

Promoting Alternative Assessment in Vietnamese Higher Education: Overcoming Challenges in Language Education

Ngo Nguyen Thien Duyen, Vo Trong Nghia*

ABSTRACT

Growing dissatisfaction with traditional assessment methods has prompted a global shift towards alternative assessment (AA) in language education. Within the EFL context, AA promises comprehensive evaluation and holistic learning. However, regional contexts shape its adoption. Nations like Vietnam, steeped in Confucian heritage, face unique challenges integrating AA due to institutional barriers. This literature review explores AA practices and perceptions among Vietnamese university-level EFL stakeholders. It aims to identify barriers to AA adoption, investigate strategies for overcoming them, and offer recommendations to advance assessment practices in Vietnamese higher education. This study contributes to assessment reform discussions within the region, providing insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers.

Key words: alternative assessment, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Vietnam, higher education, institutional barriers, stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of meaningful and effective assessment practices has been a central concern in language education for decades. The limitations of traditional assessment methods, often criticized for their emphasis on rote memorization and standardized testing, have spurred a global shift towards alternative assessment (AA). AA, with its focus on real-world application, critical thinking, and communication skills, promises a more comprehensive and holistic evaluation of student learning (Ahmad et al., 2020; Brown & Hudson, 1998)^{1,2}. The transformative potential of AA in fostering holistic language learning experiences has been underscored by numerous studies (Abedi, 2010; Nguyen & Truong, 2021; Cheng et al., 2016)³⁻⁵.

However, the adoption of AA is not without its challenges. Its implementation is shaped by unique contextual factors that varies across different regions. In East Asian nations like Vietnam, deeply rooted in Confucian heritage culture, the integration of AA faces particular hurdles. Despite efforts since Vietnam's Doi Moi (Reform) policy in 1986, traditional teacher-student hierarchy and institutional barriers continue to pose obstacles to the widespread adoption of AA (Ngo, 2024; Nguyen & Burns, 2017; Tran & Tran, 2021)⁶⁻⁸. The persistence of conventional assessment methods, often prioritizing lower-order cognitive skills over higher-order thinking and creativity, has created a pressing need to understand the

perceptions and practices of AA among university-level EFL stakeholders in Vietnam.

With conventional assessment methods often taking precedence, there exists a pressing gap in the local research landscape: a deep understanding of alternative assessment practices and literacy among university-level EFL stakeholders. This literature review addresses this gap by examining the language assessment landscape and how stakeholders namely administrators and lecturers perceive it in Vietnamese higher education, thereby exploring the way these elements influence actual assessment practices.

Thus, the specific objectives of this literature review are as follows:

1. To identify and analyze the institutional barriers to the adoption of alternative assessment methods in Vietnamese universities.
 2. To explore strategies for overcoming these challenges and promoting the effective implementation of alternative assessment.
 3. To provide recommendations for policy, practice, and future research to facilitate the integration of alternative assessment in Vietnamese higher education.
- By achieving these objectives, this literature review seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on assessment practices in Vietnamese higher education and provide insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers striving to advance assessment practices in the region.

Ho Chi Minh City University of
Economics and Finance

Correspondence

Vo Trong Nghia, Ho Chi Minh City
University of Economics and Finance

Email: nghiavt@uef.edu.vn

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Assessment in Education

Assessment encompasses the systematic process of documenting and evaluating knowledge, skills, dispositions, or beliefs acquired during instructional sequences (Koç et al., 2015)⁹. Assessment plays a pivotal role in every educational system, serving as a method to ascertain educational achievements and students' successes (Lutsenko et al., 2023)¹⁰.

In the realm of language assessment, two main varieties have emerged: traditional assessment and alternative assessment (AA) (Brown & Hudson, 1998)². Their distinctions are shown in table 1 below, followed by an elaborated analysis of their characteristics.

