AN INVESTIGATION OF SAUDI EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING-ORIENTED LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT: *Learning-oriented assessment (LOA) is a highly collaborative and interactive approach that is believed to promote students' language learning. Nevertheless, little is known about Saudi EFL teachers' knowledge, practices, and challenges of implementing LOA in their language classrooms. To this end, this study explored Saudi EFL teachers' knowledge, practices, and challenges of implementing LOA using a quantitative method survey. The Teachers' Learning-Oriented Assessment Questionnaire (TLOAQ) was developed and distributed to 162 Saudi EFL school teachers. The findings indicated that Saudi EFL teachers had a moderate level of knowledge regarding LOA. Besides, they did not implement and practice the principles of LOA efficiently. In addition, EFL teachers reported significant personal, contextual and organizational challenges that limit the implementation of LOA, such as time constraints, large classes, insufficient training, and exam-oriented culture. Besides, the MANOVA results indicated no significant differences in EFL teachers' knowledge and practices of LOA due to gender and years of experience. The findings highlight the need to develop teachers' assessment literacy as well as resolve the difficulties that limit the implementation of LOA to enhance language assessment effectiveness. Future qualitative research should be conducted to have deep insights into the in-class assessment practices in relation to LOA.*

KEYWORDS: learning-oriented assessment (LOA), EFL teachers, perceptions, English language

INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool of communication; it allows us to express our ideas, concepts, and emotions or transfer culture and traditions to new generations (Casadiego & Parakhina, 2020). Learning a language is one of the first things people do in their lives. It is a completely natural and engaging process. However, approaches to language teaching have changed it into frustrating, unnatural, and insufficient in many contexts (Jones & Saville, 2016). Studies have shown that EFL/ESL students face challenges in learning English; they encounter problems in listening (Nushi & Orouji, 2020; Renandya & Hu, 2018), speaking (AlHosni, 2014; Soomro & Farooq, 2018), reading (Chandran & Shah, 2019; Hassan & Dweik, 2021), writing (Alharbi, 2019; Nuruzzaman et al., 2018), vocabulary (Alsaif & Milton, 2012; Tran, 2020), grammar (Lin et al., 2020; Spahiu & Kryeziu, 2021), and pronunciation (Al-Ahdal, 2020; Lin, 2014). Students' weaknesses are due to many significant factors that hinder their language achievement. One of these influential factors is teachers' poor language assessment practices that dedicate the culture of tests (Kadwa & Sheik, 2021). Research revealed that teachers' lack of assessment knowledge

and poor assessment practices in language education (Tsagari & Vogt, 2017; Xu & Brown, 2017) lead to a mismatch between assessment and instruction (Heritage, 2013; Yılmaz, 2020). In the Saudi EFL context, the learning environment is mainly test-oriented that focuses on summative assessment (Almalki, 2019).

Notably, assessment is a natural process that is connected with learning. Unfortunately, as conducted through large-scale standardized tests, assessment has become systematized and failed to promote learning effectively (Jones & Saville, 2016). Test-based assessment has many negative washback effects, including teaching to the test instead of actual learning, increasing pressure on students and teachers, and narrowing the curriculum scope (Gebril, 2021). Furthermore, Figueras (2021) claimed that "language learning, teaching, and assessment have often been addressed separately, as isolated elements rather than as an integrated and interrelated whole" (p. 69). As a result of this situation, assessment reform is a means to drive the change to achieve sustainable capacity for self-directed learning and move from assessment *of* learning to assessment *for* learning (Mok, 2012). In addition, assessment reform efforts attempt to extenuate the negative impacts of standardized examinations and redesign pedagogy to reconcile the tension between the improvement and accountability functions of assessment and benefit from each to inform teaching and learning (Gebril, 2021; Mok, 2012).

Consequently, several educational assessment terms have emerged, including formative assessment, classroom-based assessment, assessment for learning, alternative assessment, teacher-based assessment, and dynamic assessment. These terms refer to explicit or implicit classroom-embedded assessment practices opposite to traditional large-scale formal examinations set for selection and/or accountability purposes (Davison & Leung, 2009). These less test-like assessments greatly emphasize the process and outcome of student learning (Fazel & Ali, 2022). Against this drawback, learning-oriented assessment has emerged as one of the most popular frameworks that connect learning to assessment to inform learning and instruction. Carless (2007) coined the term Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA). LOA strengthens the learning aspects of assessment and highlights the centrality of student learning in all assessment activities (Carless, 2007; Mok, 2012). LOA has gained currency over the last decade and has been accepted at international examination boards. Moreover, LOA exploits synergies between formal and classroom assessment (Jones & Saville, 2016) and productive synergies between summative and formative assessment (Carless, 2007). LOA "focuses on the quality of student learning outcomes … to help students achieve key disciplinary and generic understanding, values and skills" (Carless et al., 2006, p. 9). LOA has three strands that include the practices that promote learning through assessment activities designed as learning tasks, learner involvement and enjoyment in peer and self-assessment, and guided feedback used as feedforward to ensure the achievement of the desired learning outcomes (Carless, 2007). These three strands are described below:

