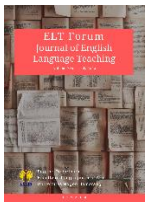
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Teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment practices in large classes: Northern Afghan Universities, English Departments

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Abstract

Alternative assessment has gained increasing attention in higher education due to its potential to promote deeper learning, critical thinking, and student engagement. This mixed-methods study investigated 30 English Department lecturers' perceptions of alternative assessment practices in large classes across nine public universities in northern Afghanistan. The findings revealed that 90% of teachers were familiar with various alternative assessment methods, and 93.3% believed alternative assessment measures students' deeper understanding better than traditional exams. Similarly, 93.3% agreed that alternative assessment encourages students to become more active and responsible learners, while 63.3% expressed preference for alternative assessment over traditional written examinations. However, 60% identified large class size as a major or extreme challenge, 43.3% cited excessive time required for evaluation as a major obstacle, 33.3% reported university policy pressure favoring final written exams as a minor challenge, and 40% indicated lack of clear departmental rubrics as a minor challenge. Group projects and oral presentations were identified as the most practical and manageable methods, with 60% agreeing they are manageable in large classes. Future studies should examine students' perceptions and include larger, more diverse samples.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Gülbahar and Büyüköztürk (2008), assessment is an extended or broad concept appearing as a crucial event which is present in any teaching context, age, institutions and training, or in any settings where learning is desired to take place. Assessment is a teaching component and process of learning. It intends to provide enhancement for those who are assessed and the assessor. So, it can be resulted as a method that is utilized to proliferate the education quality since it can improve lifelong learning proficiencies and develop performance in diverse educational settings. Gülbahar and Büyüköztürk (2008) believed that assessment is divided into two categories which are traditional and alternative assessment. The first one is a kind that focuses basically on the product and consists of traditional tests, such as paper exams, quizzes, standardized tests and so forth. The second one, which is alternative assessment, concentrates on the process and encompasses peer assessment, self-assessment, learner-centered assessment, project, portfolio and so forth. Similarly, Sadler (1989) pointed out that generally there are two kinds of assessments such as summative and formative which are being used in today's schools and the most important difference between them relates to the purpose and outcome but not the timing.

Assessment plays an integral role in proliferating teaching and measuring learner learning. Traditional assessment methods like quizzes and written exams can be utilized commonly in the universities of Afghanistan consisting of Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Faryab, Samangan, Sar-e-Pol, and Jawzjan Universities. But those methods fail to attract a full picture of learner's capacities most of the time, particularly in large classes in which students pay less attention. On the other hand, alternative assessment practices like peer assessment, portfolios, self-assessment, project-based evaluation and oral presentations provide more authentic and inclusive paths to evaluate the progression of learners. Such methods, because of different challenges, are rarely used and implemented in large classroom contexts. Formative assessment practices like interactive assessment and self-assessment impact on the learning of learners positively. It is reported that formative assessment is still being used in Afghanistan since instructors require more educational support (Golzar, Momenzadeh, & Miri, 2022). Likewise, Mussawy, Rossman, and Haqiqat (2021) expressed that such assessment practices encounter some impediments consisting of lack of efficient feedback, more reliance on examinations, and learner-centered assessment approaches are used less or limitedly. Furthermore, Kakar and Sarwari (2022) mentioned that challenges are created by large classrooms like problems in managing classroom, assessment learner's difficulty, low student management and lack of teaching materials or resources. Moreover, in large classes, lecturers confront challenges in evaluation, giving feedback, maintaining discipline and paying attention to learners individually (Qaderi & Bahir, 2024).

Though all those points were discussed by Afghan researchers such as formative assessment, classroom assessment, and large class challenges, there is still so limited research, particularly concentrating on lecturers' perceptions of alternative assessment practices like project-based evaluation, oral presentations, portfolios, self-assessment, and so forth in Afghanistan. Prior researches mostly concentrated on common formative assessment or classroom management problems and did not focus specifically on exploring how instructors in these nine universities of northern Afghanistan perceive and apply alternative assessment practices in large classrooms. This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge by investigating teachers' perceptions of specific alternative assessment practices including portfolios, self-assessment, peer assessment, project-based tasks, and oral presentations in the large class context of nine northern Afghan universities (Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Faryab, Samangan, Sar-e-Pol, and Jawzjan). For this reason, this paper intends to explore teachers' perceptions regarding alternative assessment practices in overcrowded classrooms across these Afghanistan universities.

