Rethinking Evaluation: Alternative Assessment Approaches Used by EFL Teachers at Tribhuvan University

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Abstract

Alternative assessment moves beyond the limitations of traditional testing by focusing on real-world tasks and student engagement. It provides a more accurate reflection of students' abilities by emphasizing critical thinking and practical application. The present study aims to explore EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of alternative assessment approaches in Nepalese higher education. To accomplish this, 40 EFL teachers were purposively selected from constituent and affiliated campuses of Tribhuvan University, located in the Gandaki and Lumbini provinces. The teachers were provided a set of questionnaires, comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions, to collect the intended information. The study reveals that EFL teachers at Tribhuvan University acknowledge the benefits of alternative assessment; however, some key challenges, including limited training, weak ICT skills, and dependence on traditional exams, hinder its implementation. Functional barriers, such as large class sizes, poor attendance, and resistance from stakeholders, further limit adoption. While assessment approaches like portfolios, oral presentations, and digital tools are highly valued, their use remains inconsistent. Effective reform requires clear policies, regular teacher training, improved infrastructure, and enhanced assessment literacy. Promoting collaboration, reducing class sizes, and expanding access to technology alongside pilot programs and stakeholder engagement can support sustainable, student-centered alternative assessment practices across the university.

Keywords: Semester system, internal assessment, teacher perception and practice, innovative assessment methods, assessment challenges

Introduction

Tribhuvan University (TU), the oldest and largest university in Nepal, had adopted the semester system until the 1970s. However, it could not be sustained for long due to various challenges related to teaching, learning, and examinations (Sharma, 2015). Subsequently, the university switched to an annual system, where students had to engage in a single academic session throughout the year. After the annual system failed to meet the needs of teachers and students, the TU reintroduced the semester system at its central departments in 2014 (Tribhuvan University, 2014). From the academic session of 2018, the system was extended to all constituent and affiliated campuses across the country

at the postgraduate level (Ministry of Education, 2018). Currently, TU has implemented the semester system for all Master level and some Bachelor level programs, incorporating both internal and external assessments. The internal assessment component was introduced to foster students' diverse skills through alternative assessment methods, moving away from the traditional test-based approach. However, its implementation has been largely ineffective due to a lack of clear guidelines and uniform procedures.

Assessment is a cornerstone of education reform, playing a vital role in shaping teaching and learning processes. In educational settings, assessment refers to the diverse methods and instruments used by educators to evaluate students' academic readiness, monitor their learning progress, assess skill development, and identify educational needs (Great Schools Partnership, n. d.). It is a tool or strategy teachers use to gather evidence of student teaching (Chen, 2003). The fundamental purposes of assessment include identifying student strengths and weaknesses, guiding instructional decisions, measuring learning outcomes, and grouping students according to institutional standards (Heaton, 1990).

The value of assessment lies in its ability to provide meaningful feedback for both students and teachers. Brindley (2001) asserts that assessment is not an end in itself but a means of providing useful information about language learning. Formative assessments, for instance, are conducted during the learning process to inform instruction, allowing teachers to adjust their teaching strategies. In contrary, summative assessments evaluate overall achievement at the end of a learning period. No single method of assessment can comprehensively measure all aspects of student progress, which is why a combination of assessment types is often recommended.

Teaching is ineffective unless student assessment is conducted properly. Learning remains incomplete if students fail to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies expected by both the curriculum and the job market. Without a comprehensive learning experience, students cannot achieve their full potential (Pandey, 1994). Consequently, higher education institutions must ensure that their examination systems are standardized and flawless. Assessment in higher education has transformed, particularly since the introduction of outcome-based education, which focuses on learning outcomes. There has been a growing concern for improving the quality of achievement of all learners through a continuous and comprehensive evaluation system in Nepal (Higher Secondary Education Board, 2011). Therefore, the alternative assessment system introduced in the 1990s can assist students in becoming autonomous learners and enable teachers to scaffold their learning.