Assessment Tasks as Learning Tasks
Assessment tasks as learning tasks work effectively when the processes of completing the assessment task and the learning tasks are actually the same (Carless et al., 2006). LOA assessment tasks should be aligned with curriculum outcomes to engage students with work over time, related to the real world, and be more cooperative than competitive (Wicking, 2022). Assessment tasks should be designed with learning outcomes in mind to promote higher-order

thinking skills and awareness amongst students (Fazel & Ali, 2022). Sharing learning goals and the criteria for success with students are key elements for assessment that promotes learning (Ozan & Kıncal, 2018). Similarly, learning and assessment tasks are related, reflect authentic, real-world tasks, and satisfy learners' choices in assessment tasks to foster their motivation and engagement (Keppell & Carless, 2006). Assessment tasks that promote learning are authentic; they encourage deep learning since they entail students' understanding of real-world activities and settings (Rawlusyk, 2018; Sambell et al., 2012).

Student Involvement in peer and self-assessment
LOA assessments tasks should rely on quality criteria that ensure that these tasks are valid and reliable (Xavier, 2020). Students should be familiar with the assessment criteria to address their learning needs and exceptions. In addition, they should be provided with exemplars to understand and apply the success criteria through self- and peer assessment (Fazel & Ali, 2022). Students need to be given opportunities for active involvement in self and peer assessment activities which are effective components of formative assessment (Sambell et al., 2012). Faragher (2014) states that "it is important when initiating either self- or peer assessment to set clear boundaries, behaviors, and expectations … to ensure the process is productive and effective" (p. 81). Self-assessment requires involving students in their learning process and determining what works well in a learning context rather than grading their own work. Self-assessment help students monitor their learning and become autonomous and dependent learners (Boud, 2013). The formative view of peer assessment can be emphasized when students are involved in helping each other identify their strengths and weaknesses, work on remedial actions, and develop their personal and professional skills (Topping, 2018).

Feedback and feedforward
Learning-oriented feedback is a key element of the LOA framework since LOA is concerned with "building feedback loops into learning so that students act on information received" (Carless et al., 2006, p. 9) to continuously promote their learning. Feedback is enhanced by providing students with timely, targeted, forward-looking, and actionable suggestions and involving them in the process of the feedback loops to support their current and future learning (Ali, 2013; Fazel & Ali, 2022). The distinctive feature of learning-oriented feedback is feedforward, which implies students' use of assessment information to progress their learning (Carless et al., 2006) in the future. Effective feedback is converted to feedforward when it is devoted to applying feedback in other similar tasks and new learning contexts (Hamp-Lyons, 2017). Feedforward does not just focus on mere feedback but on providing students with prior exposure to assessment to develop a clear sense of their learning expectations. It requires efficacious teaching strategies, including exemplars, explicit processes, and self and peer assessment (Baker & Zuvela, 2013).

Until recently, all the three aforementioned key principles of learning-oriented assessments have not been practically part of the advancement of language teachers wishing to increase their language assessment literacy (Hamp-Lyons, 2017). Good language teachers should be aware of up-to-date language assessment developments, especially those concerned with classroom-based assessment methods similar to learning-oriented assessment, to plan and implement comprehensive assessment practices (Fazel & Ali, 2022; Hamp-Lyons, 2017). It is not easy for teachers to implement LOA in language classroom contexts. Subsequently, language teachers'

professional knowledge of the principles of LOA, availability of training, assessment literacy, accessibility to assessment resources, assessment culture, heavy teaching load, top-down assessment policy (Farhady, 2021; Fazel & Ali, 2022), students' attitudes towards assessment and their language proficiency play a significant role in the success of teachers' implementation and practices of LOA in language classrooms. Thus, exploring LOA practices of language teachers, particularly in public education, is a fertile field of research that could help guide and regulate the assessment practices of public school teachers.