As shown in Table 1, traditional language assessment refers to methods employing conventional techniques, typically formal and standardized tests. Alternative assessment methods, as defined by Topping (1998)¹¹, encompass both individual and group work, collaboration, self-assessment, and peer assessment.

Feature-wise, traditional language assessment and AA are distinct in various aspects. Traditional assessments typically emphasize the recall of facts, content knowledge, and the application of procedures and formulas (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995). However, traditional assessment is often limited in terms of feedback. It instead provides absolute grading (Black & William, 1998)¹² and primarily focuses on measuring and ranking students based on their knowledge and skills, often through tests, quizzes, and multiple-choice questions (Glaser et al., 2001)¹³. Therefore, it may not always reflect real-world abilities, can induce anxiety, and often pay little attention to higher-order thinking skills (Linn, 2000)¹⁴.

Alternative language assessment, on the other hand, employs a wider range of formats, including essays, projects, portfolios, presentations, and performances (Herman et al, 1992)¹⁵. Under such evaluations, students are required to showcase their application of knowledge in real-world contexts, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Stiggins; 2005)¹⁶. This broader scope allows for a more holistic view of student abilities and promotes their active role in learning.

Also unlike traditional language assessments, AA focuses on continuous data collection and situational contingencies. Results from AA provide specific and descriptive feedback of learners' strengths, weaknesses, progress and areas for improvement (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2003)¹⁷. Terms like authentic assessment, performance assessment, and continuous or

ongoing assessment are therefore used interchangeably with AA (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Bachman & Palmer, 2011)^{18,19}. For consistency, the term 'alternative assessment' will be used throughout this paper.

As AA allows varied informal or formal assessment techniques, it enables students to demonstrate their abilities in contexts beyond traditional test rooms, aligning with the principles of student-centered learning (Sandford & Hsu, 2013)²⁰. This is important, as assessment is widely acknowledged and empirically proven to be an inherent, impactful part of teaching and learning. In fact, students often prioritize preparation for assessments over broader curriculum goals (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010)¹⁸. By utilizing AA, instructors can flexibly adapt assessment to students' needs, and assume the roles of not only a supervisor but also partner and collaborator in language learning, practice and performance (Sandford & Hsu, 2013)²⁰.

A reason why integrating AA into language programs have garnered endorsement is due to its pivotal role in providing decision-making information. In the assessment of students' work, traditional assessment primarily evaluates individual performance (Chappuis et al., 2012)²¹. In contrast, AA offers language teachers a deeper comprehension of their students' development. To explain, AA may be influenced by either the product or process methods (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010)¹⁸. The process approach places a focal point on assessing the manner in which the learner engages with and comprehends the learning material. As AA is cultivated inside such formative frameworks, gradually, the instructor is capable of evaluating the proficiency and limitations of pupils in various subject areas and circumstances (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010)¹⁸. AA results can therefore be used to satisfy the goal of providing a more comprehensive understanding of student learning, growth, and progress (Nasab, 2015; Quansah, 2018)^{22,23}. Students thus perceive alternative methods as fairer, more effective, and participatory than conventional methods (Pereira et al., 2022)²⁴.

As for its empowerment capacity, alternative assessment grants instructors greater autonomy over evaluation topics, assessment methods, and evaluated skills compared to conventional approaches (Sandford & Hsu, 2013; Sulaiman et al., 2019)^{20,25}. As students are better "seen" through these AA formats, they are better engaged and motivated to learn (O'Neil & Padden, 2022; Pereira et al., 2022)^{24,26}.

