Online Classroom Assessment Competence and Practices among Cambodian EFL Lecturers: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This study examines online classroom assessment competence and practices among Cambodian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers. It focuses on their perceived competence, practices, and challenges in conducting online assessment. The study employed a mixed-methods design, involving 22 EFL lecturers completing a survey and three lecturers participating in in-depth interviews. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The quantitative findings revealed that Cambodian lecturers had a moderately high level of perceived assessment competence. The qualitative findings showed that they faced a number of challenges in conducting online assessment, including difficulties in facilitating online tests, dealing with heavy marking workloads, coping with potential cheating and plagiarism, and dealing with student-related issues. This study emphasizes the need for providing regular assessment training and offers implications for practice and research.

Keywords: Online classroom assessment; assessment competence; assessment practices; Cambodian EFL lecturers

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that the quality of teaching and learning can be influenced by the quality of classroom assessment literacy of the teachers (Earl, 2013; Green, 2014; Heritage, 2013; Hussain et al., 2019; Stiggins, 1999). According to Öz and Atay (2017), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers who believe themselves to be familiar with the classroom assessment terms and concepts have difficulty in applying the assessment practice to be reflective of their assessment knowledge. Tao (2014) found that Cambodian lecturers possessed limited classroom assessment literacy, leading to weak classroom practices, causing them to give marks to borderline students' results to pass them. A similar issue was also reported by Sun and Cheng (2014) about Chinese EFL teachers' grading practices.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning was ubiquitous. There were reports of many challenges faced by teachers and students, including technicality and accessibility issues (Abduh, 2021; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Heng et al., 2023; Özüdoğru, 2021; Perwitasari et al., 2021), connectivity and disruptive learning environment issues and reduced interactions with lecturers and peers (Heng et al., 2023), and psychological issues including stress, anxiety, and frustration (Lischer et., 2022; Looi, 2001). Assessment is one of the major concerns in online teaching. As Burke (2020) stated, the major difference that comes between face-to-face and online teaching is the predominant use of technology, which also tends to add workload pressures and distraction for teachers from their regular role as an educator because they are required to develop information and communication technology (ICT) skills on top of their teaching skills.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, researchers have examined the challenges and opportunities of online learning and students' perceptions toward online learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Heng et al., 2023). Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), for example, found a lack of digital competence among learners and teachers, human and pets' interruption, and limited ability to prevent cheating during online tests. Flynn and Himel (2020) found

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the need to increase investment in online classes and the need to maximize the use of ICT in online classrooms for general education.

In the Cambodian context, several studies have been conducted about online learning during COVID-19 (Chet et al., 2022; Heng et al., 2021, 2023) exploring the opportunities and challenges of online learning in Cambodian higher education, found various challenges concerning online learning. They included (a) high spending on internet data, (b) connectivity issues, (c) disruptive learning environment at home, (d) reduced instructor-student interactions, (e) mental health issues, (f) limited access to digital devices, (g) difficulty in digital adaptation, (h) low motivation, and (i) limited knowledge, skills, and experience to online learning. Overall, these studies found that students were not really satisfied with online learning due to its difficulties in learning, unfamiliarity with online learning platforms, loss of interactions, limited ICT skills, and mental health issues. However, there appears to be limited research exploring online classroom assessment in the Cambodian context, particularly among EFL lecturers, which leaves a huge knowledge gap to be filled.

In light of this knowledge gap, the present study aims to examine Cambodian EFL lecturers' online classroom assessment competence and practices and explore the challenges they face in conducting online assessment. The study is significant in that it provides fresh insights into Cambodian EFL lecturers' online assessment practices. The study also calls for concerned stakeholders to take timely action to enhance the quality and management of assessment practices, particularly online assessment in higher education.