Despite ongoing educational reforms and the formal introduction of alternative assessment strategies in the higher education system of Nepal, traditional methods of teaching and evaluation still prevail in university classrooms. At Tribhuvan University, this reliance on conventional practices is compounded by low levels of student engagement and academic preparedness. As a teacher educator, my observation reflects that many students are irregular, demonstrate weaknesses in academic writing and presentation skills, and often fail to complete assigned tasks. Even when tasks are submitted, they frequently fall short of expected academic standards, raising concerns about both student motivation and institutional support. These persistent challenges call into question the effectiveness and actual implementation of alternative assessment in higher education settings. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the perceptions and classroom practices of EFL teachers regarding alternative assessment approaches at Tribhuvan University.

Review of Literature

The review of literature has been organized under the four themes: Rethinking evaluation practice, transformative impact of alternative assessment, barriers to effective use of alternative assessment, and current landscape and research gaps.

Rethinking Evaluation Practice

The shift toward alternative assessment stems from the inability of conventional assessment methods to properly reflect the complex and diverse aspects of student learning. Conventional assessments, such as standardized tests dominated by multiple-choice items, emphasize discrete facts, decontextualized tasks, and predetermined correct answers (Bailey, 1998). These assessments are primarily summative, focusing on results rather than the learning process, and tend to promote extrinsic motivation at the expense of deeper understanding and meaningful skill development (Bailey, 1998; Gulikers et al., 2004). Alternative assessment, in contrary, aligns with the constructivist philosophy, which sees learners as active participants in creating their own understanding (Estrin, 1993; Shepard, 2000). Rooted in individual growth and meaningful context, this approach is integrated into daily classroom instruction, allowing teachers to adjust their strategies based on ongoing feedback (Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993; Shepard, 2000). Consequently, alternative assessment has gained growing attention in education, especially for its potential to enhance students' language competence beyond what traditional testing methods can offer. Numerous studies have explored its advantages and limitations, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. In practice, alternative assessment provides a dynamic, learner-centered way of tracking student progress, especially in reading and writing. It moves beyond single-event exams by involving continuous observation of how students plan, monitor, and carry out their learning (Shepard, 2000). Tools such as portfolios, reading logs, and project-based assignments engage students in self-evaluation and reflection. This interactive process fosters a more collaborative relationship between teachers and students, transforming assessment into a shared, meaningful part of the learning experience.

Transformative Impacts of Alternative Assessment

Alternative assessment offers numerous transformative impacts in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and other educational settings, emphasizing a more comprehensive and learner-centered approach than traditional testing. One of the primary benefits of alternative assessment is an ability to assess a wide range of skills and competencies, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. Unlike standardized tests, alternative assessments such as portfolios, presentations, journals, and peer evaluations encourage learners to actively engage in the learning process and reflect on their progress. According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), alternative assessments allow students to demonstrate what they can do with language in real-world contexts, fostering meaningful learning. For instance, alternative assessment significantly improves the writing proficiency of EFL learners (Cuesta et al., 2019). It emphasizes practical skills and real-world applications, encouraging student initiative, autonomy, and responsibility (Janish et al., 2007).

Alternative assessment is particularly effective in EFL contexts as it supports formative evaluation and continuous feedback, both of which are critical for language development. By embedding assessment into the learning process, teachers can identify learners' specific needs and provide timely, targeted support. These methods promote learner autonomy and motivation, as students actively participate in setting personal goals and tracking their progress (Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000; Hansen, 1998). Alternative assessment is inclusive and flexible, accommodating diverse learning styles and cultural backgrounds, which makes it especially relevant in multilingual and multicultural

classrooms. Unlike traditional assessments, it focuses on student growth, offering multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning and improve over time. Through authentic tasks and dynamic evaluation tools, students engage in meaningful learning experiences that develop not only linguistic skills but also many other soft skills and essential competencies. This approach empowers learners and cultivates key personal qualities such as initiative, self-discipline, trust, and responsibility, ultimately preparing them for lifelong learning and global citizenship.

