

Exploring Assessment Practices of Iraqi EFL Teachers: Beliefs, Practices, and Alignment

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History: Received: 2024 June Accepted: 2024 July</p>	<p>This article delved into the realm of EFL assessment in Iraq by investigating the beliefs of Iraqi EFL teachers about assessment practices they employed in their classroom and determining whether there was any congruency between their beliefs and actual assessment practices. For this purpose, 140 experienced Iraqi EFL teachers were selected by convenience sampling and the data were collected by the Teachers' Assessment Practices Belief Questionnaire and the Teachers' Assessment Practices Questionnaire. The findings of Pearson correlation and descriptive analysis revealed that the cognitive level of assessments (e.g., reasoning and application), types of assessments (e.g., portfolios and concept mapping), and evaluation criteria (e.g., improvement and student effort) were highly valued by the teachers. Regarding assessment practices in the classroom, the participants reported obtaining, elucidating, and responding to learning evidence and assisting students to acquire a positive orientation of learning (making learning explicit). Promoting learning autonomy (an expanded opportunity to assume increased autonomy in defining their learning goals and evaluating both their work and that of their peers) was also found in the teachers' reports. Besides, an interest in assisting students adhere to performance goals stipulated by the curriculum using careful questioning and assessed by scores and grades (performance orientation). Implications and suggestions of the study are discussed in the article.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS Assessment practices Beliefs Iraqi EFL teachers Practices</p>	

1. Introduction

Classroom assessment serves as a tool utilized by educators to draw conclusions regarding the knowledge acquired by students (McMillan, 2013). It stands out as a significant element influencing the process of students' learning and the instructional techniques employed by teachers (Liu & Yu, 2021; McDaniel et al., 2007). The primary objectives of classroom assessment encompass two key aspects: (1) "assessment for learning," also recognized as formative assessment, and (2) "assessment of learning," also referred to as "any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning" (Black et al., 2004, p. 10). Conversely, the

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“assessment of learning” is “designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, ranking, or certifying competence” (Black et al., 2004, p. 10).

The concept of assessment practice denotes the execution of assessments within the educational framework. This practice encompasses gathering, interpreting, and making decisions based on the evidence presented (Hill & McNamara, 2011; Wiliam & Black, 1996). Studies on teacher assessment practices reveal the existence of varied forms of practice. Torrance and Pryor (1998) outlined two distinct categories: convergent and divergent assessment practices. Convergent practices involve routine assessments independent of instructional processes, while divergent practices focus on students’ potential for further growth and development. The disparities between these two assessment practices stem from differing theoretical perspectives and teachers’ perceptions of the interrelationship between teaching, learning, and assessment. Convergent practices align with behavioral learning theories, whereas divergent approaches embrace constructivist ideologies.

Similarly, scholars have identified two primary categories of assessment practices employed by educators. These categories encompass summative assessment and formative assessment practices, including self- and peer-assessment, and portfolio assessment. By recognizing the drivers and obstacles to teachers’ implementation of formative assessment strategies (Hazim Jawad, 2020), educational stakeholders can devise appropriate mechanisms to reinforce facilitators and address barriers, thereby optimizing the efficacy of formative assessment practices.

Heitink et al. (2016) listed several factors that impact the effective utilization of formative assessment, emphasizing aspects like assessment structuring, educators’ and students’ competencies, beliefs, and attitudes toward formative assessment, as well as the role of school leadership, institutional culture, and continuous professional development. Recent research by Yan et al. (2021) revealed that both personal and contextual elements play a substantial role in shaping educators’ intentions and utilization of formative assessment strategies, including educational background, attitudes, teaching philosophy, skills, self-efficacy, and contextual factors like school context, internal support systems, working situation, student specifications, external policies, and cultural norms.

Conversely, summative assessment (McMillan, 2013) primarily concentrates on outcomes and seeks to screen educational achievements for external evaluation purposes (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Typically conducted after a lesson or academic semester terminates, this form of assessment verifies students’ comprehension of the instructed material (Aliakbari et al., 2023). The teachers who participated in Ferretti et al.’s (2021) study believed that only summative assessment is an instrument to investigate and give feedback regarding learning, and formative assessment can be used for other purposes (e.g., teaching students about punctuality).