However, AA, while being more authentic, engaging, and promoting deeper learning (Wiggins, 1998; Barret, 2005)^{27,28}, can be time-consuming to develop and

Table 1: Differences Between the Traditional and Alternative Assessment Approaches in Language Learning

Feature	Traditional Assessment	Alternative Assessment
Purpose	Measure and rank students	Understand learning, growth, progress; foster holistic learning
Format	Standardized tests, quizzes, multiple-choice, essays	Essays, projects, portfolios, presentations, performances
Focus	Recall of facts, content knowledge, procedures	Real-world application, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity
Feedback	Limited, absolute grading	Descriptive, focused on strengths, weaknesses, improvement
Assessment of	Individual performance	Individual and group work, collaboration, self/peer assessment
Student roles	Passive recipient	Active participant
Strengths	Objective, efficient, easy to administer	Authentic, engaging, promotes deeper learning
Weaknesses	May not reflect real-world skills, anxiety-inducing	Time-consuming, less standardized

assess, may lack standardization, and can be challenging to implement in large class sizes (Parandekar et al., 2017)²⁹. In contrast, the strengths of traditional assessment lie in its objectivity, efficiency, ease of administration and grading, and the ability to provide comparable data between students (McMillan, 2019)³⁰.

Language Assessment in Vietnamese Higher Education

Traditional language assessment practices have been deeply embedded in Vietnam’s education landscape for decades, largely due to the influence of Confucian principles. Before the economic and social reforms of Doi Moi, Vietnam’s education system emphasized standardized examinations and rote memorization. These practices were centered around the preparation for and use of summative exams, focusing on the memorization of factual knowledge and performance under time constraints. Such assessments were primarily used to sort and certify students’ learning rather than to foster their academic growth (Tran, 2015)³¹. The long-standing influence of Confucian values reinforced this preference for high-stakes exams as the primary means of evaluating academic performance (Ngo, 2020; Tran, 2015)^{31,32}.

The Doi Moi reforms, initiated in the mid-1980s, marked a significant turning point in Vietnamese higher education. As the country began opening up to international influences and modernizing its economy, the limitations of traditional assessment methods became increasingly apparent. During this period, educational policies started to recognize the

need for more comprehensive evaluation methods, though traditional practices remained deeply entrenched (Ngo, 2020; Pham & Renshaw, 2015)^{32,33}.

With the turn of the millennium, educational reform efforts in Vietnam intensified. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) introduced policies aimed at shifting from knowledge-based education to competency-based learning. This shift led to the gradual introduction of alternative assessment methods, such as portfolios, projects, and presentations. However, despite these policy changes, the implementation of alternative assessments has been inconsistent, with traditional assessments continuing to dominate in many institutions (Nguyen & Burns, 2017; Tran, 2017; Nguyen & Pham, 2019)^{7,34,35}.

The persistent emphasis on rote memorization and high-stakes exams has resulted in a critical shortage of opportunities for self-assessment and meaningful feedback, both of which are essential for linking student performance to learning progress and effective teaching practices (Vu, 2017)³⁶. This preference for traditional assessments also sidelines the development of critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and communication skills—abilities crucial for success in the modern, global workforce (Tran, 2018; Nguyen & Pham, 2019)^{34,37}.

Recognizing these shortcomings, there has been a growing momentum in the past decade toward adopting alternative assessment methods in Vietnamese higher education. Methods such as portfolios, projects, and presentations are believed to intrinsically engage, empower, and motivate students.

These methods promote better, self-directed learning and provide platforms for students to demonstrate their understanding and abilities in real-world contexts, beyond the limitations of traditional exams (Luong, 2015; Nguyen & Pham, 2019; Dang & Nguyen, 2020; O'Neill & Padden, 2022; Pereira et al., 2022)^{5,24,26,34,38}.

The shift towards competency-based assessment has been integral to modernizing general education in Vietnam. For instance, with Decision 43 in 2007, MOET began supporting a variety of assessment forms at the university level. In language learning, authorities have consistently advocated for instructional methods that prepare students for English communication. This includes a shift from knowledge-based to competency-based assessment, as outlined in several MOET guidelines, such as Circular 30/2014/TT-BGDDT and Circular 22/2016/TT-BGDDT, which endorse "assessment for learning" and "assessment as learning" principles. These policies require instructors to prioritize both formative and summative assessments to inform decisions related to curriculum design and overall pedagogical practices (MOET, 2014a; MOET, 2014b).