Barriers to Effective Use of Alternative Assessment

Implementing alternative assessment in educational settings, particularly in EFL classrooms, presents several challenges despite its pedagogical advantages. One major challenge is the lack of teacher training and familiarity with alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, self-assessment, and project-based evaluations. Many teachers, especially in developing countries, continue to rely on traditional paper-and-pencil tests due to limited professional development opportunities and institutional support (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). For instance, in the context of Nepal, Acharya (2022) noted that higher education institutions often prioritize summative assessments, leaving minimal room for creative or student-centered evaluation practices. Teachers may also feel unprepared to design and implement alternative assessments that align with curriculum standards and learning objectives.

Another significant barrier is the time and resource intensity of alternative assessment. Unlike conventional exams that are easier to administer and grade, alternative assessments demand ongoing observation, feedback, and individualized student support (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). This can be particularly burdensome in large classes with high student-teacher ratios, as commonly found in South Asian universities. Furthermore, institutional policies and national examination systems often emphasize standardized testing, which can marginalize the use of more formative, learner-centered assessments (Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000). For example, Cuesta et al. (2019) found that while alternative assessment improved students' writing skills in an EFL context, its successful implementation required considerable teacher effort and institutional collaboration; elements not always available in under-resourced settings. These challenges underscore the need for systemic reforms and teacher empowerment to enable the meaningful integration of alternative assessment in education.

Current Landscape and Research Gaps

Research on alternative assessment has widely highlighted its prospects to enhance student learning through critical thinking, learner autonomy, and formative feedback. Studies such as Gulikers et al. (2004) and Brown and Hudson (1998) argue that alternative assessment methods like portfolios, self-assessment, peer evaluation, and project work are more authentic and learner-centered than traditional tests. These approaches are particularly effective in language education, focusing on performance and communication skills. Despite their pedagogical advantages, research highlights some challenges, such as a lack of teacher training, overworkload, and institutional pressure to change.

In the context of Nepal, the research landscape is still emerging but reveals important trends. Acharya (2022) critiqued that the higher education assessment system suffers from limited integration of accountability mechanisms and digital technologies, which undermines both assessment quality and student learning outcomes. Shrestha (2013) studied primary English classrooms in the Kathmandu Valley and found a noticeable shift toward alternative assessment practices. The findings highlighted the teachers' difficulties, such as limited resources, large class sizes, and insufficient professional development practices in the implementation of alternative assessment. Together, these studies suggest that while awareness of alternative assessment is growing in Nepal, systemic support and capacity-building remain crucial for its effective adoption.

Despite the global and local insights, no study has yet explored the actual practice of alternative assessment within the higher education context of Tribhuvan University. This absence highlights a significant gap in the literature. Therefore, the gaps motivated me to rethink evaluation practices by investigating the possibilities, perceptions, and challenges associated with implementing alternative assessment at TU, with the broader aim of contributing to systemic reform and improving educational quality in Nepal.

Methodology

Since the present study aimed to explore EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of alternative assessment, a set of questionnaires was administered to university-level teachers from the western region of Nepal, covering the Gandaki and Lumbini provinces. The areas were chosen for two main reasons: firstly, I was already engaged in academic and administrative work within this region, providing familiarity and access; secondly, selecting these areas allowed for a broader representation of the study's scope, capturing diverse perspectives relevant to the research objectives. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and gathered detailed information about participants' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences in a natural setting since it helps in identifying trends, patterns, and existing conditions without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2012; Cohen et al., 2018). To ensure the diverse range of perspectives, the study purposively included forty EFL teachers from various positions and and collected data using a set of questionnaires comprising both closed and open-ended questions for comprehensive and in-depth responses (Dörnyei, 2007). Similarly, I visited the selected campuses, explained the purposes of the study, and collected the filled-out questionnaires to ensure the clarity and reliability of responses. The data were systematically organized under thematic headings and analyzed using qualitative methods, including percentages and tables (Miles et al., 2014). The findings were compared with existing literature to identify patterns, similarities, and differences. Throughout the research process, ethical guidelines were strictly followed, with particular attention to academic honesty. Efforts were made to avoid any form of data manipulation or plagiarism, ensuring that the study remained honest, transparent, and academically sound (Bryman, 2016).