Teacher beliefs, formed by their previous experiences at the time they were learners and their teacher training experiences (Richards et al., 1996), significantly impact how they conduct their instructional and assessment practices (Li, 2020). Nevertheless, there are instances where teachers’ actual practices are incongruent with their beliefs, as their practical experiences as teachers play a crucial role in revealing the degree to which they can implement their beliefs (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Various issues, like the complexities of the context (e.g., the size of the class, time limitations, authority influence), the experience of teaching, and the needs of their students, can determine how teachers can enact their beliefs (Roothoof, 2014). The word “practice” in this study pertains to how teachers apply assessment techniques in classrooms, while “belief” denotes teachers’ perspectives and principles regarding the classroom assessment essence and objectives (Fulmer et al., 2015).

Considering the significance of teachers’ beliefs and practices in assessing students’ performance and the alignment between them. The present study initially sought to uncover the assessment beliefs and practices of Iraqi EFL teachers and whether beliefs align with practices.

2. Review of Literature

A combination of contextual and experiential elements might determine language instructors' assessment practices. Zhang et al. (2021) characterized contextual aspects as broader educational, historical, social, or other elements and practical aspects as the background of assessment, practice, and training. Moreover, studies on experiential factors propose that (1) instructors tend to utilize familiar assessment practices (Reynolds-Keefers, 2010; Rohl, 1999), and (2) when faced with novel assessment tasks, techniques, or instruments, teachers can acquire assessment knowledge through practical experience, leading to the development of assessment instincts (Scarino, 2013; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014).

2.1. Congruence Between Stated Beliefs and Actual Assessment Practices

There is a burgeoning number of studies delving into the correlation between the practices and beliefs of educators concerning different facets of language instruction and acquisition (Ha & Murray, 2021; Tran et al., 2023). The research trend has portrayed educators as "active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Brown et al. (2009, 2011) studied school teachers in East Asia and found that assessment for student improvement was linked with their responsibility, resulting in the repeated practice of exam readiness. Therefore, there was a congruence between assessment conceptualizations and practices.

Teachers' beliefs substantially influence classroom practices (Ha & Murray, 2023; Ha & Nguyen, 2021; Hallinger et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the practices and beliefs of teachers do not consistently align (Basturkmen, 2012; Ha, 2017; Tran et al., 2020); instead, they mutually shape each other (Borg, 2017, 2019). Borg (2003) advocated for a targeted approach to studying the cognitive processes of language instructors, and numerous studies have scrutinized diverse facets of language education, like pronunciation training (Buss, 2015), corrective feedback (Ha et al., 2021; Ha & Murray, 2023), or syllabus design and development (Shieh & Reynolds, 2020). Nonetheless, there is a dearth of investigations examining this connection in the realm of language assessment. Among the studies on the practices and beliefs of teachers in terms of assessment, the majority have been on primary and secondary school teachers (e.g., Brown et al., 2009, 2011).

These studies analyzed the general assessment conceptions of teachers, excluding a specific focus on low-risk assessment. James and Pedder (2006, p. 109), however, delved into the British school teachers' values and practices concerning classroom assessment through three factors: "making learning explicit" and "promoting learning autonomy" related to assessment for learning, and "performance orientation" related to assessment of learning. The findings revealed significant gaps between practice and value in the factors of 'promoting learning autonomy' and 'performance orientation'. Discrepancies were identified to be dependent on educational settings, as educators in Argentina, Saudi Arabia, etc., exhibited notably smaller gaps compared to British teachers (Warwick et al., 2015). These studies suggested that due to varying educational concerns (Johnson & Burdett, 2010) and context-specific interpretations of assessment quality (Zhou & Deneen, 2016), the instructors' practices and beliefs related to assessment for and of learning differed across diverse cultures and contexts.

In a recent investigation conducted by Wang et al. (2020), self-rated practices and beliefs of Chinese EFL educators concerning writing assessment. The results revealed a combination of alignment and misalignment between the instructors' practices and beliefs. Particularly, the teachers placed greater importance on "assessment for learning," which empowers students to assume accountability in the assessment process, as opposed to assessment of learning, although a contrary pattern was observed in their practice. Vattøy (2020) conducted interviews with Norwegian EFL instructors and reported discrepancies between the instructors' beliefs and practices related to formative feedback provision. These investigations have underscored the influence of both individual factors (such as students' requirements, fundamental beliefs embraced by educators, and their teaching background) and sociocultural aspects (including policy, the size of the class, time limitations, prescribed curriculum, and assessment culture) on the assessment beliefs and practices of L2 educators. For example, Mui So and Hoi Lee (2011) delved into English educators' perspectives and methods regarding assessment for learning, discovering a consistent reflection of their assessment practices in alignment with their beliefs about assessment purpose. Similarly, the correspondence between the assessment practices and beliefs of teachers in EFL settings was mentioned by Wu et al. (2021) and Zhou and Deneen (2016).