Prior researchers have focused basically on traditional assessment methods and general formative assessment practices. As Golzar et al. (2022) asserted that formative assessment is still limited in use because of inadequate instructional support, while Mussawy et al. (2021) mentioned weak feedback practices and over-dependence on examinations. Also, Kakar and Sarwari (2022) and Qaderi and Bahir (2024) illustrated difficulties in large classes consisting of management difficulties, lack of resources and less attention to every learner. Although these studies have not adequately discovered alternative assessment practices such as portfolios, peer assessment, self-assessment, project-based evaluation, and oral presentations. Furthermore, there is limited research on how university teachers perceive and implement these alternative assessment methods in large classes. In addition, less attention has been given to specific universities such as Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar,

Baghlan, Badakhshan, Faryab, Samangan, Sar-e-Pol, and Jawzjan Universities. So, a clear research gap exists regarding lecturers' perceptions and implementation of alternative assessment practices in large university classrooms in these Afghan universities.

The purpose of this paper is to explore teachers' perceptions of Alternative Assessment Practices in Large Classes in nine public universities across northern Afghanistan (Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Faryab, Samangan, Sar-e-Pol, and Jawzjan). This study is crucial because it examines alternative assessment practices in Afghanistan higher education, which is still an under-researched area. It concentrates on integral methods such as portfolios, peer assessment, self-assessment, project-based evaluation, and oral presentations. The findings will help teachers better understand how these learner-centered approaches can proliferate teaching and learning in large classrooms. It will also diagnose the main challenges that avoid the effective use of these assessment methods. Moreover, the study will provide useful insights for university administrators and policymakers to improve assessment practices and it will serve as a valuable reference for future researchers working on assessment and classroom evaluation in Afghanistan.

Research questions

1. What are teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment practices in large classes in English departments at northern Universities of Afghanistan?
2. What obstacles do teachers confront when implementing alternative assessment practices in large classes?
3. What strategies do teachers use to apply alternative assessment effectively in large English classes?

Research objectives

1. To explore teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment practices in large classes in english departments at northern afghan universities.
2. To identify the challenges teachers encounter when implementing alternative assessment practices in large classes.
3. To examine the strategies teachers use to implement alternative assessment effectively in large english classes.

Literature review

Nasri, Roslan, Sekuan, Abu Bakar and Nor Puteh (as cited in Huba & Freed, 2000) explained assessment as a process of collecting information and debating information from different sources so as to improve an in-depth knowing of what learners understand, know and are able to do with their knowledge as a consequence of the educational experiences. While Nasri et al. (as cited in Gronlund, 1998) expressed that assessment as method is used to determine the extent to which learners are obtaining the objected learning outcomes of instruction. According to this definition, assessment includes four steps: measuring achievement of learners, defining the performance of learners, summarizing what learners can do, and inferring what they could accomplish. Moreover, according to Susuwele-Banda (2005), it consists of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the learners, monitoring students' progress to obtain expected learning outcomes, gathering data about the effort of students, assigning levels of grade and paving the way for giving feedback to other school parents and officials.

Sadler (1989) pointed out that generally there are two kinds of assessments such as summative and formative which are being used in today's schools and the most important difference between them relates to the purpose and outcome but not the timing. Ates and Büyükkarci (as cited in Brown, 2014) stated that learners' understanding and success are evaluated at the end of the course or unit or a topic. Likewise, Sadler (1989) mentioned that there is a distinction between summative and formative assessments in which the first one is more related to reporting learners' achievement at the end of the course or unit, rather than assessing the progress of the learners which is being done throughout the course or unit. In addition, Ates and Büyükkarci (as cited in Coombe, Folse, & Hubley, 2007) explained that lecturers require various types of assessment and administer them at diverse stages of the course to collect data about learners. They should select the best option to monitor their specific group of learners in particular teaching settings. Accordingly, assessments should be divided by categories, aim or place within the learning or teaching process.

Synthesizing the findings across multiple studies reveals persistent obstacles that recur across different educational contexts. Time limitations, large class sizes, curriculum intensity, and the

dominance of centralized examinations are consistently identified as major barriers to alternative assessment implementation. These challenges appear to be remarkably stable across geographic and institutional settings, suggesting that they reflect fundamental tensions between the ideals of alternative assessment and the realities of formal education systems.