Results and Discussion

This section is structured around the key themes outlined in the questionnaire. The closed-ended responses have been analyzed using numerical data, percentages, and tables, whereas the open-ended responses have been interpreted through thematic analysis.

Teachers' Perceptions of Alternative Assessment

To identify the views of teachers about alternative assessment, six closed-ended items were asked, and their responses have been collectively presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Teachers' Perceptions and Impact of Alternative Assessment

S. N	Item	Yes (%)	Partially (%)	No (%)
1	Are you familiar with alternative assessment methods (e.g., portfolio, oral presentation, peer assessment, project works)?	70	20	10
2.	Do you regularly use these alternative methods in language assessment?	35	60	5
3	Do you think alternative assessment is more effective than traditional exams in evaluating student learning?	42.5	52.5	5
4	Do alternative assessment methods contribute to promoting students' language development?	65	27.5	7.5
5	Is there institutional support (e.g., resources, encouragement) for implementing alternative assessment at your department/faculty?	42.5	20	37.5
6	Do you face challenges (e.g., time constraints, large class size, and lack of training) in implementing alternative assessment?	47.5	22.5	30

Table 1 reveals that while a majority of teachers (70%) are familiar with alternative assessment methods, only 35% report regularly using them in language classrooms. Despite this limited implementation, many teachers recognize their value: 42.5% believe these methods are more effective than traditional exams, and 65% agree they positively contribute to students' academic and professional development. However, the practical adoption of alternative assessment is hindered by insufficient institutional support, with only 42.5% receiving resources or encouragement and 47.5% reporting challenges such as time constraints or lack of training. These findings highlight a clear gap between teacher perceptions and actual classroom practice, revealing what Birenbaum (2003) identifies as the need for broader systemic reform to support authentic assessment integration. This disconnect also echoes Fullan's (2007) notion of "surface-level change," where innovative practices are acknowledged theoretically but not embedded meaningfully in day-to-day teaching. The lack of formal training further underscores shortcomings in teacher education programs, suggesting that sustainable adoption of alternative assessment demands not only teacher awareness but also institutional alignment, capacity building, and structural change.

Impact of Poor Attendance on Implementing Alternative Assessment

Student attendance is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of alternative assessment. Irregular attendance hinders students from meeting the intended learning outcomes. In this regard, another set of closed-ended questionnaires was administered to teachers to examine how poor attendance affects the use of alternative assessment. Their responses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Impact of Poor Attendance on Alternative Assessment Implementation

S. N.	Item	Major challenge (%)	Minor challenge (%)	Not a challenge (%)
1.	How does poor student attendance pose a challenge for implementing alternative approaches?	50	40	10
2	How does poor attendance demotivate teachers from using alternative assessments in future?	65	25	10
3	Are assessment rubrics and criteria less effective when student participation is inconsistent?	70	15	15

Table 2 indicates that poor student attendance is a major obstacle to the effective implementation of alternative assessment. Half of the teachers (50%) perceive it as a significant challenge, and 65% report feeling demotivated to use alternative methods in the future due to irregular attendance. Furthermore, 70% believe that inconsistent participation undermines the effectiveness of assessment rubrics and criteria. These findings suggest that low attendance not only disrupts assessment processes but also affects teacher motivation and the reliability of evaluation tools. This supports Finn's (1993) view that regular attendance is key to academic success, especially in assessment approaches that rely on ongoing, reflective learning. Mac Iver and Mac Iver (2010) add that poor attendance often reflects deeper issues, such as financial problems or a lack of connection to school. This means that irregular attendance is not just a classroom issue but a wider problem that needs bigger solutions. These could include building stronger teacher-student relationships, making the curriculum more relevant to students' lives, and putting systems in place that support regular attendance and active student involvement.