The aforementioned studies collectively demonstrate that the practices and beliefs of teachers about specific facets of language education constitute a crucial research area, as such investigations can enhance comprehension of teachers' classroom behavior, which, in turn, enhances teaching and learning effectiveness. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following questions regarding the assessment practices of Iraqi EFL teachers.

1. What are Iraqi EFL teachers' beliefs about assessment practices?
2. How do Iraqi EFL teachers use assessment practices?
3. Are Iraqi teachers' stated beliefs congruent with their actual use of assessment practices?

3. Method

A survey design was adopted for the present study. Such design type quantitatively and numerically describes trends, attitudes, or ideas of a population by inquiring a sample of that population. Afterward, the researcher makes generalizations and inferences from the sample to the population (Creswell, 2014).

3.1. Participants and Setting

The research participants consisted of 140 English teachers in Kadhimiya and Baghdad, Iraq. These teachers, selected by convenience sampling method, were aged between 27 and 50 years ($M=35.5$, $SD=1.7$), experienced (more than three years of teaching experience), and shared Arabic as their first language. Demographic information of the participants is presented below.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants

Demographics		N	Percentage
Age	27-34	73	52.14
	35-41	56	40
	42-50	11	7.85
Gender	Male	88	62.85
	Female	52	37.14
Level of education	Bachelor's	117	83.57
	Master's	20	14.28
	PhD	3	2.14

3.2. Instrumentation

The following instruments were used to collect the required data.

3.2.1. Teachers' Assessment Practices Belief Questionnaire. The Teachers' Assessment Practices Belief Questionnaire, developed by McMillan (2001), was used to assess the attitudes of Iraqi EFL teachers. It specifically focused on evaluating the teachers' beliefs towards assessment and included 34 items, which were further divided into three sub-scales, including the cognitive level of assessments (e.g., reasoning and application), types of assessments (e.g., portfolio and concept mapping), and evaluation criteria (e.g., improvement and the students' efforts). The cognitive levels of assessments include four items; the types of assessments comprise 11 items, and 19 items are included in the evaluation criteria. The responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale (0= *strongly agree* to 4= *strongly disagree*). The validity of the questionnaire reported by the developers was acceptable ($r=.84$). The reliability of the questionnaire in the present study, estimated by Cronbach's alpha, was .87.

3.2.2. Teachers' Assessment Practices Questionnaire. This 30-item questionnaire was developed by James and Pedder (2006) to elicit the way teachers have applied assessment practices in class. The responses are provided by a four-point Likert scale (0=*never true* to 3=*mostly true*). This questionnaire comprises three sub-scales, namely making learning explicit (obtaining, elucidating, and responding to evidence of learning; helping students adopt a positive learning orientation; promoting learning autonomy (broadening the opportunity for students to become more independent regarding the learning objectives and assessing their own and others' work, and performance orientation (facilitating

students' compliance with performance goals specified by the curriculum using closed questioning and assessed scores and grades) each including ten items. The validity of the questionnaire, as reported by the developers, was acceptable ($r = .71$). The reliability of the questionnaire in this study, estimated by Cronbach's alpha, was .83.

3.3. Procedures

The data collection took five months, and the instruments were manually distributed among 140 Iraqi EFL teachers. They were requested to complete them at their earliest convenience. Additionally, the phone number and email of the researcher were given to the participants so that they could contact the researcher if they had any queries concerning these instruments. All the participants signed the consent form included in the instrument package, and the study aims were explained to them in written form. The questionnaires were administered in English, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and SD), one-sample t-test, and Pearson correlation.

