

FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING AND GLOBAL AWARENESS THROUGH INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION*

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Abstract

In response to the increasing demand for graduates who are not only proficient in their field but also possess critical thinking skills and global competence, this study investigates the impact of innovative assessment practices on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Algerian higher education institutions. With the evolving landscape of education, traditional assessment methods are being increasingly replaced by more dynamic, learner-centered approaches aimed at fostering 21st-century skills. This research employs a descriptive mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to explore the perceptions of 20 EFL instructors and 150 students across five Algerian universities. The study focuses on alternative assessment strategies such as project-based learning, digital portfolios, and peer assessments. Through a combination of student questionnaires, instructor interviews, and document analysis of student portfolios and project work, the research investigates the effects of these innovative methods on student engagement, critical thinking, and the development of global competence. The results reveal the positive influence of non-traditional assessments on learner motivation, analytical abilities, and intercultural awareness. Additionally, the study assesses the challenges faced by instructors and institutions in implementing these approaches and provides recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness. The findings suggest that innovative assessment practices play a crucial role in preparing EFL students for the demands of the globalized world, contributing to both their academic success and their ability to engage meaningfully in diverse, international contexts.

Key words: Critical thinking, EFL, Global competence, Higher education, Innovative Assessment.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of English as a Foreign Language education has been evolving to meet the demands of a more interconnected and rapidly changing world.

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Traditional assessment methods, such as standardized tests and written exams, are often insufficient in capturing learners' higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and ability to navigate diverse cultural contexts. In response to these limitations, innovative assessment practices, including project-based learning, digital portfolios, self- and peer-assessment, and reflective journals, have emerged as promising alternatives. These approaches aim not only to evaluate language proficiency but also to foster critical thinking, learner autonomy, and global competence. However, the integration of such methods in Algerian higher education, particularly within EFL programs, remains limited and underexplored.

This study aims to investigate the implementation and impact of innovative assessment practices in EFL classrooms across five Algerian universities. Specifically, it explores how these assessments are perceived by both students and instructors, how they contribute to the development of students' critical thinking and global competence, and what challenges or support systems influence their adoption. By examining these dimensions, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and practicality of alternative assessment strategies in Algerian higher education.

The study is guided by four key research questions: (1) What are students' perceptions of innovative assessment methods in Algerian EFL classrooms? (2) How do these methods influence learners' critical thinking development and global competence? (3) What are the current practices, challenges, and support needs of EFL instructors regarding innovative assessments? and (4) What evidence of learning outcomes can be observed in student portfolios and project-based work?

Based on a review of the literature and the pedagogical potential of non-traditional assessment, the study hypothesizes that innovative assessment practices have a positive impact on EFL learners' critical thinking and global competence and are generally perceived more favorably than traditional forms of assessment by both students and instructors.

The overarching aim of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness and perceptions of innovative assessment practices in fostering critical thinking and global competence among Algerian EFL learners. To achieve this aim, the study sets out to: (1) assess students' attitudes toward non-traditional assessment methods, (2) explore how such assessments influence students' cognitive and communicative skills, (3) identify instructors' practices, challenges, and support needs in applying innovative assessments, and (4) analyze student work for evidence of higher-order thinking, creativity, and global awareness.

A mixed-methods research design was employed to provide both breadth and depth of understanding. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 150 EFL students. Qualitative insights were obtained via semi-structured interviews with 20 instructors selected purposively for their experience with innovative assessments. Additionally, document analysis was conducted on 20 student portfolios and 15 project-based assignments to evaluate tangible outcomes of these practices. Together, these three tools offer a triangulated

perspective on the state and impact of innovative assessment in Algerian university EFL settings.

The subsequent sections of this study are organized to provide a deeper understanding of the topic at hand, a detailed examination of the collected data and their implications, and a comprehensive discussion that connects the research findings to the broader literature on assessment in EFL contexts. Therefore, the impetus of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of how innovative assessment can be effectively implemented to enhance EFL teaching and learning in Algerian higher education.