Use of Paper and Pencil Tests in Internal Assessment

Paper-and-pencil tests are commonly used in internal assessment to evaluate students' understanding of course content through written responses. These tests typically include multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions. Following this, a set of closed-ended questionnaires was posed to identify how teachers are practising and using paper-and-pencil tests in the internal assessment of their campuses, and their responses have been summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Use of Paper-Pencil Tests in Internal Assessment

S. N.	Item	Always (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
1	How frequently do you use paper-and-pencil tests for internal assessment?	15	30	47.5	7.5	-
2	How often do you follow Bloom's taxonomy while administering question papers for the internal exam?	12.5	22.5	57.7	3.5	-

Table 3 illustrates that although awareness of alternative assessment methods is increasing, traditional paper-and-pencil tests remain prevalent in internal assessment practices. With only 15% of teachers always use such tests and 47.5% use them sometimes, there appears to be a gradual shift toward more varied assessment forms. However, full integration of alternative methods remains limited, as only 12.7 % teachers consistently follow Bloom's taxonomy, while the majority (57.7%) do so occasionally. This partial shift reflects the tension between innovation and entrenched practices in assessment. As Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) note, written tests are often preferred for their perceived reliability, objectivity, and ease of administration, particularly within systems heavily influenced by standardized examinations. The inconsistent application of mixed assessment methods suggests systemic challenges, including institutional inertia and lack of support, which hinder the full adoption of more holistic, learner-centered evaluation strategies.

Implementing Alternative Assessment in Language Classrooms

Implementing alternative assessment in language classrooms is a challenging task, primarily due to the overwhelming dominance of traditional paper-and-pencil tests in the current evaluation system. In this context, a set of closed-ended questionnaires was designed to explore how teachers are incorporating alternative assessment methods into their teaching practices.

Table 4

Frequency of Implementing Alternative Assessment Practices

S. N.	Item	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
1.	How often do you follow the norms of alternative assessment?	17.5	72.5	10
2.	How frequently do you integrate alternative assessment with written examinations?	50	25	25
3	How often do you use alternative assessment methods (e.g., portfolio, oral presentation, project works) to assess language skills and aspects?	25	70	5
4	How frequently do you provide feedback to the students while implementing alternative assessment methods?	65	25	10

Table 4 asserts that while there is some level of awareness and occasional use of alternative assessment practices among teachers, their consistent implementation remains limited. Only a small proportion of teachers always adhere to the norms (17.5%), while the majority report doing so only occasionally. It was visible that 50% of teachers always integrate written examinations with alternative assessment methods. While 70% sometimes use methods like portfolios, oral presentations, and project work to assess language skills, only 25% do so regularly. Notably, feedback provision is more consistent, with 65% of teachers always providing feedback during alternative assessments. This sporadic use may reflect broader institutional and contextual constraints, such as lack of training, time, or support systems; factors commonly noted in the literature as barriers to sustained alternative assessment practices (Fullan, 2007). Moreover, the tendency to use alternative assessment "sometimes" suggests a transitional phase where traditional assessment methods still dominate, despite growing recognition of the educational benefits of alternative approaches, such as promoting deeper learning and student autonomy (Gulikers et al., 2004; Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000). These findings highlight the need for clearer institutional guidelines, capacity-building initiatives, and professional development opportunities to enable more consistent and meaningful integration of alternative assessments in language classrooms.