Sari, Anam and Munir (2024) found out four advantages of using alternative assessment: it enhances students' performance, caters to various learning styles and preferences, emphasizes process-oriented learning and improves motivation. In addition, they discovered three barriers and challenges such as subjectivity and trustworthiness, time limitations and the choosing of the appropriate methodology. Sari et al. (2024) asserted that alternative assessment is integral as it suggests a valuable opportunity to enhance learning of learners and should be applied to permit learners to strengthen their skills. Additionally, Superville (2023) showed that using alternative assessment indicates that learners will have the chance that teachers assess them in a variety of diverse ways. Most significantly, learners can participate in the process of assessment.

Puhl (1997) expressed that alternative assessments permit learners to show their knowledge and personal meaning of what they have understood in class. While Suzieleez Syrene Abdul Rahim and Tajularipin Sulaiman (2006) said that alternative assessment techniques inspire higher-order creative and critical thinking in which learners have more control of their learning. There are some reasons that indicate the logics to have alternative assessments. According to Brualdi (1996), learners do not learn similarly, so they should not be assessed merely in a uniform manner. Furthermore, he asserted that alternative assessment emphasizes real-life skills like decision making and problem-solving skills to prepare learners for the real world for the work. Also, Rudman (1989) explained that students' knowledge is only examined by traditional assessment such as paper and pencil tests. Lastly, Wiggins (1990) mentioned that alternative assessment lets lecturers monitor the efficiency of their lessons about the understanding of students and bring changes in instruction if needed. In addition, Nasri, Roslan, Sekuan, Abu Bakar and Nor Puteh (2010) found out that alternative assessment can proliferate self-confidence and active learning among learners and it is appropriate to cultivate creative and critical thinking skills.

According to Neupane (2025), teachers value alternative assessments like portfolios for enhancing in-depth learning, independence, and critical thinking. But implementation is hindered by lack of training, limited ICT skills, exam-oriented systems, large classes, irregular attendance, and reluctance from students and faculty. Lecturers reported moderate satisfaction but uncertainty about their assessment skills. Despite improving awareness of the need for holistic methods, institutional support including clear policies, professional development, and infrastructure is urgently needed. Likewise, Ghaicha and Omarkaly (2018) revealed that the practice of alternative assessment is slowly evolving within the Moroccan EFL context in spite of the very positive attitudes expressed towards it. On the contrary, the practice of traditional assessment appears to be taking the lead in the teachers' practices up to date. They figured out that teachers face different challenges consisting mainly of time limitation, class size, and lack of training. Accordingly, it is recommended that policy makers should address these issues through providing the necessary facilities and the required training on how to deal with them more successfully for a better implementation of the assessment changes.

Monib, Karimi and Nijat (2020) concluded that alternative assessment generally impacts positively on EFL contexts on language learning skills. As well as, Saif Moqbel and Al-kadi (2020) explored that in English Departments of Yemeni Universities, faculty members hold positive attitudes about alternative assessment, but they do not utilize these methods well enough to meet minimum standards. They recommend using alternative assessment to meet modern global assessment practices.

On the other hand, Kassa, Arficho, Getachew and Meressa (2024) have discovered that the use of alternative assessment was not efficient because of diverse challenges such as students and teachers related challenges, features of alternative assessment and resource related challenges. While Faizi, Mal, and Nayak (2025) found that alternative assessment such as portfolio, peer assessment, self-assessment, simulation and so forth show efficiency in improving student's engagement, enhancing critical thinking, growing deeper learning, proliferating feedback literacy and improving critical transferable skills like critical communication, metacognition and so on. At the same time, Kassa et al. (2024) discovered some challenges exist consisting of increased workload for students and staff, reliability concerns, technological obstacles and so forth. It showed that

portfolio, peer assessment etc. Are not inherently superior; however, they offer distinct benefits when met with the outcomes of learning, setting and implemented efficiently.

METHODS

Methodology section highlights the procedures that were followed to collect, analyze, and interpret the data. It describes the research design, participants, sampling strategy, instruments used for data collection, and the procedures which were utilized in this study are included in the below.