Despite these compelling motivations and a growing emphasis on communicative competence for both academic and professional success, the adoption of formative and alternative language assessments has been limited. Various factors, including the support system, instructors' readiness, and practical challenges, have posed significant barriers to their widespread implementation at the tertiary level (Tran, 2015; Pham, 2017; Vu, 2017; Ngo, 2018; Nguyen & Gu, 2020)^{31,36,39-41}.

Innovations in formative and alternative language assessments have been introduced in some local universities, such as the use of writing portfolios and classroom-based assessments. However, these methods remain unfocused and are often sidelined in favor of more traditional, discrete-point tests that emphasize lexical and grammatical knowledge (Tran, 2015; Vu, 2017)^{31,36}. Additionally, these unconventional approaches are primarily implemented in English major programs, where students are assessed directly on their language skills (Ngo, 2018; Lam N., 2018; Ngo, 2021)^{40,42,43}. For students in non-English major programs, formative and communicative language assessments are often offered as optional activities, leading to a lukewarm reception and limited integration into the curriculum (Lam T.L., 2018; Ngo, 2024)^{42,44}. Institutionally, high-stakes tests remain dominant in Vietnamese higher education, used to sort students

into language courses, periodically measure proficiency, and determine eligibility for graduation (Vietnamese Government, 2008)⁴⁵. The prominence of these exams has led to a significant washback effect on teaching methodologies, creating a feedback loop that reinforces traditional assessment practices (Tran, 2015; Ngo, 2018; Nguyen & Gu, 2020)^{31,40,41}. While digital platforms have the potential to offer more flexible and comprehensive evaluation methods for student language abilities, their effective implementation requires further teacher training and professional development. Unfortunately, opportunities for such professional development, particularly in the area of alternative assessment, remain scarce (Luong, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2020)^{38,41}.

METHODOLOGY

This literature review examines research on perceptions towards implementing alternative assessment practices in the context of Vietnamese higher education. Data collection began with a comprehensive search across multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest, and Web of Science. Search terms included various combinations of the following keywords: "alternative assessment," "higher education," "Vietnam," "EFL assessment," "language assessment," and "Vietnamese universities."

- To ensure relevance, the resulting publications were carefully screened using the below criteria:
- Focus: alternative assessment methods within the Vietnamese higher education context.
- Publication Type: peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, and credible reports from recognized organizations.
- Publication Date: studies and seminal works of relevant trends published within the last ten years.

After screening, the remaining studies were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved a thorough reading to identify recurring themes, patterns, and key insights relevant to the research objectives. Through this iterative process, the following core themes emerged:

- Institutional and Practical Barriers: Examines factors such as lack of resources, policy constraints, and resistance to change that hinder the adoption of alternative assessment.

- Strategies for Overcoming Challenges: a variety of solutions and best practices to address barriers, including topics like professional development, technology use, and collaborative initiatives.
- Impact on Learning Outcomes: how AA affect student learning, motivation, and skill development in Vietnamese universities.
- Cultural and Contextual Factors: the interplay between Vietnamese culture, educational traditions, and the implementation of alternative assessment methods.

This methodology ensures a rigorous and systematic approach to analyzing the existing literature on alternative assessment in Vietnamese higher education. It facilitates the identification of key insights, challenges, and potential solutions, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of this crucial aspect of language education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Barriers to the Adoption of Alternative Assessment

The integration of alternative assessment methods into Vietnamese higher education, while transformative and having guiding policies from the government, faces several institutional barriers still.