2. Literature Review

Recent decades have witnessed a pedagogical shift from traditional, summative evaluation to more dynamic, formative and innovative assessment practices in foreign language education. This transformation reflects a broader movement toward learner-centered approaches that aim to cultivate not only language proficiency but also essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and global competence (Boud, Falchikov, 2007). In the context of English as a Foreign Language, innovative assessment methods such as project-based learning, digital portfolios, peer assessment, and reflective journals are increasingly recognized for their role in deepening learning and enhancing student engagement (Andrade, Brookhart, 2016).

Project-based learning (PBL), for example, encourages learners to solve real-world problems and present their findings, promoting both linguistic and cognitive development. Research shows that PBL allows EFL learners to apply language skills in authentic contexts, fostering collaborative learning and enhancing problem-solving abilities (Stoller, 2006). Similarly, digital portfolios support learner autonomy and reflection, as students are given the opportunity to curate and evaluate their own progress over time (Barrett, 2007). These tools not only enhance metacognition but also support differentiated learning, accommodating students with varying proficiency levels and learning styles.

Peer assessment has also garnered attention as a means of encouraging critical reflection and active learning. Topping (2009) argues that when students assess one another's work, they develop evaluative judgment and internalize assessment criteria more effectively. In EFL settings, such collaborative practices promote interaction in the target language and help students engage more deeply with course content (Vo, Nguyen, 2023).

Beyond academic benefits, innovative assessment strategies have been linked to the development of global competence—defined as the capacity to communicate and interact effectively across cultures. According to Barrett (2021), global competence includes the ability to examine global and intercultural issues, appreciate diverse perspectives, and engage in respectful dialogue. Classroom tasks that incorporate intercultural themes or international collaboration can support these outcomes, especially when assessments reward critical reflection on cultural diversity (Deardorff, 2006).

Despite these advantages, implementing innovative assessments presents several challenges. Studies highlight issues such as time constraints, insufficient training, rigid curricula, and lack of institutional support as common barriers in higher education settings (Carless, 2007; Hung, Hwang, Huang, 2012). Instructors may also encounter resistance from students unfamiliar with non-traditional evaluation methods, which underscore the need for clear communication and scaffolding.

In the Algerian context, few empirical studies have examined how innovative assessments impact EFL learners' cognitive and intercultural development. However, recent research reflects growing interest and emerging practices in this domain. For example, Boudibi and Beleulmi (2024) explored Algerian EFL university instructors' understanding of Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA), revealing that while teachers recognized the value of formative assessment practices such as peer feedback and self-assessment, many faced implementation challenges due to heavy teaching loads and limited training opportunities.

Similarly, Ghounane and Rabahi (2017) highlighted systemic constraints in teaching and testing English in Algerian higher education, noting that summative testing continues to dominate despite policy-level advocacy for more communicative and competency-based evaluation methods.

The study calls for greater alignment between assessment practices and pedagogical goals, as well as improved teacher development programs.

A more practice-oriented perspective is presented in Bouadjaj and Belhadj (2024), who investigated how Task-based Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (TBLA) has emerged as a dynamic approach in language education. This approach emphasizes the integration of real-world tasks to improve English language acquisition in higher education. The study examines the theoretical foundations and practical application of TBLA, underscoring its potential to enhance learner motivation, communication skills, autonomy, and overall language proficiency. It also sheds light on innovative, performance-based assessment strategies aligned with TBLA principles, offering valuable pedagogical insights for university instructors aiming to implement more engaging and effective language teaching practices. Despite the promise of these approaches, the study also notes ongoing challenges related to institutional support and practical implementation.

These findings underscore the uneven uptake of innovative assessment in Algerian universities but also point to a growing awareness of its pedagogical potential. The studies collectively suggest that while there is receptiveness among instructors, broader structural and institutional support is needed to fully realize the benefits of learner-centered assessment.