Research design

A descriptive survey research design was employed using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach to collect and integrate both quantitative and qualitative data. A structured questionnaire was developed containing closed-ended Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions to capture quantitative data, alongside open-ended questions to collect qualitative responses. The quantitative strand measured teachers' familiarity with alternative assessment, their perceptions of effectiveness, challenges encountered, and strategies utilized. The qualitative strand, comprising three open-ended questions, elicited teachers' detailed explanations of obstacles, successful methods, and suggestions for improvement. Integration of the two data strands occurred at the interpretation stage. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings were then triangulated—qualitative themes were compared with quantitative results to identify convergence, divergence, and complementarity. For instance, quantitative findings showing large class size as a major challenge (60%) were supported and elaborated by qualitative responses describing why classes exceeding 50 students made assessment difficult. Similarly, while quantitative data indicated that 60% of teachers found group projects manageable, qualitative responses explained this was due to simultaneous assessment of multiple students and reduced grading burden. This integration allowed for triangulation of findings, where quantitative data provided breadth (the extent and distribution of perceptions) and qualitative data provided depth (contextual explanations and lived experiences), thereby enhancing the validity and credibility of the study's conclusions.

Respondents

The target population of the study were English language and literature lecturers from English Departments of public universities in northern Afghanistan. A convenience sampling method was utilized and the questionnaire was distributed to teachers at Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Faryab, Samangan, Sar-e-Pol, and Jawzjan Universities. Thirty lecturers, all teaching English Language and Literature, participated in the study. Their teaching experience ranged from less than 2 years to more than 10 years, with the majority (53.3%) having 2-5 years of experience (see Table 2). However, the study has several limitations: the sample was small (n=30), convenience-based, exclusively male, and limited to teachers of English Literature. Consequently, the findings may not reflect the perspectives of female instructors, teachers of other English language skills (e.g., linguistics, methodology, practical courses), or the broader population of English Department lecturers across northern Afghanistan. Future research should include larger, more diverse, and gender-balanced samples to enhance generalizability.

In the study, a non-probability convenience sampling method was used. The questionnaire was shared electronically via Google Forms to accessible English Department lecturers in the targeted provinces (Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Faryab, Samangan, Sar-e-Pol, and Jawzjan). Because of geographic constraints and the practical obstacle of data gathering in the Afghanistan's context, this sampling strategy was chosen.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire was developed based on a review of relevant literature on alternative assessment and large class challenges (Ghaicha & Omarkaly, 2018; Kassa et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2024). The instrument comprised six sections: (A) demographic information; (B) teachers' familiarity and perceptions (5 Likert-scale items); (C) alternative assessment in large classes (4 Likert-scale items); (D) challenges (4 items on a 5-point challenge scale); (E) preferred methods (multiple-response checklists); and (F) open-ended questions (3 items). For content validity, the instrument was reviewed by two lecturers specializing in language assessment and teacher education, who evaluated each item for relevance and clarity. Based on their feedback, ambiguous items were revised. The final instrument

included both closed-ended items for quantitative data and open-ended questions for qualitative responses.

Data collection procedures

Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical approval for the study was secured from the relevant institutional review board at the researchers' university. A structured questionnaire was created and distributed electronically via Google Forms to English Department heads and teachers at Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Faryab, Samangan, Sar-e-Pol, and Jawzjan Universities. The confidentiality assurance and the purpose of the study were explained clearly at the beginning of the questionnaire form. Participants were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and would be used solely for research purposes, and they were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Data collection took place over a period of one week, during which respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. No incentives were offered for participation, and all responses were stored securely to ensure data protection.

Data analysis

After collecting the data, the closed-ended responses have been analyzed using SPSS in numerical data, percentages, and tables, whereas the open-ended responses have been scrutinized and analyzed thematically. Firstly, quantitative data were exported then coded by the researcher for analyzing in SPSS program and descriptive statistics were computed such as frequencies, percentages and cumulative percentages as being seen in tables (1-16). Secondly, qualitative data were scrutinized then analyzed thematically. In analyzing qualitative data, the following procedures were followed: First, responses were read. Secondly, the responses were read and re-read by the researcher to be familiarized with the data. Thirdly, the researcher generated initial codes like university policy, group projects and so forth. Then codes were categorized into themes such as biggest obstacles, successful alternative methods and suggestions for enhancement. Finally, themes were reviewed for deeper understanding and finding the most common themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the findings which were obtained from the participants of the study. The primary aim of the study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment practices in large classes at northern Universities of Afghanistan through structured questionnaire consisting of mixed methods or triangulation. The quantitative data are presented in tables according to frequency, percentages and cumulative percentages. And the qualitative data are presented thematically.