Despite the substantial amount of research on teachers' practices of LOA in different learning contexts (e.g., Carless, 2015; Rawlusyk, 2016), few studies have focused on the impact of LOA on developing language skills among EFL/ESL learners, and it was found that LOA could significantly improve students' pronunciation (Navaie, 2018), speaking (Almalki, 2019), written skills (Vanderlelie & Alexander, 2016), and writing competency (Yang, 2020). As a relatively new assessment concept in language learning, exploring language teachers' knowledge and practices of LOA is essential to ensure they are engaging their students in more effective assessment practices. However, little research has attempted to examine language teachers' implementation of LOA in various contexts. For example, Ali (2013) conducted a qualitative study to explore 25 EFL/ESL teachers' views on the possibilities and challenges of implementing LOA in the College of Applied Sciences in Oman. Findings revealed that all teachers support implementing LOA in language classrooms because it promotes students' active learning. The study recommended training both teachers and students on self and peer assessment, aligning assessment tasks with language curriculum learning outcomes, and providing timely feedback. In a cross-contextual study, Fazel and Ali (2022) explored the English for academic purposes (EAP) teachers' knowledge and use of LOA in two private higher education settings: Canada and Malaysia. They also investigated the possibilities and challenges that facilitate or constrain implementing LOA. The findings revealed that 95% of the teachers agreed on the need and importance of LOA, and only 35% of them were familiar with the term LOA. In addition, assessment tasks as learning tasks appeared to have been not insufficiently used by teachers in either context. Students' involvements in assessment also were inadequately by EPA teachers despite it being implemented by more Canadian teachers than Malaysians. Exceptionally, all teachers reported frequent use of formal and informal feedback to support students learning.

Despite the crucial role that LOA could play across the learning environments, especially in the English language, little research has addressed language teachers' practices of LOA and the challenges that might hinder implementing LOA. More specifically, public school EFL teachers' knowledge and practices of LOA and the challenges they might face in the actual classroom are still not addressed. Moreover, previous studies on LOA did not comprehensively address language teachers' practices of LOA based on the three principles proposed by Carless (2007). Furthermore, the research provided limited findings on the factors that might affect the implementation of LOA, such as teachers' gender, educational level, and years of experience. Most importantly, research has not yet highlighted barriers and challenges EFL teachers encounter in implementing LOA in public school language classrooms. To bridge the gaps above, this study attempts to explore Saudi EFL teachers' knowledge and practices of LOA and the challenges that teachers might be encounter. The framework proposed by Carless (2007) will guide this study, focusing on the three core principles of LOA: assessment tasks as learning

tasks, learners' involvement in the assessment processes, and learners' engagement in feedback and feedforward. It is hoped that this study could provide insightful paths for guiding the assessment practices of public school language teachers in relation to the core principles of LOA. Further, it is expected that this study will provide a clear picture for language teachers and researchers regarding the challenges of implementing LOA to accomplish practical solutions to these barriers. To this end, this study addressed the following questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of Saudi EFL teachers of learning-oriented assessment?
RQ2: To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers perceive their practices in implementing the three principles of learning-oriented assessment?
RQ3: To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers perceive the challenges in implementing learning-oriented assessment?
RQ4: Are there any significant differences in Saudi EFL teachers' knowledge, practices, and challenges in implementing learning-oriented assessment due to gender, educational level, and years of experience?

METHODOLOGY

Study Design
This qualitative study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey approach to explore the EFL teachers' knowledge, practices, and the challenges of implementing LOA in public schools in Saudi Arabia.

Participants
The study participants were 162 EFL teachers of public schools in Saudi Arabia during the 2021/2022 year. The stratified random sampling technique was employed to comprise male and female teachers in the study sample.

Table 1 *Characteristics of the study sample (n=162)*

Variable		N	(%)
Gender	Male	71	43.8
	Female	91	56.2
Educational level	Elementary	46	28.4
	Intermediate	60	37
	Secondary	56	34.6
Years of experience	Less than 10 years	56	34.6
	From 10 to 20 years	78	48.1
	More than 20 years	28	17.3

As illustrated in Table 1, female teachers represented 56.2%, while the proportion of male teachers was 43.8%. Teachers were distributed among the educational levels, the highest for the intermediate level (37%) and the lowest for the primary level (28.4%). Teachers' experiences varied, and the most were between 10 and 20 years (48.1%) and the least for those who have more than 20 years of experience in teaching (17.3%).

Instrument
Due to the lack of a suitable tool to explore the knowledge, practices, and challenges of LOA among EFL teachers, a questionnaire with five dimensions was developed based on the three

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core principles of LOA proposed by Carless (2007), and related studies of LOA (e.g., Carless, 2015; Farhady, 2021; Rawlusyk, 2016). In addition, for exploring EFL teachers' knowledge of LOA and the potential challenges encountered by teachers when applying LOA in language classrooms, two dimensions for knowledge of LOA and challenges were developed. Previous research on these two constructs (e.g., Carless, 2015; Fazel & Ali, 2022) was reviewed, and the challenges of LOA in language classrooms were mainly adapted from Fazel and Ali's study (2022).