This literature review underscores the importance of integrating alternative assessment methods into EFL instruction as a means to promote deeper learning, critical thinking, and global readiness. It also highlights the need for context-specific research to better understand how such innovations function in Algerian universities and to identify strategies that can overcome existing implementation barriers.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. The aim was to provide a comprehensive understanding of how innovative assessment practices influence the development of critical thinking and global competence among EFL learners in Algerian higher education. By combining numerical trends with in-depth insights, the methodology allowed for a more holistic examination of classroom practices and their outcomes.

3.1. Participants

The study targeted EFL instructors and undergraduate students from five public universities in Algeria: Barika University Center, Biskra University, Setif 2 University, Constantine 1 University, and Blida 2 University. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to select participants who had experience with or exposure to innovative assessment methods. The sample included 20 EFL instructors and 150 undergraduate EFL students who had engaged with non-traditional evaluation formats, such as project-based learning, digital portfolios, and peer assessment.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

To collect data, three complementary tools were employed: a student questionnaire, instructor interviews, and document analysis. The student questionnaire consisted of structured Likert-scale items divided into four key sections. The first section addressed students' perceptions of innovative assessments, gauging attitudes toward methods such as project-based tasks and peer feedback. The second section focused on the development of critical thinking, exploring how such assessments promote analytical skills, argumentation, and reflection in English. The third section examined global competence, investigating how classroom practices encourage intercultural awareness and preparedness for global communication. The final section considered institutional and pedagogical aspects, such as the availability of guidance, course flexibility, feedback mechanisms, and students' receptiveness to non-traditional assessment methods.

The instructors' interview was semi-structured and comprised six open-ended questions designed to capture the perceptions and experiences of the selected 20 EFL instructors. These interviews delved into the types of innovative assessments currently in use, including digital portfolios, peer evaluations, and reflective journals. Instructors also discussed the perceived effects of these practices on students' critical thinking, language development, and engagement. Furthermore, the interviews explored the extent to which such assessments enhance global competence, along with challenges related to institutional support, classroom constraints, and the need for additional resources. This qualitative data provided nuanced insights into how assessment is evolving toward more student-centered, competency-based approaches.

The third tool, document analysis, involved a systematic review of selected student portfolios and project-based assignments. This qualitative method aimed to evaluate the tangible outcomes of innovative assessments within real classroom contexts. A total of 20 portfolios and 15 project tasks were analyzed, drawn from

various EFL courses across the five participating universities. These documents were purposively selected to reflect a variety of proficiency levels, assignment types, and assessment formats. The analysis emphasized indicators such as critical thinking, language proficiency, global awareness, creativity, task structure, and the depth of self-reflection exhibited by students.

3.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the student questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques via SPSS software, enabling the identification of response patterns and trends across the student population. Meanwhile, qualitative data from instructor interviews and document analysis were processed through thematic analysis. This method allowed recurring themes and categories to emerge, offering a deeper understanding of how innovative assessments impact learners and how they are situated within institutional and pedagogical contexts.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the student questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with a smaller sample of participants prior to the main data collection. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a reliability score of 0.87, indicating a high level of consistency among the items. Additionally, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating data from three sources: student questionnaires, instructor interviews, and document analysis. This triangulated approach strengthened the credibility and validity of the findings by allowing for cross-verification across different data types and perspectives, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive and trustworthy interpretation of the study's outcomes.

4. Findings

This section presents the key findings derived from the three data collection tools employed in the study: a structured questionnaire administered to EFL students, semi-structured interviews conducted with EFL instructors, and document analysis of selected student portfolios and project work. These tools were used to triangulate data and provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of innovative assessment practices on students' critical thinking skills and global competence in Algerian higher education. The quantitative data from the questionnaire offers insights into students' perceptions and experiences, while the qualitative data from interviews and documents deepen the interpretation by exploring instructors' perspectives and actual student outputs.

4.1. Students' Questionnaire

This data gathering tool presents the quantitative results gathered through the student questionnaire, which aimed to explore learners' perceptions of innovative assessment practices and their influence on engagement, critical thinking, and global competence. A total of 150 EFL students from five Algerian universities responded to the questionnaire. The data is organized into four thematic categories: perceptions of innovative assessment, development of critical thinking, global competence, and

institutional/pedagogical aspects. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, are used to highlight key trends and patterns in student responses.