Table 1. Gender

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Male	30	100.0

According to table 1, the subjects of this study were only male teachers from different northern universities of Afghanistan.

Table 2. Years of teaching experience

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Less than 2 years	3	10.0
	2-5	16	53.3
	6-10	6	20.0
	More than 10 years	5	16.7
	Total	30	100.0

Table 2 shows that only three teachers had less than two years teaching experience, while sixteenth of them had 2-5 years of teaching experience and only six lecturers had 6-10 year of teaching.

Table 3. Average class size you teach

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	30–40 students	10	33.3
	41–50 students	13	43.3
	51–60 students	4	13.3
	More than 60 students	3	10.0
	Total	30	100.0

Table 3 indicates 33.3 % of the participants cover 30-40 students, whereas 43.3 % teach 41-50 students and there is 13.3% teach 51-60 students.

Table 4. Subject area you teach

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	English Literature	30	100.0

According Table 4, all the participants teach English literature.

Table 5. I am familiar with various alternative assessment methods (e.g., portfolio, self/peer assessment, project-based tasks)

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	19	63.3
	Strongly Agree	8	26.7
	Neutral	3	10.0
	Total	30	100.0

Table 5 illustrates that 63.3 % of the subjects agreed with the given statement am familiar with various alternative assessment methods (e.g., portfolio, self/peer assessment, project-based tasks)" and 26.7 % of them strong agreed with it, while 10% chose the neutral option. It shows that majority of the respondents expressed their familiarity with different kinds of alternative assessment.

Table 6. Alternative assessment can measure students' deeper understanding better than traditional exams

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	12	40.0
	Strongly agree	16	53.3
	Neutral	1	3.3
	Disagree	1	3.3
	Total	30	100.0

In addition, Table 6 implies 40 % of the participants agreed with "Alternative assessment can measure students' deeper understanding better than traditional exams", and 53.3% strongly agreed with the given statement whereas 3.3 % said neutral as well as 3.3 % disagreed with the mentioned statement.

Table 7. Alternative assessment encourages students to become more active and responsible learners

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	16	53.3
	Strongly Agree	12	40.0
	Neutral	1	3.3
	Disagree	1	3.3
	Total	30	100.0

As the Table 7 shows, 53.3 of the respondents agreed with "Alternative assessment encourages students to become more active and responsible learners" and 40 % of them strongly agreed with the statement. Also, it indicates that 3.3 % chose neutral option, likewise, 3.3 % disagreed with it.

Table 8. I prefer using traditional exams over alternative assessment in my teaching

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	4	13.3
	Strongly Agree	4	13.3
	Neutral	3	10.0
	Disagree	15	50.0
	Strongly Disagree	4	13.3
	Total	30	100.0

Table 8 explains 13.3 % agreed with "I prefer using traditional exams over alternative assessment in my teaching" also 23.3 % strongly agreed with using traditional exam. Furthermore, it states that 10 % said neutral, while 50 % disagreed with traditional exams, and 13.3 % strongly disagreed with the provided statement.

Table 9. Alternative assessment provides more accurate feedback on student progress

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	21	70.0
	Strongly Agree	9	30.0
	Total	30	100.0

As Table 9 illustrates, 70% agreed with "Alternative assessment provides more accurate feedback on student progress" and 30 % strongly agreed with the mentioned statement. While no one expressed disagreement or neutral in this regard.

Table 10. Group projects and presentations are manageable in large classes

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	18	60.0
	Strongly Agree	5	16.7
	Neutral	4	13.3
	Disagree	3	10.0
	Total	30	100.0

Table 10 clearly illustrates 60 % of the participants agreed about "Group projects and presentations are manageable in large classes" and 16.7 % of them strongly agreed with it. But 13.3 % said neutral and 10 % disagreed with that given statement.

Table 11. Providing timely and individualized feedback on alternative assessments is very difficult in large classes

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	18	60.0
	Strongly Agree	6	20.0
	Neutral	3	10.0
	Disagree	3	10.0
	Total	30	100.0

Table 11 presents respondents' perceptions of the difficulty of providing timely and individualized feedback on alternative assessments in large classes. Out of the 30 respondents, 18 (60.0%) agreed that providing such feedback is very difficult, while 6 (20.0%) strongly agreed.

