-on teaching opportunities. A key component in the training is the inclusion of practicum experiences. Student teachers participate in a one-month teaching practicum in actual classrooms under the guidance of their ENS teachers and teacher trainers as part of their preparation. Another essential training step is classroom observation, during which teacher trainers evaluate the performance of the trainees. Following this, student teachers are required to document their experiences, insights, and reflections in a training copybook as well as a training report that is submitted at the end of the year for grading. Trainees also participate in research projects to develop their research skills and suggest solutions to real classroom problems.

2. Study Design

The research was conducted following an exploratory case study approach as outlined by Yin (2014). It adopts a qualitative research design, for it allows an in-depth exploration of human experiences, a depth that quantitative methods alone may not fully capture. Following the philosophy of Bogdan and Biklen (1998), the study believes that all elements of a research context contribute to a full understanding of the topic under study. With this approach in mind, this research work prioritizes the voices and perspectives of former teacher education program graduates and engages them in open-ended conversations to capture the richness of their firsthand experiences with assessment practices.

2.1.Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews will serve as the primary method for data collection, for they "*provide a space for extended conversation that allow the researcher insights into how people think and what they believe*" (Knott, Rao, Summers and Teeger, 1: 2022). To facilitate the process, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed and designed to steer discussions effectively. It was prepared to explore a range of important issues such as the strategies employed to assess the performance of former pre-service teachers, how effective those strategies were, the perceived roles of assessment in teacher training, and the challenges faced during the process along with suggestions for possible improvements. Before starting the main interviews, a pilot interview was conducted with 5 participants to refine the protocol and ensure its effectiveness in eliciting the desired insights.

2.2.Participants and Setting

Participants in this study consist of 30 middle and secondary school in-service English teachers who were former graduates of the ENSC (See Table 1.). The teachers are selected based on the accessibility criterion. Choosing graduates for this study, as opposed to current pre-service teacher students, offers several advantages. Graduates have completed their training and as a consequence have experienced the entirety of the curriculum including pedagogical approaches, assessment strategies, and the practicum. This allows to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness and relevance of the assessment practices within the program. Moreover, the graduates have had the chance to reflect on how well the assessment practices prepared them for the challenges of teaching.

Number of Participants	Level		Gender		Year of Graduation	
30	**Middle School**	**Secondary school**	**Female**	**Male**	2016	5
	17 teachers	13 teachers	24 teachers	6 teachers	2017	9
					2018	6
					2019	3
					2022	7

Table 01: Characteristics of the Participants

2.3.Data Analysis

The thematic analysis offers researchers a clear and structured way to make sense of their data. Its primary objective is the identification of recurring themes and the attainment of a deeper understanding of experiences, thoughts, and behaviors across a dataset (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). During the analysis phase, the interview transcripts were examined using thematic analysis. This means going through the content systematically to identify recurring patterns and themes concerning the assessment methods used and how they were perceived by the teachers involved. To facilitate this process, the data were coded, which means that relevant text segments were labeled or grouped based on their content and relevance to the research objectives. Most importantly, the analysis was not linear; instead, it involved cycles of

reviewing, coding, and refining interpretations. This back-and-forth approach allowed for a thoughtful understanding of the key themes that emerged from the data.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1.Perspectives on the Effectiveness of the ENSC Assessment Methods

The findings in the interview revealed that the majority (53 %) of teachers admitted the inadequacy of the school assessment procedures. They stated that in most courses, assessing pre-service teachers learning outcomes would have depended entirely on mid-term and final exams as the main criterion. Even in practical training, wherein prospective teachers were supposed to be assessed based on their performance, trainers ended up giving them a mark. In other words, summative assessment was dominant. The interviewees raised issues about the traditional orientation of assessment in most cases, which did little to address their teaching skills or performance, especially during the practicum. They expressed a desire for alternative assessment methods that go beyond traditional measures and embrace more holistic and student-centered approaches. They emphasized the importance of formative assessment and other strategies that promote deeper understanding among students.

On one end of the spectrum, a substantial proportion of the interviewees (47%) implied in their answers an appreciation of the existing assessment methods, highlighting their perceived effectiveness in evaluating student learning outcomes and informing instructional practices. In their accounts, participants shared how they took part in different educational modules where instructors used innovative assessment methods, like project-based assignments and oral presentations, to make learning experiences more engaging. Some participants also highlighted the importance of traditional assessments, such as exams and quizzes, for measuring student performance. Their assertions revolved around the inherent quality of tests and exams in maintaining transparency and impartiality. They considered them as enduring fixtures in assessment that helped them navigate the reality of Algerian classrooms, where such types of assessment play an important role in instructional decision-making.