The teacher's learning-oriented assessment questionnaire (TLOAQ) has five dimensions with 50 items: EFL teachers' knowledge of LOA (8 items), assessment tasks as learning tasks (9 items), involving students in assessment processes (11 items), engaging students with feedback and feedforward (10 items), and challenges of implementing LOA (12 items). In addition, the questionnaire contains a close-ended, five-point-Likert rating scale ranging from very low (1 point) to very high (5 points). TLOAQ contains a part for teachers' demographic information: gender (male, female), educational level (elementary, intermediate, secondary), and years of experience in language teaching (less than 10 years, from 10 to 20 years, more than 20 years). TLOAQ face validity was checked by three EFL faculty members, and two faculty members specialized in assessment and evaluation. Their suggestions were taken to modify some of the questionnaire items to achieve the final form of the questionnaire. Since the TLOAQ was developed upon a clear theoretical framework (Carless, 2007), the confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Correlations between TLOAQ factors*

TLOAQ factors	KLOA	AT	IA	LE	CLOA
Knowledge of LOA (KLOA)	---				
Assessment tasks as learning tasks (AT)	.809***	---			
Involvement in assessment (IA)	.701***	.789***	---		
Learner engagement with feedback (LE)	.698***	.840***	.921***	---	
Challenges of LOA (CLOA)	.714***	.852***	.782***	.772***	---

***P < .001.

The correlations between the five factors of TLOAQ were significant at (α≤.001), indicating the conceptual uniqueness of the TLOAQ dimensions and its validity in gathering the study data. Besides, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to calculate the reliability of TLOAQ. The values of Cronbach's alpha coefficients were excellent, indicating that TLOAQ was reliable: EFL teachers' knowledge of LOA (.92), practices of assessment tasks as learning tasks (.90), practices of involving students in assessment (.93), practices of engaging students with feedback and feedforward (.90), challenges of implementing LOA (.91), and the whole questionnaire (.95).

Data collection procedures
After obtaining ethics approval and permission, to conduct the study on EFL teachers from the university, an electronic version of the survey was sent to the study sample via email. After two weeks, the return rate was 71% (n=177). The valid questionnaires date (n=162) was entered into SPSS 23, coded, and analyzed.

Statistical analysis

The descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to describe the sample characteristics. In addition, means, standards deviations, and percentages were calculated to display the sample responses to the TLOAQ dimensions. Depending on the value of the mean score, items were categorized as follows: low (mean=1 to 2), moderate (mean=3 to less than 4), high (4 to 5). Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was run to explore any statistical significance between the sample responses due to gender, educational level, and years of experience. MANOVA was chosen since the dependent variable has more than two levels. The p-value is not significant if it is more than .05.

RESULTS

To answer the study first question: *What are the perceptions of Saudi EFL teachers of learning-oriented assessment?*, the first dimension of the teachers' learning-oriented assessment questionnaire (TLOAQ) was used to explore EFL teachers' knowledge of the implementation of LOA. Descriptive statistics were used to arrange their responses in descending order. Table 3 depicts the findings of the EFL teachers' knowledge of LOA. As shown in Table 3, all items were found to be at a moderate level ranging from 3.49 (69.8%) to 3.91 (78.2%), and the average mean score was 3.71 (74.2%). Item 6 obtained the highest score (M=3.91, 78.2%). Equally, item 2 (M=3.77, 75.4%) and item 5 (M=3.76, 75.2%) were among the highest aspects of EFL teachers' knowledge of LOA. Conversely, item 1 (M=3.49, 69.8%) had the lowest score, followed by item 3 and item 4 (M=3.64, 72.8%), indicating teachers' low knowledge of LOA.

Table 3 *Descriptivse of teachers' knowledge of LOA (n=162)*

Item#	Item	Mean	SD	(%)	Value
6	I recognize the role of involving students in their learning process.	3.91	1.06	78.2	moderate
2	I recognize the potential role of feedback in triggering learning processes and achieving success.	3.77	1.07	75.4	moderate
5	I am familiar with similar concepts (e.g., assessment for learning, alternative assessment, formative/continuous assessment).	3.76	1.06	75.2	moderate
7	I recognize the role of integrating assessment in language instruction.	3.75	1.06	75	moderate
8	I recognize how to identify the language skills to be assessed when designing language assessments.	3.70	1.11	74	moderate
4	I acknowledge the synergies across assessment, instruction, and learning.	3.64	1.05	72.8	moderate
3	I recognize the role of talk-in interaction in structuring and mediating learning.	3.64	1.10	72.8	moderate
1	I recognize the potential agents of self, peer, teacher, materials, and curriculum in language assessment.	3.49	1.04	69.8	moderate
	Overall Mean	3.71	.79	74.2	moderate

To answer the study second question: *To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers perceive their practices in implementing the three principles of learning-oriented assessment?,* the second, third, and fourth dimensions of the teachers' learning-oriented assessment questionnaire