Therefore, a combined 80.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, 3 respondents (10.0%) were neutral, and another 3 (10.0%) disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed. Overall, the findings indicate that a substantial majority of respondents (80%) perceive large class sizes as a significant challenge to providing timely and individualized feedback on alternative assessments. This suggests that the workload associated with assessing large numbers of students may limit teachers' ability to provide personalized and prompt feedback.

Table 12. I have successfully used at least one alternative assessment method in a large class

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Agree	19	63.3
	Strongly Agree	9	30.0
	Neutral	1	3.3
	Disagree	1	3.3
	Total	30	100.0

Table 12 shows a strong level of successful experience with alternative assessment in large classes. 63.3% (19 respondents) agreed and 30.0% (9 respondents) strongly agreed, giving a combined 93.3% positive response. This means that 28 out of 30 respondents had successfully used at least one alternative assessment method. Only 3.3% (1 respondent) were neutral and 3.3% (1 respondent) disagreed, with no respondent strongly disagreeing. These results indicate that alternative assessment methods are widely used and considered feasible in large classes, despite the challenges of providing individualized feedback identified in Table 11.

Table 13. Too much time needed to evaluate alternative assessment (e.g., reading portfolios, listening to presentations

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Not a challenge	6	20.0
	Minor challenge	7	23.3
	Moderate challenge	4	13.3
	Major challenge	13	43.3
	Total	30	100.0

Table 13 shows that evaluating alternative assessments is a significant time-related challenge. The largest proportion, 43.3% (13 respondents), identified it as a major challenge, while 13.3% (4 respondents) considered it a moderate challenge. Thus, 56.6% viewed the time required for evaluation as a moderate or major challenge. In contrast, 23.3% (7 respondents) reported it as a minor challenge and 20.0% (6 respondents) said it was not a challenge. The findings indicate that more than half of the respondents experience considerable difficulty because alternative assessments, such as portfolios and presentations, require substantial time to evaluate, which may increase teachers' workload in large classes.

Table 14. Pressure from university policies favoring final written exams

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Not a challenge	5	16.7
	Minor challenge	10	33.3
	Moderate challenge	6	20.0
	Major challenge	3	10.0
	Extreme challenge	6	20.0
	Total	30	100.0

Table 14 indicates that pressure from university policies favoring final written examinations is a notable challenge to the use of alternative assessment methods. Overall, 50.0% of respondents perceived this pressure as a moderate, major, or extreme challenge, while 33.3% considered it a minor challenge. Only 16.7% reported that it was not a challenge. These findings suggest that

institutional preference for traditional final examinations may constrain teachers' ability to adopt alternative assessment methods, although the degree of pressure varies among respondents.

Table 15. Lack of clear guidelines or rubrics from the department

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Not a challenge	2	6.7
	Minor challenge	12	40.0
	Moderate challenge	3	10.0
	Major challenge	8	26.7
	Extreme challenge	5	16.7
	Total	30	100.0

The table reveals that the lack of clear guidelines and rubrics is a widespread challenge, with 40% of teachers viewing it as a minor issue, while 43.4% perceive it as a major or extreme obstacle. Only 10% consider it moderate, and a mere 6.7% see it as no challenge at all. This indicates that for the vast majority of teachers, the absence of departmental support directly contributes to overwhelming time constraints and grading workloads. Without clear rubrics, teachers face inconsistency and discouragement, ultimately forcing many to retreat to traditional exams. The qualitative comments echo these findings, with teachers requesting "ready-to-use rubrics" and developing creative workarounds like "exit slips." This data clearly demonstrates that providing institutional support through clear guidelines is essential for any successful shift toward alternative assessment.

Table 16. High number of students (large class size)

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Not a challenge	2	6.7
	Minor challenge	5	16.7
	Moderate challenge	5	16.7
	Major challenge	15	50.0
	Extreme challenge	3	10.0
	Total	30	100.0

Table 16 indicates that large class size is a major barrier to implementing alternative assessment methods. Overall, 76.7% of respondents viewed large class size as a moderate, major, or extreme challenge, with 50.0% identifying it specifically as a major challenge. Only 6.7% reported that class size was not a challenge. These findings suggest that the high number of students significantly increases the difficulty of organizing, administering, and evaluating alternative assessments, particularly in large classes.