This study is guided by three research questions:
1. What are Cambodian EFL lecturers' perceptions about their online classroom assessment competence?
2. How are Cambodian EFL lecturers' online classroom assessment practices?
3. What challenges do Cambodian EFL lecturers face when engaging in online classroom assessment?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Assessment knowledge base
Assessment literacy begins with the study of assessment knowledge base (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Popham, 2009) because assessment knowledge base "lies at the heart of assessment literacy." (Xu & Brown, 2017, p. 134). Appropriate use of classroom assessment provides teachers, students, and relevant stakeholders with significant data about learners' performance and progress and about the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved in the class (Giraldo, 2021).

There have been a number of studies on assessment in pre-service and/or in-service teachers in the context of general education (Hussain et al., 2019; Mertler, 2003). For example, Plake (1993) examined assessment knowledge base of 555 schoolteachers. The findings revealed that pre-service teachers scored highest in the area of appropriate assessment method selection and lowest in validating grading procedures, while in-service teachers performed well in terms of administering, scoring, and interpreting assessment results method and performed badly in the development of valid grading procedures. These findings were later confirmed by Mertler's (2003) and Mertler and Campbell's (2005) studies on measuring the assessment knowledge base of 197 in-service teachers and 67 pre-service teachers as well as 101 in-service teachers and 67 pre-service teachers, respectively. The findings of both studies suggested that in-service teachers generally performed better in the assessment knowledge test than pre-service teachers.

López-Mendoza and Bernal-Arandia (2009) conducted a study to investigate the impact of the lack of training in assessment to a group of in-service EFL teachers in Colombia. The study showed that their uses of classroom assessment were rather summative than formative in nature and were not often used regularly. Moreover, it was also revealed that the assessment was misused where test scores were unintentionally used for what they were not intended, and there was a need for assessment training to the language teachers in terms of instruction, using, scoring, and analysing and interpreting assessment results.

Assessment beliefs and practices
According to various studies in different geographical locations such as Hong Kong (Brown et al. 2009), the United Kingdom (James & Pedder, 2006), the United States (Sikka et al., 2007), and Cyprus, Greece, and Germany (Vogt & Tsagari, 2017), much of the focus has been on teachers'

assessment beliefs and practices of schoolteachers rather than those at university levels. The results showed that formative assessment played an important role in student learning; therefore, teachers must uphold these values and practice formative assessment more frequently in the classroom by providing students with meaningful feedback and involving them to be the active agent of their own learning. It was found that the teachers had never attended any assessment training, and they believed that their assessment literacy was limited, leading them to practice ineffective classroom assessment. These findings suggest the need for regular assessment training.