(TLOAQ) were used to explore EFL teachers' practices of the implementation of the three principles LOA. Descriptive statistics were used to arrange their responses in descending order. Table 4 depicts the results of EFL teachers' practices of assessment tasks as learning tasks. The findings revealed that EFL teachers had a moderate level of these practices in their classrooms. The overall mean of these practices was 3.68 (73.6%), and the items ranged from 3.55 (71%) to 3.76 (75.2%). Item 8 (M=3.76, 75.2%), item 3 (M=3.74, 74.8%), and item 4 (M=3.73, 74.6%) scored the highest level of practice. On the contrary, item 2 (M=3.55, 71%), item 1 (M=3.58, 71.6%), and item 7 (M=3.64, 72.8%) obtained the lowest practice among EFL teachers regarding assessment tasks as learning tasks.

Table 4 *Descriptives of teachers' practices of assessment tasks as learning tasks (n=162)*

Item#	Item	Mean	SD	(%)	Value
8	I assign a variety of tasks involving individuals, pair work, and group work.	3.76	1.13	75.2	moderate
3	I provide interactive language activities.	3.74	1.03	74.8	moderate
4	I use tasks for both instruction and assessment.	3.73	1.11	74.6	moderate
5	I use learner-learner collaborative discussion and decision-making tasks.	3.71	1.09	74.2	moderate
9	I make language assessment part of language teaching and learning.	3.70	1.06	74	moderate
6	I include assessments embedded in instruction for learning goals and learning embedded in assessments for better performance goals.	3.65	1.05	73	moderate
7	I make assessment tasks as learning tasks.	3.64	1.06	72.8	moderate
1	I provide real-world tasks related to learning outcomes.	3.58	1.12	71.6	moderate
2	I offer tasks that require time and effort to complete.	3.55	1.12	71	moderate
	Overall Mean	3.68	.81	73.6	moderate

Based on Table 5, EFL teachers' practices of involving students in the assessment were moderate (M=3.76, 75.2%), whereas the items of their practices ranged from 3.61 (72.2%) to 3.96 (79.2 %). Item 3 (M=3.96, 79.2%) had the highest score indicating teachers' extensive practice of enhancing students' interaction with the teacher and peers to promote learning. Besides, item 2 (M=3.90, 78%) and item 6 (M=3.88, 77.6%) were highly employed by teachers. On the other hand, item 7 (M=3.61, 72.2%), item 8 (M=3.62, 72.4%), and item 1 (M=3.64, 72.8%) were amongst the lowest levels of practice by EFL teachers, indicating the weakness of EFL teachers in using rubrics/criteria, training students to use them, and uninvolving of students in various assessment activities.

Table 5 *Descriptives of teachers' practices of involving students in assessment processes (n=162)*

Item#	Item	Mean	SD	(%)	Value
3	I promote students' interaction with the teacher and peers.	3.96	1.00	79.2	moderate
2	I help students monitor their performance.	3.90	1.03	78	moderate
6	I encourage students to self-assess to identify strengths and weaknesses in language learning.	3.88	1.05	77.6	moderate
5	I encourage learner autonomy (i.e., motivating students to study independently and actively engage in-class activities).	3.82	1.10	76.4	moderate
9	I guide students' reflection on how to improve their learning based on assessment information.	3.79	1.08	75.8	moderate
11	I share success criteria with learners (clear instructions, rubrics, etc.).	3.74	1.05	74.8	moderate
10	I place students into instructional groups for differentiated instruction.	3.68	1.04	73.6	moderate
4	I involve students in self-assessment both in and outside class.	3.68	1.08	73.6	moderate
1	I involve students in assessment processes/activities.	3.64	1.11	72.8	moderate
8	I explain rubrics/criteria to students.	3.62	1.14	72.4	moderate
7	I teach students to use scoring rubrics in different assessment tasks.	3.61	1.10	72.2	moderate
	Overall Mean	3.76	.80	75.2	moderate

Table 6 depicts the results of teachers' practices of engaging students in feedback and feedforward as the most distinctive feature of LOA. EFL teachers practiced feedback and feedforward at a moderate level (M=3.75, 75%). Their practices ranged from 3.56 (71.2%) to 3.84 (76.8%). The results showed that item 2 (M=3.84, 76.8%), item 7 (M=3.83, 76.6%), and item 6 (M=3.80, 76%) were frequently practiced by EFL teachers. As expected, teachers' practice of the feedback loops (Feedback and Feedforward) had the lowest level (M=3.56, 71.2%). Similarly, item 4 (M=3.70, 74%) and item 9 (M=3.72, 74.4%) were among the lowest practices of EFL teachers in providing an adequate level of feedback.