Qualitative analysis

Theme 1: Biggest obstacles to using alternative assessment in large classes

Regarding this question, respondents recognized several obstacles that hinder the implementation of alternative assessment in large classes effectively. Large class size was the most frequently mentioned impediment or challenge followed by excessive workload and time limitations. Some participants mentioned that when class enrolments exceed 50 students, assessing portfolios, projects, presentations and other alternative assessment tasks become challenging and tough. Also, respondents commonly mentioned policies of university prioritizing traditional written tests that limit teachers' flexibility in using alternative assessment methods. Additionally, lack of training and clear assessment instructions, fixed and dense curricula, insufficient facilities and resources, lack of academic freedom, and unfamiliarity of students regarding alternative assessment methods are another mentioned challenges.

Theme 2: Alternative assessment methods successfully used or preferred

Group projects and oral presentations were the most repeatedly reported methods which were mentioned commonly by the participating teachers. Also, they stated that this method inspires student participation, teamwork, and lessens the grading burden on teachers. Many participants reported that

group presentations pave the way for opportunities for learning, while remaining manageable in large class size. In addition, project-based learning was mentioned as the most common theme. Participants believed that it motivates deeper learning, creativity and critical thinking. Also, portfolio assessment was reported generally, even though some stated that it needs substantial time and effort to evaluate it. Likewise, they stated frequently peer assessment consisting of formed rubrics and staged group projects comprising individualized reflections.

Theme 3: Suggestions for improving alternative assessment practices

Several suggestions were provided by the respondents for proliferating assessment practices. The most common one was the provision of professional development and training workshops. Participants stated that many teachers need practical training and examples of how they implement alternative assessment in large class size efficiently. Additionally, greater flexibility and policy reform were repeatedly recommended in assessment process. It was mentioned that universities should revise test rules and provide teachers with greater freedom in choosing assessment methods. As well as, development of ready-to-use rubrics and assessment guidelines to help lecturers in conducting alternative assessment practices were suggested. Reducing class sizes, introducing progressive assessment practices, providing teaching assistants, and improving technological and digital support were recommended by the participants.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment practices in large classes in English Departments of northern universities of Afghanistan. A structured questionnaire consisting of mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative approaches) was used to gather the data for better understanding of teachers' perceptions. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The results revealed that teachers of English department generally held positive perceptions about alternative assessment despite of experiencing some educational and practical challenges.

It is shown that most of the teachers were familiar with alternative assessment methods and they believed that these methods measures deeper understanding of students more efficiently than traditional examinations. Similarly, Nasri et al. (2010), Monib, Karimi, and Nijat (2020), and Faizi, Mal, and Nayak (2025), who found that alternative assessment increase meaningful learning, critical thinking, and student involvemtn. Also, Sari, Anam, and Munir (2024) discovered that alternative assessment supports process-oriented learning and increase student performance. This research confirms these findings within the context of Afghan higher education, and suggest that lecturers identify the pedagogical benifites of learner-centered assessment methods. In addition, teachers thought that alternative assessment inspires learners to become more active and responsible learners. This result matches with the findings of Superville (2023), who emphasized that alternative assessment provides students with greater participation in the process of assessment. Also, Suzieleez Syrene Abdul Rahim and Sulaiman (2006) believed that alternative assessment increases higher-order thinking skills and gives learners greater control over their learning. So, the present study supports the growing body of literature suggesting that alternative assessment help positively to student autonomy and engagement.

Alos, it was found that most lecturers preferred alternative assessment than exclusive reliance on traditional written examinations. This finding contrasts with the observations of Ghaicha and Omarkaly (2018), who asserted that although Moroccan EFL teachers expressed positive attitudes toward alternative assessment, traditional assessment practices still dominated classroom assessment. While lecturers in both contexts valued alternative assessment, the Afghan lecturers in the present study showed a stronger preference for adopting alternative methods. This difference may be attributed to increasing awareness of student-centered teaching approaches and the perceived limitations of traditional examinations in measuring diverse learning outcomes.