4. Results

The first research question sought to find Iraqi EFL teachers' beliefs about assessment practices. In so doing, the Teachers' Assessment Practices Belief Questionnaire was administered, and the results are presented below.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Responses to Teachers' Assessment Practices Belief Questionnaire

		Strongly Agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree	M	SD
Please choose the one that best describes your idea.	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)s	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
1 I believe that using concept maps can enhance students' understanding of the subject matter.	65 (46.42)	46 (32.85)	19 (13.57)	7 (5)	3 (2.14)		3.23	0.89
2 I think portfolios are an effective way to assess students' progress throughout a course or unit.	45 (32.14)	46 (32.85)	30 (21.42)	15 (10.71)	4 (2.85)		3.68	1.07
3 Student effort and improvement over time should be considered when determining grades.	78 (55.71)	50 (35.71)	9 (6.42)	3 (2.14)	0 (0)		3.58	0.66
4 Assessments should require students to apply knowledge and think critically about topics and ideas.	80 (57.14)	40 (28.57)	11 (7.85)	6 (4.28)	3 (2.14)		3.45	0.83
5 Involving students in projects is a meaningful way to approach assessment.	48 (34.28)	57 (40.71)	14 (10)	13 (9.28)	2 (1.42)		3.83	1.07
6 Evaluation of students should include assessing higher-order thinking skills like analysis and evaluation.	77 (55)	35 (25)	18 (12.85)	7 (5)	3 (2.14)		3.45	0.83
7 Alternative forms of assessment, such as presentations or demonstrations, can better engage students compared to only using tests.	48 (34.28)	44 (31.42)	24 (17.14)	15 (10.71)	9 (6.42)		3.83	1.07
8 The use of rubrics enhances the fairness and accuracy of how student work is graded.	56 (40)	35 (25)	35 (25)	7 (5)	7 (5)		3.10	0.96

9	Group assessments, such as group projects, foster collaboration skills in students.	47 (33.57)	46 (32.85)	13 (9.28)	21 (15)	13 (9.28)	3.63	1.14
10	Performance-based assessment tasks, such as oral presentations, better reflect real-world applications of skills and knowledge.	59 (42.14)	38 (27.14)	19 (13.57)	18 (12.85)	6 (4.28)	3.85	1.03
11	Student self-assessments are a valuable part of the assessment process.	58 (41.42)	40 (28.57)	25 (17.85)	10 (7.14)	7 (5)	3.60	1.08
12	Creativity and creative thinking skills should be included in assessments.	46 (32.85)	45 (32.14)	27 (19.28)	12 (8)	11 (7.85)	3.60	1.03
13	Questions with multiple potential correct answers can enhance student learning.	44 (31.42)	58 (41.42)	12 (8)	20 (14.28)	6 (4.28)	3.83	1.00
14	Assessing the quality of students' work, not just whether answers are right or wrong, is important.	58 (41.42)	46 (32.85)	26 (18.57)	9 (6.42)	3(2.14)	3.15	0.87
15	Observations of students, such as during hands-on activities or discussions, can provide meaningful performance data.	54 (38.57)	45 (32.14)	20 (14.28)	15 (10.71)	6 (4.28)	3.90	0.93
16	Checklists can be an effective way to evaluate skill development over time.	43 (30.71)	47 (33.57)	35 (25)	9 (6.42)	6 (4.28)	3.90	0.89
17	Essay questions should be an important part of assessments.	72 (51.42)	32 (22.85)	27 (19.28)	9 (6.42)	0 (0)	3.23	0.82
18	Projects more authentically integrate learning compared to other assessment types.	54 (38.57)	45 (32.14)	23 (16.42)	15 (10.71)	3(2.14)	3.82	0.87
19	Homework assignments should be formally assessed as part of a student's overall evaluation.	39 (27.85)	35 (25)	30 (21.42)	24 (17.14)	12 (8)	3.50	1.07
20	Peer assessment where students evaluate each other can have educational value.	32 (22.85)	56 (40)	25 (17.85)	24 (17.14)	3(2.14)	3.68	0.94
21	Conferencing one-on-one with students provides insights into their understanding that assessments may not reveal.	52 (37.14)	52 (37.14)	18 (12.85)	15 (10.71)	3(2.14)	3.95	0.86
22	Subjective evaluations, such as points for effort, are less meaningful than more objective measures of performance.	45 (32.14)	50 (35.71)	15 (10.71)	27 (19.28)	3(2.14)	3.78	0.95
23	Standardized, norm-referenced tests have a useful role to play in student assessment.	46 (32.85)	42 (30)	12 (8)	30 (21.42)	10 (7.14)	3.38	1.12
24	Potential bias and subjectivity should be minimized as much as possible when grading student work.	80 (57.14)	28 (15.55)	28 (15.55)	4 4 (2.85)	0 (0)	3.15	1.01
25	Assessments should primarily evaluate students' understanding	86 (61.42)	30 (21.42)	15 (10.71)	6 (4.28)	3(2.14)	3.40	0.80