Teacher #	Emerging Themes	Illustrative Responses
# 3 **#20**	Inadequacy of Assessment tools	- "The training lost its value because, in the end, everything we did was just for getting a mark. The final mark was a combination of the applicant teacher's mark and final exam mark." - "It is true the training was an eye-opening experience, but the feedback given by the trainer did little to improve my teaching skills and after all, we know that all what mattered the most was the mark." - "It's about time we move away from old ways of assessment. I believe assessment should be mostly formative, it should be about the

		students and should allow progress."
#15 **#30** **#14**	Adequacy of Assessment tools	- "So, yeah, we were asked to write training reports, training copybooks, and sat for examinations and all of that for the sake of getting a good mark. And yes this kind of prepared me for the reality of Algerian schools. It is what I see today in schools; this is the evaluation commonly used." - "Whether we like it or hate it, marks have always been there, and to be honest if I were the teacher I would offer marks because it is simply fair." - "We had some modules wherein teachers integrated good ways to assess us including oral presentations and some project works. I appreciate these as they allow me to demonstrate some creativity."

Table 02 Examples of the Teachers' Answers on the Effectiveness of ENSC Assessment

Pre-service teachers are assessed for a variety of reasons, therefore; the goal of the assessment influences how the procedures are selected, and designed and how they are scored (Hamdan Alghamdi, 2013). Appreciating one type of assessment or another can be linked to teachers' understanding and conceptions of how and why the assessment is carried out (Harlen, 2005). This understanding of assessment is primarily shaped by a combination of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and emotions (Kyttala *et al.*, 2022). Studies have shown that previous experiences of being assessed outside teacher training can play an important role in shaping one's assessment conceptions (Crossman, 2007). In this respect, Brown (2008) proposed varying types of teachers based on their assessment beliefs and inclinations. He identified two distinct categories of teachers: the pro-formative group and the traditionalist group (Kyttala *et al.*, 2022). The first group is characterized by their forward-thinking approach to assessment, viewing it as a tool for promoting learning and development rather than a means of measuring outcomes. This category corresponds to the 53% of respondents. The traditionalist group, on the other hand, prioritizes outcome measurement over the promotion of ongoing learning, and this is the group where 47% of interviewees belong. The choices of teachers can also be interpreted as indicative of the societal and cultural practices in Algerian schools. Given Algeria's exam-oriented culture, it is understandable why this latter group of teachers continues to favor traditional assessment approaches. This may stem from a long familiarity with these

assessments which have been prevalent throughout their primary, middle, and secondary schooling.

3.2. Understanding the Interplay of Formative and Summative Assessment

Another important theme that appeared in the analysis was how participants view the roles of formative and summative assessments. Many pointed out the significance of formative assessment in tracking the students' development and understanding over time. At the same time, others brought attention to the importance of summative assessments in offering a complete picture of students' overall learning outcomes. In pre-service teacher education, assessment ensures accountability and supports the learning process. Bell, Bell and Cowie (2001) explained that formative assessment involves collecting, interpreting, and acting on information about students learning to adjust teaching and learning activities. Participants' recognition of formative assessment as an essential tool for ongoing feedback aligns with contemporary educational principles that lean toward continuous improvement. These perspectives on formative assessment can be reflected in their responses, as shown in the following excerpts:

> "As far as preparing teachers for their profession is concerned, teachers must be encouraged and must be given continuous and constructive feedback on their performance...this can help develop important skills like lesson planning, classroom management and engaging learners. Once their strengths and weaknesses in their practice are identified, trainees can modify their performance accordingly." (participant # 9)

> "I think receiving feedback in our training helped us to be reflective and also encouraged self-assessment." (participant #14)

Valli and Rennert-Ariev (2002) advocated the shift from a culture centered on testing to one focused on assessment. This transition involves embracing different perspectives on the nature of the human mind, the process of learning, and the evaluation process itself, all of which are aligned with the intended learning objectives. Assessment should entail ongoing constructive feedback. Formative assessment has the potential to enhance learning as it occurs while instruction is in place and can serve as the foundation for timely feedback to increase the students learning making it particularly relevant to programs centered on teacher education (Canadas, 2021). Some studies, however, have pointed out that formative assessment is still not widely used in teacher education despite its advantages (Panadero, Fraile, Fernandez Ruiz, Castilla-Estevez and Ruiz, 2018; Canadas, 2021). Large class sizes, a heavy workload, a limited knowledge of formative assessment techniques, and the belief that it is a less rigorous or lighter form of evaluation are the often cited causes.