Effectiveness of Evaluation Practices at Tribhuvan University

To assess the implementation of alternative assessment in practice, it is essential to evaluate how it is applied in real classroom settings. With this aim, five closed-ended questionnaires were presented to teachers to gather their views on the effectiveness and fairness of evaluation and alternative assessment practices at Tribhuvan University. Their responses have been summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Effectiveness and Fairness of Evaluation and Alternative Assessment Practices at Tribhuvan University

	Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	DA (%)	SD (%)
1.	The existing evaluation system effectively measures students' language skills properly.	7.5	42.5	7.5	10	2.5
2.	Students have adequate opportunities to showcase their practical and analytical abilities during alternative assessments.	10	55	25	7.5	2.5
3.	The current exam-based assessment system at Tribhuvan University is fair and transparent.	10	52.5	25	12.5	-
4.	I am satisfied with the current evaluation methods implemented by the university.	7.5	35	27.5	30	
5.	Alternative assessment methods promote deeper learning and critical thinking compared to traditional exams.	30	40	30	-	

Table 5 reveals that teachers at Tribhuvan University hold mixed and sometimes conflicting views regarding the effectiveness and fairness of current evaluation practices. While a majority expresses trust in the traditional exam system's ability to measure students' knowledge and skills, this confidence appears to stem more from established institutional norms and habit than from alignment with modern educational goals. The data show that although 65% of teachers believe students have adequate opportunities to demonstrate practical and analytical skills through alternative assessments, a considerable portion remain neutral or doubtful about how well these methods are implemented. Moreover, satisfaction with current evaluation methods is relatively low, with only 42.5% expressing satisfaction despite many perceiving the exam system as fair and transparent. This indicates that, although traditional exams may fulfill administrative and procedural needs, they fall short in promoting deeper learning and a more comprehensive assessment of student abilities.

These findings echo the critiques of Birenbaum (2003), who argues that reliance on traditional tests often signals resistance to change rather than effective pedagogy, as such exams prioritize memorization over critical thinking. The ambivalence toward alternative assessments supports Wiggins' (1990) view that performance-based evaluations require strong design, institutional support, and teacher training to succeed, conditions not fully met in this context. Similarly, Davison and Leung's (2009) critique of exam-focused systems resonates here, as such approaches tend to overlook the diverse skills and competencies students possess. Together, these perspectives underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms that improve assessment design, expand teacher capacity, and foster institutional environments conducive to meaningful, student-centered evaluation practices.

Self-Satisfaction Level of Teachers in their Performance

Self-satisfaction is an important aspect of one's personal and professional life. Teachers, in particular, require a range of competencies and skills. With this in mind, a set of questionnaires was administered to assess teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and skills. Their responses are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Teachers' Satisfaction Level with their Performance

Statements	VS (%)	S (%)	N (%)	DS (%)	VDS (%)
1. Current evaluation approach at TU	7.5	55	30	7.5	-
2. Knowledge and skills on alternative assessment	7.5	40	40	12.5	-
3. Application level of alternative assessments	12.5	35	35	17.5	5
4. Student results/ performance	2.5	40	25	25	7.5
5. ICT skills in student evaluation	5	42.5	45	5	2.5

Table 6 indicates a range of mixed feelings among teachers about their own performance in various assessment-related areas. While a majority express satisfaction with the current evaluation system at Tribhuvan University, this may reflect adherence to institutional norms rather than genuine confidence in its effectiveness, echoing Birenbaum's (2003) observation that surface-level satisfaction can mask misalignments between assessment methods and educational goals. Teachers' neutral or cautiously positive attitudes toward their knowledge and application of alternative assessments, each with around 40% neutrality, highlight significant gaps in both understanding and practical use. Xu and Brown (2016) emphasize that strong assessment literacy is crucial for effective alternative assessment implementation, suggesting that inadequate training and support contribute to these mixed perceptions. Similarly, dissatisfaction with applying alternative methods aligns with Stiggins' (2002) argument that without sustained professional development, efforts to innovate assessment practices remain superficial.