Resistance to change poses as the first barrier to AA adoption. Transitioning from traditional to alternative language assessment necessitates a shift from the concept of "assessment of learning" toward "assessment for learning" (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010)¹⁸. This requires a reevaluation of pedagogical practices and a deep commitment to fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Nguyen and Tran's (2018)⁴⁶ research underscored this point, revealing that while EFL instructors in Vietnam generally demonstrate favorable views towards in-class speaking evaluation, they lack sufficient understanding of the complexity of certain speaking assessment tasks. Thai et al., (2023)'s study on classroom assessment practices highlights a potential misalignment between the perceptions of students and instructors regarding various assessment types. This indicates that pushbacks may stem from unfamiliarity with AA methodology rather than outright opposition.

Besides educators individually, deeply entrenched educational norms in Vietnamese landscapes contribute to hesitance among educators and administrators to deviate from familiar methods (Dang & Nguyen,

2020)⁵. Confucian values, a cornerstone of the Vietnamese educational culture, emphasize rote memorization and high-stakes examinations as markers of academic achievement (Tran, 2018)³⁷. The Confucian exam-oriented education puts desirable social, political, and economic rewards upon the success of intensive preparation and memorisation of knowledge (Ngo, 2020)³². This ingrained value system reinforces the dominance of familiar assessment practices and perpetuates a priority of lower-order cognitive skills over higher-order thinking and creativity (Dang & Nguyen, 2020)⁵. Also, formative assessment demands a more balanced dynamic between teachers and students, something not easily embraced by the strict hierarchy within Confucian heritage education (Pham & Renshaw, 2015)³³.

Specifically in terms of tertiary-level English assessments in the country, summative practices are held strongly in place by the shared pressure between Confucianism's priority of exams, the neoliberalist's idea of making teachers and administrators accountable for students' standardised test results (Vu, 2017; Ngo, 2020)^{32,36} and the socialist's requirement towards institutions to show their achievement of state's goals. Such complementary influences directly hinder efforts to foster innovation and diversify assessment practices, particularly of skills not easily measured by conventional evaluation forms (Ngo, 2023)⁶.

In regards to regulatory and administrative constraint, a lack of familiarity among statemens, policy-makers, administrators and academic managers with alternative of summative examinations and their benefits also makes securing its stance in the local landscape challenging (Dang & Nguyen, 2020)⁵. As a manifestation of this, directives from the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) further stipulate specific assessment requirements, often emphasizing high-stakes examinations that place significant weight on final language evaluations (Nguyen & Truong, 2021)⁴⁷.

Ironically, while there are imposed regulations of English assessment in tertiary Vietnam, as evidenced from all assessments following MOET demands (Pham, 2017; Vu, 2017)^{36,39}, states' efforts to supervise and follow through these requirements have been lax (Ngo, 2024)⁶. In some cases, they have been complied with in contrastingly different manners from universities (Lam T.L., 2018; Ngo, 2018)^{40,44}. Institutions' internal tests can have unensured quality (Ngo, 2018; Nguyen, 2020; Vu, 2017)^{36,40,41} or students' results taken from international standardised tests are filtered under greatly different acceptance criteria among schools (Ngo, 2024)⁶. This gives

little confidence for stakeholders when it comes to integrating alternative assessments in tertiary levels.

Practical Challenges to the Adoption of Alternative Assessment

Another critical impediment is the lack of supportive resources. Many Vietnamese universities face limitations in funding and infrastructure, hindering their investment in the training, materials and updated digital technology essential for AA implementation (Nguyen & Pham, 2019). This creates two direct impacts. One is on the availability of crucial professional development opportunities for in-service educators on AA design and evaluation, including seminars, workshops, conferences, and training courses (Tran, 2018)³⁷. This can reinforce a preference for traditional assessment methods as educators may feel insecure about designing and evaluating novel assessment methodologies (Tran, 2017)³⁵.