Table 6 *Descriptives of teachers' practices of engaging students in feedback and feedforward (n=162)*

Item#	Item	Mean	SD	(%)	Value
2	I provide feedback both in and outside class.	3.84	1.07	76.8	moderate
7	I offer feedback linked to the purpose of the assignment and specific criteria.	3.83	1.04	76.6	moderate
6	I provide feedback focused on learning rather than on marks.	3.80	1.09	76	moderate
5	I provide formal and informal feedback.	3.78	1.01	75.6	moderate
3	I ask students to assess peers' performance on language tasks to give feedback.	3.77	1.03	75.4	moderate
8	I provide written descriptive feedback.	3.76	1.00	75.2	moderate
1	I offer opportunities to give and receive feedback.	3.74	1.08	74.8	moderate
9	I provide feedback that consists of wrong and correct answers.	3.72	1.09	74.4	moderate
4	I provide detailed feedback on language skills.	3.70	1.06	74	moderate
10	I put learners in the feedback loops (Feedback and Feedforward).	3.56	1.07	71.2	moderate
	Overall Mean	3.75	.79	75	moderate

To answer the study third question: ***To what extent do Saudi EFL teachers perceive the challenges in implementing learning-oriented assessment?,*** the fifth dimension of the teachers' learning-oriented assessment questionnaire (TLOAQ) was used to explore the challenges of the implementation of LOA. Descriptive statistics were used to arrange their responses in descending order.

Regarding the challenges encountered by EFL teachers in implementing LOA, Table 7 shows that EFL teachers perceived high challenges in the implementation of LOA in language classrooms. The overall mean of the challenges was 4.08 (81.6%), and the items ranged from 3.97 (79.4%) to 4.18 (83.6%). The highest challenge was time constraint (item 2, M=4.18, 83.6%), then students' negative attitudes towards assessment (item 3, M=4.16, 83.2%), and teachers' lack of training on LOA (item 4, M=4.14, 82.8%). On the other hand, heavy teaching load (item 7, M=3.97, 79.4%) and teachers' lack of experience in designing authentic assessment tools (item 11, M=3.99, 79.8%) were the lowest challenges; they were moderately perceived by EFL teachers.

Table 7 *Descriptives of challenges of implementing learning-oriented assessment (n=162)*

Item#	Item	Mean	SD	(%)	Value
2	Time constraint limits implementing LOA.	4.18	.85	83.6	high
3	Students have negative attitudes towards assessment.	4.16	.84	83.2	high
4	Teachers' lack of training on implementing LOA.	4.14	.89	82.8	high
5	Dominance of exam-oriented culture.	4.13	.89	82.6	high
9	Monitoring students in large classes.	4.10	.90	82	high
6	Students' lack of language proficiency.	4.08	.86	81.6	high
12	Unavailability of equipped classrooms for practicing teamwork language activities	4.07	.90	81.4	high
8	Potential bias in self/peer assessments.	4.06	.91	81.2	high
1	Limited control over assessment due to top-down assessment policy.	4.05	.88	81	high
10	The inappropriateness of language curriculum for implementing learning-oriented assessment.	4.02	.91	80.4	high
11	Teachers' lack of experience in designing authentic assessment tools.	3.99	.96	79.8	moderate
7	Heavy teaching load.	3.97	1.01	79.4	moderate
	Overall Mean	4.08	.62	81.6	high

To answer the study fourth question: *Are there any significant differences in Saudi EFL teachers' knowledge, practices, and challenges in implementing learning-oriented assessment due to gender, educational level, and years of experience?*, Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was run to determine any significant differences due to the variables above.

Table 8 *Multivariate Tests of difference due to gender, Educational level, and Years of experience*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p value
Gender	Knowledge of LOA	1.429	1	1.429	2.275	.133
	Assessment tasks as learning tasks	.247	1	.247	.373	.542
	Involvement in assessment	.063	1	.063	.093	.761
	Learner engagement with feedback	.301	1	.301	.456	.501
	Challenges of LOA	.013	1	.013	.032	.858
Educational level	Knowledge of LOA	4.206	2	2.103	3.422	.035* I > E
	Assessment tasks as learning tasks	.255	2	.128	.191	.826
	Involvement in assessment	.626	2	.313	.464	.629
	Learner engagement with feedback	.039	2	.019	.029	.971
	Challenges of LOA	1.874	2	.937	2.426	.092
Years of experience	Knowledge of LOA	.141	2	.071	.111	.895
	Assessment tasks as learning tasks	1.792	2	.896	1.363	.259
	Involvement in assessment	.463	2	.232	.344	.710
	Learner engagement with feedback	1.309	2	.654	.992	.373
	Challenges of LOA	.834	2	.417	1.062	.348