Section A: Perceptions of Innovative Assessment

This section explores students' general attitudes toward innovative assessment methods, such as project-based learning, digital portfolios, and peer assessment. The items aim to assess how engaging, effective, and enjoyable students find these non-traditional approaches compared to conventional exams. It also evaluates the frequency with which such methods are used in their EFL courses.

Table 1. Perceptions of Innovative Assessment

Item	SD		D		N		A		SA	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1. I find project-based learning more engaging than traditional exams.	5	3%	12	8%	28	19%	65	43%	40	27%
2. Digital portfolios help me monitor my progress in English.	6	4%	14	9%	30	20%	60	40%	40	27%
3. Peer assessment allows me to reflect on my learning process.	4	3%	11	7%	35	23%	63	42%	37	25%
4. Innovative assessments make the learning experience more enjoyable.	3	2%	8	5%	27	18%	68	46%	44	29%
5. My instructors often use non-traditional assessment methods in class.	10	6%	18	12%	40	27%	52	35%	30	20%

The findings from Section A of the questionnaire indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions toward innovative assessment methods in EFL classrooms. A majority of respondents expressed agreement with the statement that project-based learning is more engaging than traditional exams, with 70% selecting either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree,” while only 11% disagreed. Similarly, 67% of students agreed that digital portfolios help them monitor their progress in English, indicating a strong appreciation for tools that support self-directed learning. Peer assessment was also viewed favorably, with 67% agreeing that it encourages reflection on their learning process. Notably, the highest level of agreement was observed for the statement that innovative assessments make the learning experience more enjoyable, with 75% of students expressing positive sentiments. This suggests that alternative assessment methods not only support skill development but also enhance students' overall engagement and motivation. However, when asked whether their instructors frequently use non-traditional assessment methods, only 55% agreed or strongly agreed, while 18% disagreed and 27% remained neutral. This indicates that, despite students' favorable views, there may be inconsistencies in the application of these innovative practices across courses. Overall, the data highlight

a clear student preference for dynamic, learner-centered assessment approaches, while also pointing to a potential gap in their consistent implementation within the classroom setting.

Section B: Critical Thinking Development

The second section investigates the extent to which students believe innovative assessment practices contribute to the development of their critical thinking skills. It includes items that examine learners' ability to analyze information, construct arguments, reflect on their learning, and confidently engage with complex ideas in English as a Foreign Language.

Table 2. Critical Thinking Development

Item	SD		D		N		A		SA	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1. Innovative assessments help me analyze and evaluate information critically.	4	3%	10	7%	30	20%	68	45%	38	25%
2. I have become better at forming arguments and supporting them with evidence.	3	2%	9	6%	35	23%	64	43%	39	26%
3. Reflective activities (e.g., journals) enhance my thinking about my own learning.	5	3%	11	7%	33	22%	66	44%	35	24%
4. I often have to justify my choices in tasks and assignments.	6	4%	12	8%	38	25%	63	41%	32	21%
5. I am more confident in discussing abstract or complex topics in English.	7	4%	13	9%	36	24%	58	39%	36	24%

The results from the second section indicate that a substantial majority of students perceive innovative assessment practices as beneficial to the development of their critical thinking skills in EFL contexts. For Item 1, 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that such assessments help them analyze and evaluate information critically, while only 10% disagreed. Similarly, 69% of students acknowledged improvement in forming arguments and supporting them with evidence (Item 2), reinforcing the role of innovative assessments in fostering structured reasoning. In Item 3, 68% agreed that reflective activities enhanced their metacognitive awareness, suggesting that tasks like journals are effective in promoting introspective learning. Furthermore, Item 4 reveals that 62% of students often have to justify their choices in tasks and assignments, a key indicator of critical thinking engagement, despite a modest 12% expressing disagreement. Lastly, Item 5 shows that 63% of respondents felt more confident discussing abstract or complex topics in English, highlighting that innovative assessments also support linguistic and cognitive development simultaneously. Overall, the data suggest that students

widely recognize the positive impact of alternative assessments on cultivating higher-order thinking skills essential for academic and professional success.