Challenges to online classroom assessment

Various terms such as 'E-learning,' 'online instruction,' 'online teaching,' 'distance education,' 'distance learning,' 'web-based learning,' and 'online learning' have been used interchangeably to refer to the use of ICT to teach, learn, communicate, and collaborate remotely using computers or mobile devices (Anderson, 2011; Ko & Rossen, 2010; Rapanta et al., 2020; Tarhini et al., 2016). When teachers switched to online teaching, however, they experienced various challenges (Abduh, 2021; Heng & Sol, 2021). The literature on online teaching before the COVID-19 pandemic has identified a number of challenges for online assessment, such as teacher absence, unfamiliarity of online platforms, lack of teacher-student interaction, and difficulty in providing feedback (Holmes & Gardner, 2006). However, in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of challenges have been identified. For example, Abduh's (2021) study with EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia identified several challenges, such as (a) a lack of physical interaction; (b) high risk of cheating and plagiarism; (c) technical difficulties and connection instability; (d) difficulty in assessing a large online class; (e) difficulty in assessing speaking tasks; and (f) the need to deal with students' request for late submission. Likewise, Perwitasari et al., (2021) who conducted a study with over 6,600 teachers of all levels of schools in Indonesia found that the teachers faced the following challenges: (a) difficulty in assessing student performance and checking their understanding; (b) difficulty in providing meaningful feedback; and (c) potential cheating and plagiarism.
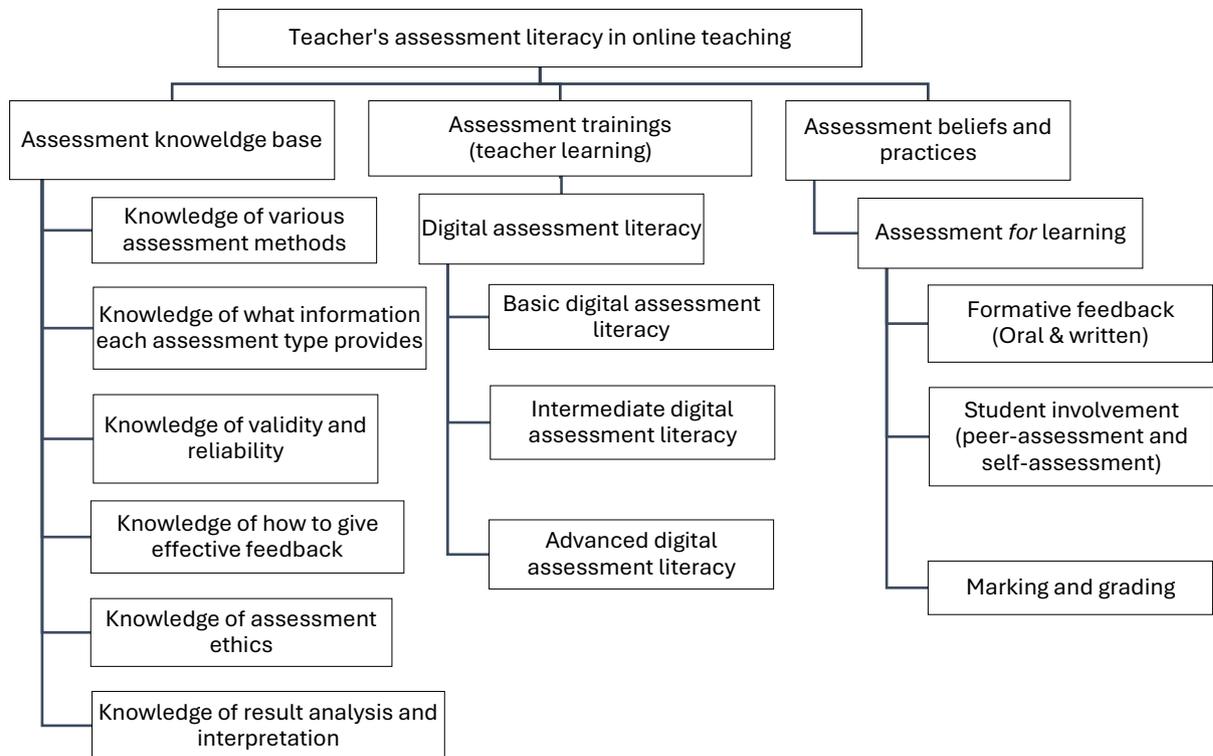

Figure 1. Framework for researching teacher's assessment literacy in online teaching (Source: Authors' synthesis of relevant literature)

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To be assessment-literate in a classroom context, it is important that teachers possess a good knowledge base of assessment. Boyles (2005) and López-Mendoza and Bernal-Arandia (2009) noted that the important elements of assessment knowledge base included (a) a general understanding of various assessment methods; (b) insightful knowledge of what information each assessment type would provide; (c) clear concepts of validity and reliability; (d) effective feedback given to students; (e) ethical considerations of testing, assessment practice, and the interpretation of test results; and (f) the inclusion of test results in teaching.

As the world keeps changing, and the educational landscape has also transformed from a physical class to an online class, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, where teachers became facilitators who had to handle technical supports before, during, and after their online teaching and digital assessment literacy (Eyal, 2012).