Note: I= Intermediate level, E= Elementary level, * $p \leq .05$

As shown in Table 8, the findings indicated no statistically significant differences between male and female teachers regarding their knowledge, practices, and challenges of LOA [knowledge of LOA, F=2.275, p=.133; assessment tasks as learning tasks, F=.373, p=.542; involvement in assessment, F=.093, p=.761; learner engagement with feedback, F=.456, p=.501, and challenges of LOA, F=.032, p=.858]. Regarding the educational level of EFL teachers, the findings indicated no statistically significant differences due to the educational level in four dimensions [assessment tasks as learning tasks, F=.191, p=.826; involvement in assessment, F=.464, p=.629; learner engagement with feedback, F=.029, p=.971, and challenges of LOA, F=2.426, p=.092], whereas there were statistically significant differences in the knowledge of LOA between the teachers of the intermediate level and those of the elementary level in favor of the intermediate level [F=3.4.22, p=.035]. Finally, the results revealed no statistically significant differences due to years of experience in all dimensions [knowledge of LOA, F=.111, p=.895; assessment tasks as learning tasks, F=1.363, p=.259; involvement in assessment, F=.344, p=.710; learner engagement with feedback, F=.992, p=.373, and challenges of LOA, F=1.062, p=.348].

DISCUSSION

This study aimed at exploring Saudi EFL teachers' knowledge, practices, and challenges in implementing LOA in language classrooms. EFL teachers reported a moderate level of LOA knowledge in general. Specifically, they reported considerable knowledge and familiarity with involving students in their learning process, the potential role of feedback, the role of integrating assessment in language instruction, and assessment types (i.e., formative assessment, assessment for learning, and alternative assessment). Although most EFL teachers have acknowledged these roles, they are still bound by the pervasive exam-oriented culture dominating school education (Yan, 2015). It seems that their knowledge of LOA is connected to the abstract concepts confirming the findings of Fazil and Ali (2022), which indicated that EAP teachers' familiarity with LOA was at the conceptual level. Conversely, EFL teachers

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perceived unsatisfactory familiarity with the potential agents of self, peer, talk-in interaction, teacher, materials, and curriculum in language assessment, and the synergies across assessment, instruction, and learning constitute the core of LOA. Teachers should be trained to apply and implement assessment tasks into language instruction by exposing them to LOA's theoretical and practical bases.

Teachers' practices in relation to the three core principles of LOA (i.e., assessment tasks as learning tasks, involving students in assessment processes, and engaging students with feedback and feedforward) varied according to the distinctive features of these core principles. The first principle seemed to be unexploited by EFL teachers compared to the other two principles. This finding aligns with the findings of Fazil and Ali (2022), which indicated a low level of practices of the first principle among Canadian and Malaysian EAP teachers. Teachers' frequent practices of assessment tasks as learning tasks were restricted to assigning interactive language activities, learner-learner collaborative discussion, and individuals, pair work, and group work. Although these practices are essential for LOA, they should be provided to support LOA rather than isolated activities that consume class time and disrupt learners. In addition, the teachers should consider that these strategies should be harmoniously integrated with assessment and instruction.

On the other hand, EFL teachers seemed to depress tasks that require time and effort due to the length of the language curriculum and the limited time allocated to teaching English. In addition, real-world tasks related to learning outcomes were less frequently provided by EFL teachers within the frame of LOA. It seemed that EFL teachers had difficulties utilizing assessments embedded in instruction and vice versa. This finding confirms the dominance of assessment of learning procedures that focus on summative assessment rather than formative assessment.

Regarding the second principle of LOA (i.e., involving students in assessment processes), EFL teachers reported mixed responses about their practices towards student involvement in assessments. Teachers' practices of this principle were moderate and focused on providing students with opportunities to interact with the teacher and peers, self-assess their works, monitor their performance, reflect on their learning, and be autonomous learners. Teachers need to practice self-assessment and peer assessments since they signify the cornerstone of this principle (Carless, 2007). Taylor (2009) indicated that language teachers devote little time to assessment theory and practice. Therefore, language teachers should engage students with quality criteria and in self-assessment and peer assessment tasks to develop their self-evaluative capacities and make judgments about their peers' learning (Carless, 2015). For the lease practices of self and peer assessment, it was evident that EFL teachers were less involved in explaining, teaching, and sharing success scoring criteria and rubrics with learners. Besides, involving students in assessment processes and activities both in and outside the classroom. This finding might be due to teachers' little knowledge and skills in designing and adopting alternative language assessment instruments (i.e., rubrics, rating scales, checklists, etc.).