Section C: Global Competence

This section focuses on how assessment practices in EFL classrooms help students build global awareness and intercultural communication skills. The items assess whether classroom tasks promote understanding of cultural diversity, encourage collaboration with peers from different backgrounds, and prepare students to function in a globalized academic or professional environment.

Table 3. Global Competence

Item	SD		D		N		A		SA	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1. I find project-based learning more engaging than traditional exams.	5	3%	10	7%	36	24%	63	42%	36	24%
2. Digital portfolios help me monitor my progress in English.	4	3%	12	8%	33	22%	66	44%	35	23%
3. Peer assessment allows me to reflect on my learning process.	6	4%	9	6%	34	23%	65	43%	36	24%
4. Innovative assessments make the learning experience more enjoyable.	3	2%	8	5%	31	21%	70	47%	38	25%
5. My instructors often use non-traditional assessment methods in class.	5	3%	10	7%	32	21%	68	46%	35	23%

The findings from section C demonstrate that innovative assessment practices are perceived by students as contributing significantly to their global awareness and intercultural communication skills. For Item 1, 66% of students agreed or strongly agreed that classroom tasks involve global or intercultural themes, indicating that content with international relevance is being integrated into EFL instruction. Similarly, 67% of respondents affirmed that they had worked on projects requiring consideration of different cultural perspectives (Item 2), suggesting that assessments are fostering intercultural sensitivity and understanding.

In Item 3, 67% of students agreed that innovative assessments prepare them to communicate effectively in a global context, further underlining the alignment between assessment practices and real-world communication demands. Item 4 revealed that 72% of participants developed collaboration skills with diverse peers through group work, emphasizing the value of cooperative learning in building interpersonal competence. Finally, Item 5 showed that 69% of students felt more aware of global issues due to the tasks completed in their EFL classes, indicating that such assignments successfully encourage a broader worldview. Overall, the responses point to the strong potential of innovative assessment to enhance global competence among EFL learners, equipping them with the skills needed for effective interaction in multicultural and international settings.

Section D: Institutional and Pedagogical Aspects

The last section evaluates the institutional support and classroom conditions surrounding the implementation of innovative assessments. It examines whether students receive adequate guidance, if course structures allow for such assessments, the timeliness of instructor feedback, and students' openness to more widespread use of alternative evaluation methods in the future.

Table 4. Institutional and Pedagogical Aspects

Item	SD		D		N		A		SA	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1. I find project-based learning more engaging than traditional exams.	7	5%	15	10%	38	25%	62	41%	28	19%
2. Digital portfolios help me monitor my progress in English.	10	6%	18	12%	40	27%	55	37%	27	18%
3. Peer assessment allows me to reflect on my learning process.	6	4%	13	9%	35	23%	68	45%	28	19%
4. Innovative assessments make the learning experience more enjoyable.	8	5%	14	9%	36	24%	64	43%	28	19%
5. My instructors often use non-traditional assessment methods in class.	3	2%	7	5%	26	17%	68	46%	46	30%

The results from the last section reveal moderate to strong student support for the institutional implementation of innovative assessment practices in EFL courses. Regarding institutional encouragement (Item 1), 60% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their institution supports project-based or non-traditional assessments, although 15% expressed disagreement, suggesting room for broader institutional endorsement. In Item 2, 55% of students reported receiving guidance or training on alternative assessment tasks, while 18% disagreed, indicating a need for improved instructional support and clearer expectations.

Responses to Item 3 show that 64% of participants felt there was sufficient time allocated within their courses for project-based or reflective tasks, though 13% disagreed, pointing to time constraints as a potential barrier. Similarly, 62% of students in Item 4 agreed that instructors provide timely feedback on innovative assignments, which is essential for meaningful learning and progression. Finally, Item 5 revealed high enthusiasm for alternative assessments, with 76% of students expressing a desire to see more of these methods in future EFL courses. This overwhelming support highlights a positive student disposition toward shifting away from traditional testing in favor of more dynamic, learner-centered evaluation strategies.