	rather than just their ability to memorize material.								
26	The specific types of assessments I use are strongly influenced by the learning objectives of the course or lesson.	96 (68.57)	30 (21.42)	7 (5)	6 (4.28)	1 (7.14)	3.53	0.67	
27	The criteria by which student work is evaluated should closely relate to expectations in the workplace or the real world.	60 (42.85)	41 (29.28)	21 (15)	12 (8)	4 4 (2.85)	3.18	0.88	
28	Students find immediate feedback while learning occurs, the most useful for their ongoing progress.	72 (51.42)	30 (21.42)	12 (8)	21 (15)	5 (3.57)	3.03	0.96	
29	Using rewards and grades is an effective way to motivate students.	40 (28.57)	48 (34.28)	37 (26.42)	9 (6.42)	6 (4.28)	3.75	0.94	
30	Assessments should be culturally responsive and respectful of the diverse backgrounds in my classes.	60 (42.85)	50 (35.71)	24 (17.14)	3(2.14)	3(2.14)	3.28	0.77	
31	Testing accommodations are necessary for some students to fairly demonstrate their knowledge and skills.	72 (51.42)	32 (22.85)	30 (21.42)	3(2.14)	3(2.14)	3.23	0.81	
32	Technology can enhance classroom assessment in various ways.	52 (37.14)	52 (37.14)	18 (12.85)	18 (12.85)	0 (0)	3.00	0.86	
33	Assessment practices are improved through collaboration and discussion with other teachers.	90 (64.28)	35 (25)	5 (3.57)	5 (3.57)	1(7.14)	3.20	0.89	
34	It is important for assessment to evaluate how much individual students have grown and progressed over time.	63 (45)	42 (30)	21 (15)	12 (8)	2 (1.42)	3.85	0.95	

As shown in Table 2, it appears that teachers hold predominantly positive views of assessment practices that emphasize higher-order thinking, application of knowledge, and student-centered practices. More than half of teachers “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that assessments should evaluate critical thinking, incorporate alternative forms of assessment like projects, and provide immediate feedback to support learning. Observation, rubrics, and assessment of understanding rather than memorization were also favored. However, teachers were more divided on the use of portfolios, group work, and homework assessment in terms of agreeing or strongly agreeing with their inclusion in assessment practices. Furthermore, one sample t-test showed that teachers’ beliefs about assessment practices were significantly above the expected mean (2; $M= 2.25$, $t= 5.39$, $p=.00$).

The second research question sought to uncover the assessment practices Iraqi EFL teachers used in their classrooms. For this purpose, the Teachers’ Assessment Practices Questionnaire was administered to elicit the way they have employed assessment practices in class.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Responses to Teachers’ Assessment Practices Questionnaire

	Mostly true	Often true	Rarely true	Never true	M	SD
Please choose the one that best describes your assessment practice.	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
1 Assessment provides me with useful evidence of students’ understanding,	60 (42.85)	60 (42.85)	15 (10.71)		2.01	0.71