Regarding challenges, large class size emerged as the most significant challenge to accommodate alternative assessment practices. This is similar to previous research. Kakar and Sarwari (2022) recognized large classes as a major obstacle that affect classroom management and assessment practices. Likewise, Qaderi and Bahir (2024) found out that teachers in large classes struggle to prevent students' attention and effective feedback. This study supports these findings by demonstrating that large class sizes make it tough and difficult for teachers to assess portfolios, projects, and presentations efficiently. In addition, time constraints and excessive workload were

also recognized as major challenges. Similarly, Sari et al. (2024), Ghaicha and Omarkaly (2018), and Neupane (2025), who expressed that alternative assessment need additional time for evaluation and feedback. However, unlike some previous studies that concentrated primarily on time limitations, the current study highlights the combined effect of workload, large classes, and institutional policies, which together create considerable pressure on teachers. Moreover, another significant finding concerns the influence of university policies favoring final written examinations. Teachers believed that such policies decrease their flexibility in implementing alternative assessment methods. This result aligns with the findings of Mussawy, Rossman, and Haqiqat (2021) pointed out that higher education institutions in Afghanistan continue to rely heavily on traditional examinations. The present study extends previous research by pointing how policy-related factors directly affect teachers' assessment choices and practices.

In the part it was found that group projects and oral presentations were the most liked and easy-to-handle alternative assessment methods in big classes. These methods are seen as manageable as portfolios. Group projects and oral presentations let teachers assess students at once in one class, which reduces the grading work. Unlike portfolios which need reading and individual feedback for each student oral presentations and group projects allow peer evaluation. This shares the assessment work. Involves students in the process. This is probably why teachers see these methods as practical in big classes. They need individual time per student but still offer chances for meaningful assessment and feedback. This finding matches what Faizi et al. (2025) Said. They stressed that collaborative and performance-based assessment methods are effective in promoting communication, critical thinking and deeper learning. However unlike portfolio assessment, which many studies say is highly effective participants here thought portfolios were beneficial but hard to manage. This is because of the time needed for evaluation. Group projects and oral presentations are methods. They help teachers assess students in classes. Teachers find them easy to manage. They also help students learn and communicate better. Oral presentations are helpful. Group projects are helpful too. These methods are good, for classes. They are practical and useful.

The finding that teachers have a positive view of alternative assessment is interesting. It would be good to know if teachers who have used assessment methods have a more positive view than those who have not. In this study most teachers said they have used at one alternative assessment method. However we did not look at how their experience affects their views. Future studies could look into whether teachers with views are also those who have had good training support from their school and a manageable number of students. These factors can help teachers use alternative assessment methods successfully and make them feel more positive about it. Teachers suggested that schools should offer development programs guidelines on assessment, policy changes, technological support and smaller class sizes to improve the use of alternative assessment. These suggestions are similar to what Neupane (2025) Ghaicha and Omarkaly (2018). Kassa et al. (2024) Said. They stressed the need for schools to support teachers provide training and have policies on assessment. So this study supports the idea that using assessment successfully depends on teachers having a positive attitude and schools being supportive and committed to it. Teachers positive attitude towards assessment is important. Alternative assessment methods help teachers. Alternative assessment is useful, for teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at what teachers think about using ways to assess students in big classes at English Departments in universities in northern Afghanistan. It wanted to know what teachers think about these ways of assessing students what problems they face when they try to use them and how they actually use them in big classrooms. The study found that teachers at universities generally think that using ways to assess students is a good thing and that it helps students learn more deeply participate more think critically and get more useful feedback than they would from traditional written tests. Most of the teachers in the study knew about ways to assess students and thought they were effective in figuring out what students have learned. Even though teachers like the idea of using ways to assess students the study found that it is hard to actually do it because of problems with the context and the university. The biggest problem is that the classes are too big and teachers also have much work, not enough time, and no clear guidelines for assessing students and university rules that still focus on final written tests. These problems make it hard for teachers to give students feedback and to use assessment methods that focus on the learner. However teachers are trying to make assessment by using practical methods like group projects oral presentations, project-based learning and having students assess each

other which work well in big classrooms. This study is important because it is the first to really look at what teachers think about using ways to assess students in universities in northern Afghanistan. The study was limited by its small sample of 30 lecturers, convenience sampling, and the inclusion of only male English Literature teachers from nine northern Afghan public universities. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all university teachers in Afghanistan. Additionally, the study relied mainly on teachers' self-reported perceptions rather than direct observation of assessment practices or student outcomes. Future studies should look at what students think about these ways of assessing compare how different subjects are assessed and see how using different ways to assess students actually affects how well students do academically how well they think critically and how well they learn languages. If future studies include teachers and look at universities, in more parts of Afghanistan we will have a better understanding of how assessment works in Afghan higher education.

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