4.2. Instructors' Interview

The instructors' interview aimed to gather qualitative insights from 20 EFL instructors experienced in innovative assessment practices across Algerian universities. Using a semi-structured format with six open-ended questions, the interview explored the types of non-traditional assessments used, their impact on students' critical thinking and language skills, and changes in student engagement. It also examined how these assessments support global competence, the challenges faced in implementation, and the resources needed to enhance their use in EFL classrooms.

Item 01. What types of innovative assessments do you currently use in your EFL classes?

Most instructors reported using a range of innovative assessment methods including project-based learning, peer assessment, reflective journals, presentations, and digital portfolios. These approaches were selected to move beyond traditional testing and promote active learning. Thematic patterns revealed a strong preference for assessment types that foster student autonomy, creativity, and collaboration. A few instructors also mentioned experimenting with online discussion forums and task-based evaluation.

Item 02. How do these methods affect your students' critical thinking and language development?

Instructors widely agreed that innovative assessments significantly enhance students' critical thinking and language proficiency. They noted improvements in learners' ability to analyze texts, construct arguments, and express complex ideas more confidently. Thematic analysis showed that reflective and project-based tasks, in particular, encouraged deeper engagement with content and improved learners' academic discourse.

Item 03. Have you noticed changes in students' engagement when using non-traditional assessments?

Responses highlighted noticeable increases in student motivation and participation when using non-traditional assessments. Instructors observed that students were more enthusiastic about completing tasks that were meaningful, collaborative, and tied to real-world issues. A recurring theme was that students felt a stronger sense of ownership over their learning, which translated into improved attendance, effort, and communication.

Item 04. In your opinion, how do these practices contribute to global competence?

Many instructors believed innovative assessments played a role in developing students' global awareness and intercultural communication skills. Assignments that incorporated international themes, cultural comparisons, or group collaboration with peers from different backgrounds were cited as particularly effective. A key theme was that these practices made students more open-minded and better prepared for global communication.

Item 05. What institutional or classroom-level challenges have you encountered in implementing innovative assessments?

Instructors identified several challenges, including lack of institutional support, limited training, rigid curricula, and large class sizes. Time constraints and resistance from both colleagues and students also emerged as common barriers. Thematic coding indicated that although instructors were motivated to innovate, systemic and logistical factors often limited the extent to which they could apply such methods consistently.

Item 06. What support or resources would help you integrate these methods more effectively?

Participants expressed a clear need for professional development workshops, institutional encouragement, and flexible curricular policies. Access to digital tools and smaller class sizes were also mentioned as necessary to facilitate implementation. A major theme was the desire for a supportive teaching environment where innovation is recognized and resourced adequately.

4.3. Documents Analysis

The third data collection tool examined 20 student portfolios and 15 project-based assignments from EFL courses across five Algerian universities. This qualitative method aimed to assess the practical outcomes of innovative assessments. The selected documents represented varied proficiency levels and task types, and were analyzed for evidence of critical thinking, language development, global competence, and the quality of structure, creativity, and reflection.

The analysis of student portfolios and project work revealed several recurring patterns that align with the goals of innovative assessment. First, most portfolios demonstrated clear evidence of reflective learning, with students articulating their language learning process, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and setting goals. Reflective journal entries and self-assessment forms were common, showing increasing levels of metacognitive awareness. In terms of critical thinking, project tasks often required students to analyze problems, propose solutions, and support arguments with examples or data. Many projects, particularly research-based and problem-solving tasks, showed structured reasoning and coherent argumentation, suggesting that students were engaging with content at a deeper cognitive level.