For the third principle of LOA (i.e., feedback and feedforward), language teachers relatively adopt feedback both in and outside class, linked to the purpose of the assessment tasks. They showed a reasonable focus on providing formal and informal feedback for learning rather than

on marks. Besides, they adequately afford written descriptive feedback and enable students to assess peers' performance on language tasks to give feedback. On the contrary, teachers were less inclined to offer opportunities for students to give and receive detailed feedback that consisted of wrong and correct answers. Remarkably and in line with Fazel and Ali (2022), EFL teachers showed low interest in putting students in the feedback loops (Feedback and Feedforward), which is specifically the heart of learning learning-oriented assessment (Turner & Purpura, 2016).

Regarding the challenges of implementing LOA, EFL teachers showed significant consensus on the difficulties that hinder implementing LOA practices. Having limited time for applying LOA and students' negative attitudes towards assessment were the most common berries of LOA. Remarkably, students were not motivated to implement LOA since it increased their learning workload. Students prefer to rely on teacher-centered assessment approaches to avoid the overwork of LOA (Gao, 2017). In addition, EFL teachers reported a remarkable lack of training in implementing LOA strategies. As an emerged trend in the assessment field, pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should move a step forward to renew their courses to meet the new movements in language assessment. Besides, they encountered difficulties related to the education system: the dominance of exam-oriented culture, limited control over assessment due to the top-down assessment policy, and mismatches between the language curriculum and learning-oriented assessment strategies. Fazel and Ali (2022) claimed that these contextual factors are beyond the language teacher's control and should be resolved by institutions and policymakers. The finding related to the governance of exam-oriented culture goes in line with other studies (e.g., Kandiko & Kingsbury, 2021; Tinmaz & Lee, 2020), which pointed out that assessment innovations cannot succeed in contexts that exploit text-oriented beliefs. EFL teachers reported a lack of equipped classrooms for practicing LOA activities and disability to monitor students in large classes. Moreover, EFL teachers face difficulties in students' lack of language proficiency. This finding is in line with Gao (2017), which confirmed a slow process of students' language proficiency. Another difficulty of LOA is the potential bias in self/peer assessments that drives students to give high grades to themselves and their peers. Importantly, as LOA requires evaluative criteria and rubrics, teachers found it challenging to design and use such instruments. One expected reason behind this finding may be to emphasize training teachers on teaching strategies and technologies rather than training them on up-to-date assessment strategies, which are the most crucial component of the language curriculum.

The study findings revealed that EFL teachers' knowledge, practices, and challenges of implementing LOA did not differ due to gender and years of experience. This finding might refer to the similarities between male and female teachers' knowledge, practices, and challenges since they teach English in equally similar contexts. Besides, years of experience did not have any effect on EFL teachers' perceptions which might indicate insufficient in-service training and supervision during teachers' careers. This finding accords with Rawlusyk (2016), which revealed that years of experience did not influence the practices of assessment methods. On the other hand, the educational level affected only teachers' knowledge of LOA in favor of intermediate level teachers compared to elementary level teachers. This finding might refer to the fact that most elementary school teachers are diploma holders, and their academic knowledge is not as high as intermediate school teachers.

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CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study contributes to the research on EFL teachers' assessment practices, particularly learning-oriented assessment. In general, EFL teachers had insufficient knowledge and practices of LOA. In addition, there were many practical, institutional, and educational challenges that hindered the potential use of LOA. They include time constraints, teachers' training, exam-oriented culture, students' attitudes, and language proficiency. For solving these problems, decisions must be delivered by decision-makers to facilitate the implementation of learning-oriented assessment methods in order to help teachers fulfill their expected roles in this regard.

The study has significant implications for language teachers' pre and in-service education. EFL teachers should be familiarized with LOA in both theory and practice. Pre-service and in-service teacher education programs and training courses should be equipped with informed assessment literacy to enrich EFL teachers' knowledge and practice of new assessment trends. These courses should include designing and employing alternative assessment approaches and tools such as rubrics, observation schedules, self and peer assessment techniques, portfolios, and more. Furthermore, EFL teachers should focus on providing assessment tasks as learning tasks; incorporating these reciprocal tasks would make a difference in classroom language assessment. Besides, involving students in self and peer assessment and providing feedback and feedforward would greatly influence students' language learning. The language curriculum should be aligned with LOA activities to enable students and teachers to apply the principles of LOA efficiently.

This study has several limitations. First of all, the study employed the cross-sectional quantitative method. Future studies might apply qualitative or mixed-method approaches to have s deep understanding of EFL teachers' knowledge and practices of LOA. Secondly, this study was limited to teachers' perceptions of LOA; more studies are warranted to explore students' perceptions, practices, and attitudes towards LOA since they are the beneficiaries of the language assessment process. Thirdly, the sample of the study is relatively small. Larger sample sizes are suggested to draw generalizable findings.

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