In addition to the assessment knowledge base and digital assessment literacy, teacher beliefs also play a significant role in their assessment practices (Borg, 2003; Burns, 1992; Richards et al., 1996; Vogt et al., 2020). James and Pedder (2006) suggested upholding assessment *for* learning, thereby making formative feedback an integral part of student learning. Furthermore, student participation by becoming active agents of their own learning. They can engage in self-assessment, peer-assessment, and rubric development which could lead to their own co-construction of knowledge. As such, teachers need to be assessment-literate to perform their teaching and facilitating roles in online teaching effectively (Martin & Bolliger, 2018).

These important elements and concepts provide a foundation for developing a conceptual framework for this study, as shown in Figure 1.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design that consisted of two phases for data collection (Creswell & Clark, 2018). In the first phase, quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire. The data from the first phase was analyzed, and the qualitative data collection was built directly on the quantitative results, meaning that the results of the first phase were used to plan the second phase for the development of the follow-up qualitative investigation of the focused phenomenon.

Research setting

In this study, a Department of English of one foreign language institute in a public university was chosen as the research site as this university switched to online teaching, all the lecturers of this English department were all Cambodian nationals with similar education backgrounds, years of teaching experience, academic qualifications, and teaching hours. Lastly, the lecturers in this department are known to design and develop their own assessments–both formative and summative assessments (Moore, 2017). A total of 22 lecturers accepted the invitation and participated in the online survey. The demographic information of these participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the survey respondents (n = 22)

Demographic	Value	Fre-quency	Percent-age
Gender	Male	17	77.3
	Female	5	22.7
Age group	24-30	8	36.35
	31-35	3	13.63
	36-40	5	22.72
	41-45	4	18.18
	45-50	2	9.09
Academic qualifications	Bachelor	3	13.6
	Master	17	77.3
	PhD	2	9.1
Employment status	Full-time	15	68.2
	Part-time	4	18.2
	Missing	3	13.6
Years of teaching experience	Less than 1	1	4.55
	1-5	7	31.82
	6-10	3	13.63
	11-15	8	36.36
	16-20	0	0
	Over 20	3	13.63
Teaching many hours is difficult for online assessment practice	Yes	16	72.7
	No	4	18.2
	Invalid	2	9.1
Teaching many students is difficult for online assessment practice	Yes	16	72.7
	No	4	18.2
	Invalid	2	9.1

Demographic	Value	Fre-quency	Percent-age
Having received assessment training as a student	Yes	21	95.5
	No	1	4.5
Having received assessment training as a lecturer	Yes	17	77.3
	No	5	22.7

Table 2. Profiles of the interview participants

Participant code	Lecturer A	Lecturer B	Lecturer C
Gender	Male	Female	Female
Age	24	26	50
Qualification	Bachelor	Master	PhD
Teaching experience	3 years	5-6 years	Over 20 years
Online teaching experience	3 years	2 years	3 years

In the second phase, three lecturers (two were females) were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Table 2 provides information about these participants.

Research instruments

This study used two instruments: a survey questionnaire and interview questions. The questionnaire was adapted from two questionnaires, namely the Self-Confidence Scale in Educational Measurement (Alkharusi, 2010) and Teacher Self-perceived Assessment Competence (Al-Bahlani, 2019, adopted with a written approval) with minor modifications. The interview questions were developed by the researchers based on the analysis of the quantitative findings. The questions covered different aspects ranging from background information to perceptions about online classroom assessment, practices, experiences, and challenges.