	which can be useful when planning subsequent lessons.				5 (3.57)		
2	The next lesson is determined more by the prescribed curriculum than by how well students did in the last lesson.	77 (55)	39 (27.85)	13 (9.28)	9 (6.42)	2.15	0.93
3	The main emphasis in my assessments is on whether students know, understand or can do prescribed elements of the curriculum.	75 (53.57)	41 (29.28)	16 (11.42)	8 (5.71)	2.23	0.85
4	The feedback that students receive helps them improve.	82 (58.57)	32 (22.85)	12 (8)	0 (0)	2.18	1.19
5	Students are told how well they have done in relation to others in the class.	62 (44.28)	47 (33.57)	20 (14.28)	11 (7.85)	2.3	0.89
6	Students are given opportunities to decide their own learning objectives.	71 (50.71)	39 (27.85)	21 (15)	9 (6.42)	2.38	1.2
7	I use questions mainly to elicit factual knowledge from my students.	90 (64.28)	27 (19.28)	18 (12.85)	5 (3.57)	2.2	0.82
8	I consider the most worthwhile assessment to be the assessment that is undertaken by the teacher.	63 (45)	55 (39.28)	10 (7.14)	11 (7.85)	2.05	0.74
9	My assessment practices help students to learn independently.	50 (35.71)	55 (39.28)	28 (15.55)	7 (5)	2.07	1.04
10	Students are told how well they have done in relation to their own previous performance.	70 (50)	60 (42.85)	5 (3.57)	5 (3.57)	2.03	1.14
11	Students' learning objectives are discussed with students in ways they understand.	56 (40)	45 (32.14)	22 (15.71)	17 (12.14)	2.15	1.16
12	Assessment of students' work consists primarily of marks and grades.	80 (57.14)	35 (23.33)	10 (7.14)	15 (10.71)	2.63	1.05
13	I provide guidance to help students assess their own work.	75 (53.57)	44 (31.42)	15 (10.71)	6 (4.28)	2.73	0.98
14	I identify students' strengths and advise them on how to develop them further.	80 (57.14)	50 (35.71)	8 (5.71)	2 (1.42)	2.1	0.86
15	Students are helped to find ways of addressing problems they have in their learning.	70 (50)	62 (44.28)	5 (3.57)	3(2.14)	2.53	0.92
16	Students are encouraged to view mistakes as valuable learning opportunities.	91 (65)	40 (28.57)	9 (6.42)	0 (0)	2.25	0.86
17	Students are helped to think about how they learn best.	77 (55)	46 (32.85)	15 (10.71)	2 (1.42)	2.45	0.79
18	I use questioning mainly to elicit reasons and explanations from my students.	90 (64.28)	32 (22.85)	13 (9.28)	5 (3.57)	2.65	0.83
19	I provide guidance to help students assess one another's work.	60 (42.85)	48 (34.28)	17 (12.14)	15 (10.71)	2.30	0.87

20	Students' errors are valued for the insights they reveal about how students are thinking.	79 (56.42)	49 (35)	10 (7.14)	2 (1.42)	2.50	0.88
21	Students are helped to understand the learning purposes of each lesson or series of lessons.	77 (55)	40 (28.57)	20 (14.28)	3(2.14)	2.25	0.94
22	Assessment of students' work is mainly in the form of comments.	70 (50)	35 (25)	35 (25)	0 (0)	2.60	0.78
23	Students' learning objectives are determined mainly by the prescribed curriculum.	85 (60.71)	46 (32.85)	5 (3.57)	4 (2.85)	2.25	0.94
24	I provide guidance to help students assess their own learning.	55 (39.28)	23 (16.42)	33 (23.75)	12 (8)	2.45	0.87
25	The main emphasis in teachers' assessment is on what students know, understand and can do.	91 (65)	30 (21.42)	10 (7.14)	9 (6.42)	2.45	0.85
26	Students are helped to plan the next steps in their learning	80 (57.14)	44 (31.42)	8 (5.71)	8 (5.71)	2.09	0.76
27	Student effort is seen as important when assessing their learning.	77 (55)	57 (40.71)	6 (4.28)	0 (0)	2.2	0.9
28	Assessment criteria are discussed with students in ways they understand.	83 (59.28)	32 (22.85)	24 (17.14)	1 (7.14)	2.13	0.85
29	Students are given opportunities to assess one another's work.	74 (52.85)	35 (25)	30 (21.42)	1 (7.14)	2.17	1.05
30	Teachers regularly discuss with students ways of improving learning how to learn.	66 (74.14)	35 (25)	35 (25)	4 (2.85)	2.24	0.88

The Teachers' Assessment Practices Questionnaire aimed to find the extent to which Iraqi EFL teachers used assessment practices in their classrooms. The results (Table 3) show that most teachers opted for the choices "mostly true" and "often true" for all 30 items, with "mostly true" having a higher frequency of selection. However, in cases of items 30 (discussing how to learn) and 22 (commenting), the frequency of the two choices of "rarely true" and "often true" were equal, and for item 24 (self-assessment), the frequency of the "rarely true" option exceeded that of "often true". Additionally, one sample t-test showed that teachers' actual assessment practices were significantly above the expected mean (2; $M = 3.58$, $t = 6.47$, $p = .00$).