Assessing teachers is a complex task, for it entails the evaluation of a wide array of competencies like subject knowledge, pedagogical skills, classroom management, and their ability to reflect on their teaching. A balanced approach to assessment that integrates different tools is the best way to respond to this complexity. This way, student teachers receive meaningful feedback that helps them reflect on and improve their classroom instruction, while also meeting their institutions' requirement for summative evaluation of their teaching performance (Ford and Hewitt, 2020). Formative assessments offer ongoing feedback to support learning, whereas summative assessments remain important for evaluating academic skills. One of the participants shared this perspective:

> "Some aspects of a teacher's competence are better evaluated via exams. I believe that the best way to assess teachers' knowledge, for instance, is via paper and pencil tests, I can't think of a better way to do it!" (participant # 17)

In Algerian middle and secondary schools, summative assessment techniques are commonly employed to evaluate learning outcomes. These techniques, which typically involve assigning grades or marks at the end of learning, are deeply ingrained in the educational system. In addition to this, teachers' approaches to assessment are not solely determined by educational norms; they are influenced by external factors such as parental expectations, school policies, and broader societal influences (Khanjani *et al.*, 2016). These external factors play a great role in informing how teachers create and implement assessment practices in their classrooms. For example, parental pressure for high grades can lead teachers to focus more on end-of-term assessments that prioritize outcomes rather than tracking ongoing student progress. In addition to this, school policies and societal expectations often push for standardized testing, further reinforcing the prevalence of summative assessment practices. Given these influences, it is challenging for pre-service teachers to completely disregard summative assessment. Instead, they have to find a space where both summative and formative assessment approaches can exist.

3.3.Identified Challenges

The findings revealed some difficulties associated with assessment methods at ENSC. Most participants expressed concerns about how trainers assess them, questioned the effectiveness of existing approaches, and emphasized the need for fairer assessments that accurately reflect their capabilities and provide a measure of their learning experience in its entirety.

3.3.1. Mismatches Between Trainers and Trainees

Trainees' teaching practice is a core element of teacher education programs that offers rich, hands-on learning opportunities. In a study by Velzen *et al.* (2008), the researchers explored the criteria used by the trainees during the practicum. Via interviews with a cohort of trainees, they aimed to understand what factors contributed to favorable evaluations from their trainers. The results showed a significant correlation between trainees' grades and how closely their teaching aligned with their supervising trainers' preferred methods. The researchers also identified a gap between the theoretical content taught in professional courses and the practical activities undertaken during training. They also noted the absence of a clear coherent theoretical framework to help trainees assess their instructional practices. Echoing similar concerns, several interviewees in this research work shared worries about the subjective nature of trainer evaluations. They explained that their success was often contingent upon the extent to which they, as trainees, conformed to the explicit and implicit expectations of their teacher trainers (Boyd, Harris and Murray, 2007). When asked about the challenges faced, most interviewees recalled their experiences with their teacher trainers:

> "I remember during the training, the applicant teacher and I seemed to speak different languages. There was somehow a conflict in our understanding of teaching. I was confused and had no idea of what was exactly expected of me." (participant # 1)

> "Sometimes I felt that the trainer teacher was imposing her ideas on us, I mean I understand that what happens in real classes is different from what we learned in the ENSC, but I didn't feel the freedom to experiment what I have as ideas; I was simply expected to obey the instructions." (participant # 3)

Despite the existence of evaluation criteria in pre-service teacher training, there remains a dearth of clarity regarding the methodologies employed for assessment. While trainers are offered checklists outlining evaluation criteria, their assessment practices frequently reflect personal biases and preferences, privileging conformity to their teaching styles (Pourdana and Behbahani, 2013). One of the participants stated that:

> "By the end of the training, I wasn't given a good mark despite the positive feedback I received from the teacher. I really had no idea on what basis were the marks given and what made one trainee better than the other." (participant # 19)

For the most part, the way trainees are assessed at ENSC often feels unclear and inconsistent. This highlights the need for a more transparent assessment system; one that ensures fairness and supports learning throughout the student teachers training journey.

3.4.Suggested Strategies to Enhance the Existing Assessment Methods

Incorporating feedback from former pre-service teachers regarding suggestions to improve existing assessment methods in their former training institutions is crucial despite the subjective nature of their responses. These insights provide valuable perspectives on the practical implementation of assessment practices, offering tailored suggestions for program improvement. By involving former pre-service teachers in discussions, training institutions ensure that the voices and needs of trainees are considered.

Former ENSC trainees mainly advocated the use of a broader range of assessment techniques beyond written exams and training reports. They advocated for other assessment methods that do justice when assessing their professional competence. Although there was no clear reference to specific assessment methods, the need to change was implied in their responses. This diversity would allow for a more holistic evaluation of their skills and knowledge. Moreover, trainees recognized the increasing significance of technology in education and recommended incorporating digital tools and platforms for assessment purposes.