Moreover, teachers demonstrate divided opinions about their satisfaction with student results, with only 42.5% satisfied or very satisfied and a substantial proportion expressing neutrality or dissatisfaction. This division supports Black and Wiliam's (1998) assertion that effective assessment should guide instruction and improve learning outcomes, implying that current practices are perhaps overly reliant on summative exams that fail to fulfill this role adequately. Finally, teachers' moderate satisfaction with their ICT skills in evaluation (47.5% satisfied or very satisfied) points to a need for enhanced digital competency. Wiggins (1990) highlights the importance of integrating new technologies in assessment to maintain relevance and effectiveness, indicating that improved training and institutional support are necessary to empower teachers in utilizing digital tools for student evaluation.

Weaknesses of the Present Evaluation System

The current evaluation system is often criticized for being strict and traditional, mostly relying on one theory-based exam to judge student performance. This focus on theory encourages memorization instead of helping students truly understand concepts or develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical skills (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Following this, T7, one of the university teachers, claimed:

> The present evaluation system of TU is unfair and non-transparent, as there is no clear link between student study and securing marks in the results. They don't know why they secure such unexpected marks. Moreover, memorization matters more than applying student creativity in obtaining the marks in the exams.

The system also lacks clear rules for scoring, which can cause unfairness and inconsistent results, making it hard to trust the accuracy of students' scores (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Another problem is that results are published late, which slows down important feedback that helps students learning and improve (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Regarding this, another teacher (T4) expressed, "The exam system at TU is inconsistent. They are usually late. Sometimes, there is an exam crossing 15 months, and the results take a year. As a result, students feel unequal assessment experiences".

It mostly ignores practical skills and real-life knowledge. Exams are usually given in English or formal academic language, which can be difficult for students who are less skilled in the language and may affect how well they show their understanding (Davison & Leung, 2009). Overall, students' marks may not truly show what they have learned or can do, showing a need for a broader evaluation system that focuses on skills as well as knowledge.

Innovative Approaches to Alternative Assessment

Alternative assessment includes a variety of methods that go beyond traditional tests. These approaches promote higher-order thinking, real-life learning, and student-centered evaluation. Common methods include portfolios, journals, observations, peer and self-assessments, interviews, projects, concept maps, presentations, and digital tools (Al Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Janish et al., 2007). Following this, one of the teachers (T5) claimed, "We can implement many alternative assessment approaches, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, project works, and oral presentations in our language classrooms. These approaches reduce students' anxiety and increase collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills."

Portfolios are collections of student work, such as essays, art, reflections, and videos that show progress and support self-reflection (Birenbaum, 2003; Brown, 2004). *Journal*s allow students to express thoughts and feelings regularly while improving writing skills. *Project-based learning* engages students in real-world tasks that build critical thinking, teamwork, and leadership (Freeman & Lewis, 2005). *Oral presentations* develop speaking skills and confidence while assessing creativity and understanding (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). *Interviews* give insight into students' speaking abilities and learning needs, especially for those who are better at speaking than writing. Concept maps help organize ideas visually to improve understanding (Cuesta et al., 2019). Tools like the *Diagnostic Tree* help identify learning gaps through structured questions (Bransford et al., 2000).

Peer and self-assessment encourage students to reflect on their learning and give feedback to others. This builds independence, responsibility, and goal-setting (Topping, 2009). *Technology* supports flexible, continuous assessment. Platforms like Moodle and Microsoft Teams offer tools for quizzes, discussions, assignments, and feedback, useful for both formative and summative purposes (Redecker & Johannessen, 2013). *Computer-based assessments* give instant feedback and interactive tasks that boost engagement (Yusop, 2018). *Performance-based assessments* like field reports, case studies, and real-life projects connect classroom learning to real situations (Wiggins, 1990). *Teacher observations* help evaluate participation, teamwork, and behavior.