RESULTS
Quantitative results
Perceived competence in classroom assessment

Table 3. Perceived competence in classroom assessment (n = 22)

No.	Perceived classroom assessment competence	M	SD	Min	Max
1.	Constructing and administering assessment	3.99	0.69	1	5
2.	Analysing assessment results	3.49	0.93	1	5
3.	Performance assessment	4.23	0.69	1	5
4.	Grading	4.05	0.70	1	5
5.	Communicating assessment result to others	4.02	0.76	1	5
6.	Assessment ethics	4.13	0.79	1	5
7.	Digital assessment literacy	3.88	0.75	1	5
8.	Overall competence	3.97	0.76	1	5

Online classroom assessment practices

Table 4. Frequency of online classroom assessment practices (n = 22)

No.	Online classroom assessment practices	M	SD	Min	Max
1.	Using traditional assessment methods	3.83	0.99	1	5
2.	Using performance assessment methods	3.29	1.17	1	5
3.	Analyzing assessment results	3.80	0.83	1	5
4.	Communicating assessment results to students	3.74	0.93	1	5
5.	Using assessment standards and criteria	3.08	1.14	1	5
6.	Using student-involved assessment	3.18	0.96	1	5
7.	Using non-achievement-based grading	2.70	1.11	1	5
8.	Using digital assessment	3.94	0.82	1	5

Qualitative Results

The analysis of data from the semi-structured interviews with the three EFL lecturers revealed three main themes: (1) perceived knowledge of classroom assessment, (2) factors influencing online classroom assessment, and (3) challenges in conducting online classroom assessment.

Perceived competence in classroom assessment

The interview participants were asked to describe their own understanding of classroom

assessment. They defined the term 'classroom assessment literacy' as knowledge or awareness to be able to assess student learning and performance. Lecturer A asserted that he possessed sufficient knowledge of digital assessment, but most of his knowledge came from asking his colleagues or particularly younger lecturers for advice in conducting quizzes or assessment. When Lecturer B was asked to give her opinion about her own knowledge of digital classroom assessment, she mentioned that she still needed more improvement and training because she believed that this would help her and other lecturers to have more effective practice. Despite her long years of service as a lecturer, Lecturer C, in contrast, admitted that she had never heard of digital classroom assessment literacy. She stated that "I have never heard of classroom assessment literacy, let alone digital classroom assessment literacy."

When asked whether or not they had attended any assessment course during their pre-service or undergraduate programs, all the three lecturers stated that they only had a short lesson of assessment in one course during their senior year. Only Lecturer C had an opportunity to study more insightful lessons in the assessment course during her master's degree in Australia.

Moreover, when they were asked to describe their professional training experiences in online classroom assessment, all the three lecturers claimed that the department where they worked had not provided them with any professional training regarding classroom assessment, and they had to learn more about it from their own colleagues.

Online classroom assessment practices

Regarding their online assessment practices, the three lecturers had similar practices. Lecturer A tended to conduct a few forms of assessments before, during, and after the course. Lecturer B and Lecturer C stated that they tended to focus more on their formative assessment practices. Lecturer B commented that she did not incorporate a wide range of online assessment activities compared to her past experience. Moreover, in order to check students' comprehension, she would ask for volunteers or randomly select students to answer questions. She stated that it is one way to check whether the students understand the lessons or not by using questions, such as "What have you

learnt from the lessons?" For Lecturer C, she reported that she conducted some quizzes in online classes as an enforcing discipline mechanism of punctuality and participation.

Lecturer A and Lecturer C commented that their current teaching hours were fine for them to have enough time for the assessment practices with 15 hours and 18 hours of teaching, respectively while Lecturer B complained of heavy workload. All the three lecturers agreed that their current average number of students in their classes could affect how they practiced assessment in online teaching.

These lecturers also emphasized the importance of providing feedback to their students using online classes as a part of the learning process. They utilized both oral and written feedback to help students understand their strengths and areas for improvement. Despite online teaching, the three lecturers maintained the use of rubrics and shared the marking criteria with their students.