Regarding language development, the documents reflected progress in vocabulary range, academic writing skills, and spoken fluency (as evidenced by video-recorded oral presentations attached to some portfolios). Students frequently integrated feedback from peers and instructors, revising their work accordingly, which indicates an ongoing learning process fostered by formative assessment strategies. The element of global competence was also visible in several projects. Students explored topics such as climate change, gender equality, and cultural identity, often incorporating perspectives from multiple cultures. Group projects in particular highlighted intercultural collaboration, as students reflected on working with peers from different backgrounds.

Overall, the document analysis provided tangible evidence of how innovative assessments not only enhanced language proficiency but also promoted independent learning, reflective practice, and global awareness.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the growing significance of innovative assessment methods in fostering critical thinking and global competence among EFL learners in Algerian higher education. Data from the student questionnaire revealed strong agreement with statements supporting the effectiveness of project-based learning, digital portfolios, and peer assessments. These approaches were perceived as more engaging and conducive to deeper learning than traditional examinations. This reflects the shift toward student-centered learning advocated in contemporary language education literature (e.g., Boud, Falchikov, 2006).

From the instructors' interviews, it became evident that innovative assessments are not only well-received but also actively employed in various forms, such as reflective journals, group presentations, and intercultural projects. Instructors emphasized that such practices enhance students' analytical abilities and encourage them to take ownership of their learning as key components of critical thinking development. Furthermore, several instructors observed improved classroom participation and greater willingness among students to tackle abstract or complex topics, reinforcing the quantitative findings.

The document analysis supported these claims, offering tangible evidence of learning outcomes. Portfolios and project work demonstrated students' abilities to synthesize information, reflect on personal progress, and incorporate intercultural perspectives. These findings align with global competence frameworks (e.g., Barrett (2021), which stress the importance of engaging students in culturally diverse and globally relevant tasks.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also highlighted several challenges. Institutional barriers such as rigid curricula, lack of time, and insufficient training for instructors were frequently cited in interviews. These limitations often hinder the full integration of innovative assessments into mainstream EFL programs. This echoes previous studies (e.g., Carless, 2015) that point to systemic constraints in assessment reform.

Nonetheless, both students and instructors expressed a clear interest in seeing broader adoption of innovative practices. Students showed openness to non-traditional tasks, and instructors called for more institutional support, such as training workshops and curriculum flexibility. This indicates a readiness for change and a foundation upon which policy reforms and professional development initiatives could be built.

In sum, the convergence of data from all three sources suggests that innovative assessment practices hold strong potential for enhancing not only linguistic outcomes but also essential soft skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and global awareness. However, their successful implementation requires structural support and pedagogical innovation at both institutional and classroom levels.

6. Recommendations

Based on the research findings and discussion, this study fervently recommend the following:

1. Ongoing training and workshops are essential to help instructors effectively design and implement non-traditional assessments. This includes familiarization with tools that support critical thinking and global competence.
2. Institutions need to invest in digital tools and classroom resources that facilitate innovative assessments, including platforms for portfolio development, collaboration tools, and intercultural learning materials.
3. Students should be introduced to the purpose and expectations of innovative assessments early in their academic journey. This could be achieved through orientation sessions or scaffolded assignments.
4. EFL departments across universities should establish networks to share successful assessment strategies, sample tasks, and evaluation rubrics to ensure consistency and quality.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of innovative assessment practices on the development of critical thinking and global competence among EFL learners in Algerian higher education. Using a descriptive mixed-methods approach that included student questionnaires, instructor interviews, and document analysis, the research provided comprehensive insights into how alternative assessments, such as project-based tasks, digital portfolios, peer assessments, and reflective activities, can enhance language learning outcomes and promote essential 21st-century skills. Findings revealed that these practices significantly contribute to students' ability to analyze, reflect, and engage meaningfully with complex global issues while fostering greater engagement and collaboration in the classroom. Despite the positive outcomes, the study also highlighted institutional and pedagogical challenges, including limited training, time constraints, and a lack of systemic support. Overall, the research emphasizes the importance of integrating learner-centered, formative assessment strategies into EFL instruction to better prepare students for academic and professional success in a globalized world. Future efforts should focus on capacity-building for instructors and the creation of enabling environments that support sustainable assessment innovation.

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