The last research question aimed to reveal whether there was congruence between Iraqi teachers' stated beliefs and their actual use of assessment practices. For this purpose, a correlation analysis was run to find the go-togetherness of the sub-scales of the two above-mentioned questionnaires as an indication of congruence and alignment between Iraqi teachers' stated beliefs and their actual use of assessment practices. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were run prior to the analysis to ensure the normality of data (Table 4).

Table 4
Test of Normality of Sub-Scales of Two Questionnaires

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnoff			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
A1 – Cognitive level	0.09	140	0.2	0.97	140	0.54
A2 – Types of assessment	0.1	140	0.2	0.97	140	0.52
A3 – Evaluation criteria	0.08	140	0.2	0.98	140	0.82
B1 – Making meaning explicit	0.1	140	0.2	0.97	140	0.6
B2 – Promoting learner autonomy	0.12	140	0.2	0.96	140	0.25

B3 – Performance orientations	0.11	140	0.2	0.97	140	0.58
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The Kolmogorov-Smirnoff and Shapiro-Wilk tests' statistics for the six sub-scales indicated the normal distribution of the data ($p > .05$); therefore, the normality assumption is met, and Pearson correlation can be run on sub-scales scores. It is noteworthy that the three sub-scales of the Teachers' Assessment Practices Belief Questionnaire are numbered with A1-A3, and those of the Teachers' Assessment Practices Questionnaire are numbered with B1-B3.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation Comparing Sub-Scales of Two Questionnaires

Sub-scale	B1	B2	B3	A1	A2	A3
A1	0.32*	0.48*	0.56**	1		
A2	0.25**	0.21**	0.31*		1	
A3	0.4*	0.22*	0.18*			1

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

The Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated significant relationships between the sub-scales of the two questionnaires. The cognitive level sub-scale was positively related to making meaning explicit ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.05$), promoting learner autonomy ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.05$), and performance orientations ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). The types of assessment sub-scale were positively correlated with making meaning explicit ($r = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$), promoting learner autonomy ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), and performance orientations ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$). Finally, the evaluation criteria were positively correlated with making meaning explicit ($r = 0.4$, $p < 0.05$), promoting learner autonomy ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$), and performance orientations ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). In general, the findings confirmed the congruence between Iraqi teachers' stated beliefs and their actual use of assessment practices.

5. Discussion

This study sought to find Iraqi EFL teachers' beliefs about assessment practices, the assessment practices they used in their classrooms, and the congruence or alignment between their practices and beliefs. The findings indicated that the items of the beliefs questionnaire, including the three sub-scales of cognitive level of assessments (e.g., reasoning and application), types of assessments (e.g., portfolios and concept mapping), and evaluation criteria (e.g., improvement and student effort) were highly appraised by participants. Regarding assessment practices in the classroom, the participants reported obtaining, elucidating, and responding to learning evidence; assisting students to acquire a positive orientation of learning (making learning explicit); promoting learning autonomy (an expanded opportunity to assume increased autonomy in defining their learning goals and evaluating both their own work and that of their peers) and an interest in assisting students adhere to performance goals stipulated by the curriculum using careful questioning and assessed by scores and grades (performance orientation).

The data revealed that teachers predominantly support assessments aligned with constructivist pedagogy over rote memorization (Brown & Abdi, 2015; Herbert, 2018). Teachers agreed that evaluations should assess higher-order thinking and real-world application through critical projects and immediate feedback (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996; Wells & Arauz, 2006). Observation, rubrics, and understanding-based assessments were also favored (De Luca & Johnson, 2017; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). The preference for alternative assessments, feedback, and critical thinking implies teachers value student-centered, formative practices over rigid performance measures (Lingard, 2010; Carless, 2007). Esfandiari et al. (in press) also reported Iranian pre-service EFL teachers in the employment of self-assessment, collaborative peer assessment, and portfolios in their classes. This constructivist-informed orientation values authentic engagement and problem-solving over memorization (Brookhart, 2013). Favoring portfolios and standardized tests reveal an openness but not total reliance on objective measures, necessitating deeper exploration (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005).