Other effective strategies include *group discussions, simulations, gamification, and presentations*, which make learning more active and engaging. These foster creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills often missed in traditional exams (Biggs & Tang, 2011**)**. *Term papers and research papers* also encourage deep thinking and independent learning. Alternative assessment offers a fairer and more complete way to evaluate students. It reduces dependence on standard exams and helps measure not only academic content but also essential 21st-century skills (Linn & Baker, 1996).

Challenges for Implementing Alternative Assessment

Although alternative assessment has many educational advantages, its implementation faces challenges at multiple levels: students, teachers, institutions, and policy. One major challenge is student resistance. Many students are accustomed to traditional exam systems and may not understand or appreciate alternative assessments. They may lack motivation or the necessary skills to participate fully (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Low digital literacy among both students and teachers limits effective use of online platforms like Moodle or Microsoft Teams (Redecker & Johannessen, 2013). In this regard, one teacher (T10) claimed, "Teachers also often resist change. Many prefer traditional exams because they seem more objective and easier to manage. They worry about the time, effort, and subjectivity involved in assessments like portfolios or projects."

These problems are worse in large classes with poor attendance, limited training, and scarce resources (Black & Wiliam, 1998). At the institutional level, weak policies, poor monitoring, and limited support hinder wider adoption. Political interference and changing priorities can also block long-term progress.

Deciding who should receive alternative assessments is another challenge. Some think it should be only for students who cannot take standard tests, while others argue it should also help students with different learning needs (Lazarus et al., 2012). Proper training for teachers and administrators is needed to make fair decisions, and there is debate over whether parents should be involved. Maintaining consistent educational standards is crucial to ensure fairness for all students (Yell, 2019).

Concerns about reliability and validity are common, especially for students with severe disabilities or for skills like social-emotional learning (Ysseldyke et al., 1997). Reporting accurate data while protecting privacy is difficult, especially with small numbers of such students. Additionally, these assessments are expensive to develop and run, raising questions about sustainability.

As suggested by T6, "Cultural and language diversity adds complexity. English language learners may be unfairly judged by standard tests." Alternative assessments should be adapted to meet language needs, using bilingual tools and support (Solano-Flores & Trumbull, 2003). Technology can improve accessibility, especially for students with disabilities, through tools like text-to-speech or adaptive software. However, unequal access to devices and digital skills creates new equity challenges. Schools need clear policies to ensure technology is used fairly and inclusively in assessment.

Conclusions and Implications

The present study examined the perceptions and practices of alternative assessment among 40 purposively selected EFL teachers affiliated with Tribhuvan University, representing the Gandaki and Lumbini provinces of Nepal. Adopting a descriptive survey and utilizing a questionnaire, the study revealed that although teachers broadly acknowledged the pedagogical value of alternative assessments, such as portfolios and digital tools for fostering deeper learning, learner autonomy, and critical thinking, their effective implementation remains constrained by multiple challenges. These include a lack of formal training, limited ICT skills, and dominance of exam-oriented assessments. Many teachers expressed moderate satisfaction with their current evaluation practices; however, they also revealed uncertainty regarding their assessment skills and the effectiveness of the existing system. Structural issues such as large class sizes, irregular student attendance, and reluctance from students and faculty further complicate efforts to employ more formative, student-centered approaches. Despite these obstacles, there is a growing awareness among teachers of the need for more holistic and innovative evaluation methods. To support this shift, the university must commit to continual

professional development for faculty, invest in essential infrastructure, and develop clear policies that define and promote the role of alternative assessment. With institutional support, Tribhuvan University could gradually transition toward more effective and meaningful assessment practices.

This study implies that there is an urgent need for university policies to clearly define the role of alternative assessment and to develop teachers' assessment skills. Strong support from stakeholders is essential to move a shift toward formative and student-centered practices. Furthermore, infrastructural investment is necessary to enhance classroom digitization and interactivity. As a descriptive survey, the present study cannot provide an in-depth exploration of alternative assessment. Therefore, a qualitative study is needed to investigate the detailed issues related to this topic.

Acknowledgements

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