Teacher #	Emerging Themes	Illustrative Responses
# 8 **# 6**	Performance-based assessment	- "During the practicum, I think trainees should not only be judged on their linguistic abilities or lesson planning because most of the feedback I received was about the language I used while I was teaching." - "Although there are many areas that demonstrate a teacher's competence, some areas were emphasized more than others."
# 22	Formative strategies	- "In my training, I appreciated the parts

		that involved peer-review activities and discussions. Engaging in dialogue with different parties helped me find many answers to my questions."
# 28	Technology integration	- "I wish the teachers were more open to online platforms to facilitate discussion about teaching practices."

Table 03 Examples of the Teachers' Answers on Suggested Improvements in Assessment

In recent years, there has been a growing demand to bring innovative methods into teacher education. Among the methods that has received attention in educational literature is alternative assessment. Despite its recognized value, it appears to be largely missing in the training programs at ENSC. Alternative assessments transcend testing; they involve a shared responsibility for assessing performance and encourage student active participation via self-assessment, peer assessment, and reflexivity. At their core, they view learning as a developmental, social, interactive, and reflective process.

Although their acceptance in educational discourse, the practical implementation of alternative assessment in teacher education programs remains limited. The absence of exposure to such innovative assessment approaches during training can hinder prospective EFL teachers' ability to translate theoretical knowledge about these assessments into effective teaching practices. This gap brings to light the need to include more innovative tools like portfolios, group projects, writing tasks, and authentic performance assessments, into teacher training curricula (McConney and Ayers, 1998; Hamdan Alghamdi, 2013; Beleulmi and Hamada, 2014). These scholars also emphasize that without continued support and professional development opportunities, the successful adoption and implementation of these approaches is impossible. By integrating dynamic assessment tools, institutes of teacher education can better prepare their student teachers to meet the demands of modern classrooms and create rich successful learning experiences.

4. Educational Implications

The insights from this study present valuable guidance for administrators and policymakers in Algerian teacher training institutions, particularly at ENSC. By paying attention to the diverse experiences shared by student teachers, decision-makers can rethink and improve assessment practices in ways that genuinely answer teachers' needs. Chief among these needs is the shift from predominantly summative assessments to more formative approaches. Summative approaches continue to remain necessary in the evaluation of learning outcomes, but their prominence limits the students' potential to grow. Continuous feedback and reflective practices can support pre-service teachers to improve their professional competencies. The findings revealed trainees' calls for more innovative and technology-enhanced assessment tools. The inclusion of digital platforms, portfolios, and group projects could better align with modern educational assessment. Such tools do indeed encourage pre-service teachers to take ownership of their learning. To support this, teacher education programs should consider revising their curriculum to formally integrate alternative assessment practices that reflect the developmental nature of teaching. Most importantly, assessment does

not exist in a vacuum; it is deeply connected to the wider educational and cultural context. That is why an open dialogue involving all the stakeholders and trainees themselves is essential to redefine the purpose and practice of assessment in teacher education.

Conclusion

Assessment in initial teacher education helps both to evaluate the trainees' learning and to develop the skills to assess others. Beyond measuring knowledge and competence, assessment also shapes how future teacher understand their roles in the classroom. The shifting landscape in assessment calls for a more balanced approach that guarantees accountability and supports growth. This study revealed mixed perceptions among former ENSC students regarding the effectiveness of assessment. Many felt that summative approaches dominated the scene, which meant limited opportunities for reflection and feedback. Others acknowledged the worth and objectivity of such methods in final evaluations. As for the challenges they faced, former trainees referred to the unclear assessment criteria, the inconsistent feedback, and the subjective nature of their trainers' evaluations. This undermined the ability to take full advantage of assessment to improve their performance. To improve the assessment practices, participants in this work recommended transparent criteria, more formative feedback, and open dialogue with their trainers. Overall, the current assessment practices at ENSC provide structure, yet a shift towards holistic and learning-oriented approaches is advisable.

Although this was a small-scale exploratory study, the findings it offers remain worth considering. Despite the inherent potential biases in the sample selection and data analysis, as with any qualitative research, this study places significant emphasis on participant voices to form "*genuine dialogic partnerships*" (Whitney *et al.*, 75: 2002) with their institutions. The inclusion of a wider range of participants in future research would help identify additional themes. Therefore, there is a clear need to conduct further evaluation studies in different settings to support the ongoing improvement of teacher education programs. Future follow-up studies can build on these findings to involve trainees not just as participants, but as collaborators in shaping assessment and institutional decisions.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview

- How do you perceive the effectiveness of the assessment methods used at ENSC in shaping your learning experiences?
- In what ways do you believe these assessment methods have impacted your teaching experience?
- Can you describe any challenges you encountered about assessment practices during your time at ENSC?
- How did these challenges affect your learning and preparation for teaching?
- Based on your experiences, what suggestions do you have for enhancing the assessment process at ENSC?
- Are there any specific changes or improvements you believe could address the challenges you mentioned earlier?