The results indicating Iraqi EFL teachers favor assessments emphasizing higher-order thinking, application of knowledge, and student-centered practices align with current research on effective evaluation strategies. Recent studies have similarly found teachers supporting assessments that evaluate critical thinking over simple memorization tests (Brown & Abdi, 2015; Herbert, 2018). In addition, preferences for assessments that consider student growth and provide feedback support findings that formative evaluation practices are valued when determining achievement (Wiliam, 2018; De Luca & Johnson, 2017). However, the mixed responses to group work assessments differ from the literature, showing teachers recognize collaborative learning benefits when implemented properly (Zheng et al., 2014). This divergence could stem from differences in classroom realities versus ideals proposed in other contexts.

The findings of the study also demonstrated the congruence between Iraqi EFL teachers' beliefs and practices. Previous studies reported that the beliefs of experienced teachers are more likely to align with their practices than the novice ones (e.g., Hallinger et al., 2021; Ha & Murray, 2021; Tran et al., 2023; Tran et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2020). This might justify the present study findings as the participants were experienced EFL teachers. This alignment indicates the substantial impact of teachers' beliefs on classroom practices. Consistent with this finding, Brown et al. (2009) carried out a study that examined the practices and beliefs of teachers. The researchers identified a direct link between the two. More specifically, a strong relationship was established between the educators' beliefs regarding the utilization of assessment for enhancing educational practices and students' responsibility. For instance, teachers who believe in students' active engagement in their own learning and the effect of peers on learning enhancement might include self-assessment and peer assessment in their classroom assessment practices, indicating a congruency between belief and practice.

Likewise, Ha et al. (2021) studied EFL teachers' practices and beliefs concerning assessment. Data were collected through interviews with teachers and analysis of their test files. The findings demonstrated the significant effect of standardized tests on teachers' beliefs about testing, i.e., the teachers overtly attended to the language-related items in the form and content of the assessment. Such beliefs were precisely manifested in their assessment practices. Wafa (2021) also investigated the assessment practices and beliefs of EFL teachers and found a positive correlation between teachers' assessment beliefs and classroom practices.

The congruency between the present study teachers' assessment beliefs and classroom practices might be further justified by what Basturkmen (2012) calls "planned aspects of teaching." Differently put, classroom assessment practices are planned activities where the teacher's assessment decisions are made carefully considering various factors, including objectives, students, etc. Additionally, the incongruency might happen due to tensions between different belief sets held by teachers (Ha & Murray, 2020), and the literature reveals that experienced teachers have consistent beliefs about teaching/assessment issues (Hallinger et al., 2021). Therefore, the consistency between the beliefs and assessment practices observed in the present study might be influenced by teachers being experienced.

6. Conclusion

This article has elucidated the beliefs and practices of Iraqi EFL teachers in terms of assessment. The study revealed a strong emphasis placed by the teachers on assessing cognitive levels, utilizing various types of assessments, and incorporating evaluation criteria focused on improvement and student effort. Furthermore, the findings highlighted a dedication to obtaining and responding to learning evidence, fostering a positive learning orientation, promoting student autonomy, and guiding students toward achieving performance goals outlined in the curriculum. These insights underscore the commitment of Iraqi EFL teachers to effective assessment practices that not only evaluate student progress but also foster a conducive learning environment.

In general, by shedding light on the assessment landscape in Iraqi EFL classrooms, this research can inform teacher training programs, policymakers, and curriculum developers on how to effectively align assessment practices with teachers' beliefs and educational goals. It may also enhance the professional development of EFL teachers in Iraq and other similar contexts. Apart from uncovering teachers' assessment practices, future researchers are required to determine areas necessitating additional support and development and to uncover issues that expedite or hamper teachers' deployment of helpful assessment practices. Moreover, considering the undeniable role of other stakeholders, e.g.,

students and policymakers, in the assessment process, future researchers can explore these stakeholders' assessment beliefs and theories.

This study is limited by its sample, which consisted of experienced teachers from two cities in Iraq. Furthermore, the data were merely collected by self-report measures, which might have been influenced by participants' desire to be viewed as favorable. Including other data-collection measures might further enrich the findings. In other words, using classroom observations and document analysis can further enhance the exploration of participants' actual behavior in terms of their assessment practices against the background of their beliefs. Last but not least, the sample was limited to EFL teachers, so the findings might not be generalizable to other groups of teachers or even novice EFL teachers.

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