Challenges in conducting online classroom assessment

The data showed that there were various challenges faced by these EFL lecturers. These challenges are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Key challenges in conducting online classroom assessment

No.	Key challenges
1	Difficulty in facilitating quizzes and tests online due to the unfamiliar use of technology & the limited provision of training
2	Unstable internet connection
3	Heavy marking workloads (i.e., long essays and presentations)
4	Difficulty in checking students' comprehension
5	Dealing with limited teacher-student interaction
6	Dealing with potential cheating and plagiarism
7	Health issues (i.e., lack of physical movements and eye problems)
8	Dealing with student-related problems (i.e., student forgot passwords or had issues with digital devices)

As shown in Table 5, there are a range of challenges the participants faced in conducting online assessment. When Lecturer C she was asked whether or not she had received any training, she mentioned that the trainings were conducted once or twice by other lecturers who were undertaking

their study overseas that was more like a sharing session in a video conference on how online teaching was conducted in other countries during the COVID-19 outbreak.

DISCUSSION

This study found that Cambodian EFL lecturers perceived themselves to be somewhat highly competent in classroom assessment. The role of pre-service and in-service trainings is crucial in ensuring their assessment literacy. This study found that the EFL lecturers communicated the results and feedback with students most frequently as part of the assessment for learning. The lecturers also involved their students in the assessment process, and they favoured formative assessment over summative assessment in their teaching.

In addition, the present study revealed that the lecturers had minimal pre-service assessment and lacked in-service training, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic when all the classes were entirely operated online. Therefore, they were forced to learn about online assessment by themselves or from their colleagues. This finding suggests that educational assessment training in both pre-service education and in-service professional development programs should be provided or institutionalized (Latif, 2021).

This study also found various challenges to the conduct of online classroom assessment. The lecturers were found to try to teach as many classes as possible to earn additional income, leaving little time for them to provide to ensure the effectiveness of their classroom assessment, especially in providing meaningful feedback to their students. It is interesting to note that the lecturers' assessment practices are shaped by non-academic factors. For example, they sometimes give high scores or good grades to their students due to their demonstrated commitment, effort, positive attitudes, and active class participation. Such assessment practices have also been reported in different contexts, such as China (Cheng & Sun, 2015), Greece (Zbainos, 1999), Indonesia (Arrafii, 2019), and the United States (Kelly, 2008).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has showed that the Cambodian EFL lecturers had moderately high competence in classroom assessment. However, they reported having limited knowledge of digital literacy and ICT skills, preventing them from implementing online class assessment effectively. The study identified several factors contributing to the challenges in conducting online assessment, such as limited pre-service and in-service training, heavy teaching loads, large class size, and students' limited commitment and engagement. There were also cases of inappropriate assessment practices such as providing late feedback and rounding-up scores leading to grade inflation. Other challenges identified included unfamiliarity with newly introduced technologies or tools for online teaching, unstable internet connection, and difficulty in managing online quizzes or tests, dealing with heavy marking workloads, and coping with potential cheating and plagiarism, among others.

This study has a few implications. First, since lecturers are the key agents in charge of classroom assessment practices, they must possess knowledge about classroom assessment to perform their online classroom assessment effectively. This requires them to attend proper educational assessment courses both through pre-service and in-service training. Online classroom assessment is bound to have challenges, particularly in terms of ICT knowledge and skills, student and assessment task management, and other unexpected challenges related to technology. Therefore, assessment training and digital assessment literacy training needs to be regularly provided to enhance lecturers' assessment knowledge base needed to ensure effective assessment practices. The training needs to consider the format and content, mode of delivery, frequency, and evaluation mechanisms. Moreover, lecturers should be encouraged to practice fair and unbiased assessment to ensure reliability and validity of the test scores and assessment results.

Despite its contributions to addressing the knowledge gap, this research has limitations related to a small sample size, the use of self-ratings to measure assessment literacy, and a lack of classroom observations. Therefore, future research should address these limitations. Furthermore, it is desirable to measure actual assessment literacy and skills using an exam-like assessment test where critical scenarios are given for the lecturers to reflect and make decisions with a triangulation of classroom observations and

reviews of relevant documents in a longitudinal study.

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