A secondary impact is on the implementation of assessments involving online portfolios, digital presentations, or multimedia projects against almost insurmountable logistical difficulties in assessing large student populations across education levels (Tran, 2017; Dang & Nguyen, 2020)^{5,35}. Vietnam's growing youth population results in consistently large class sizes, averaging 38 students per class in upper secondary schools, or 45-50 students per classroom in major urban centers (Parandekar et al., 2017)²⁹. Educators face significant difficulties in delivering lessons, conducting engaging learning activities, and effectively assessing students in such large classes. AA methods like project-based learning, performance assessments, and portfolios demand significantly more time, effort, and resources. Individualized feedback, a cornerstone of many AA approaches, becomes logistically difficult with large numbers of students (O'Neill & Padden, 2022)²⁶. As the Vietnamese lecturers lack practical skills, time (Nguyen, 2011)⁴⁸, and compensation (Luong, 2015)³⁸, this may hinder their commitments to design and implementation of effective CBA practices (Anh, 2017; Giang, 2017)^{49,50}. This reality often leads to the continued reliance on traditional assessment practices, such as multiple-choice examinations, favored for their efficiency in evaluating large student groups (Tran, 2017)³⁵. Teachers may also feel pressured to keep to test preparation over the development of broader language skills essential for real-world application (Truong & Wang, 2019)⁵¹.

In summary, multifaceted institutional and practicality issues impede the adoption of alternative assessment in Vietnamese higher education. Overcoming

these barriers requires concerted efforts from stakeholders to promote a culture of innovation and flexibility. Examining other similar educational contexts can offer applicable strategies to deliver such a goal.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges in Alternative Assessment

Therefore, the process of extending the AA approach in Vietnamese higher education calls for a measured, stepwise approach that targets the deeply rooted obstacles AND SEIZES opportunities for change. The following strategies can provide directions to address these requirements in a gradual way.

Professional Development and Teacher Training Initiatives

The key to effective implementation of new assessment arrangements in an AA context is in endowing educators with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage with new ways of assessment. As for continuing education, solid content knowledge in AA, practical training focused on design and implementation of AA tasks, and communities of practice must be offered. Such communities can also create a positive culture of innovation by addressing concerns of subjectivity issues and offering clear assessment standards.

Consequently, robust professional development (PD) is fundamental to the successful adoption of alternative assessment in Vietnamese higher education. A key element of effective PD is providing a strong grounding in the principles of AA, its rationale, and the benefits it offers for student learning. It's essential to explicitly address how AA aligns with student-centered pedagogy and promotes the development of higher-order thinking skills (MacLellan, 2004)⁵². PD programs should also consider a variety of delivery formats to cater to diverse learning styles, time constraints, and institutional capabilities.

Additionally, these programs must go beyond theoretical introductions, offering a multi-pronged approach or intensive "hands-on" workshops that equip educators with the skills to design and execute various AA tasks in their classrooms. If technology is an integral part of an institution's AA strategy, dedicated training on relevant digital tools and platforms is essential. Since educators may have concerns about the subjective nature of AA scoring, PD programs should include guidance on creating clear criteria and providing exemplars of different quality levels, and engage faculty in "calibration" exercises to develop a shared understanding of expectations as well as effective feedback strategies (MacLellan, 2004)⁵².

To ensure the lasting impact of PD efforts, it's important to foster ongoing support. This can be achieved by creating communities of practice where faculty can collaborate, share experiences, problem-solve challenges, and refine their AA practices. Peer mentoring, and partnering with external consultants are all viable options. PD programs should also have a built-in evaluation mechanism. Surveys, interviews, and analysis of AA implementation data can help track the effectiveness of PD efforts and inform future improvements.

Curriculum Integration and Assessment Alignment

The next logical step is to incorporate AA into the learning process and to make sure it is fully compatible with learning objectives and outcomes. This entails redesigning syllabus and instructions to include appropriate authentic assessment tasks, which reflect higher-order thinking skills and post secondary uses of knowledge. Thus, when links are made between assessment and purposeful learning objectives, a more proficient framework for student learning can be developed. This integration emphasizes the importance of AA and provides students with regular opportunities to develop and demonstrate their skills in meaningful ways (Nguyen & Pham, 2019)³⁴.

Strategic curriculum design should include careful consideration of what constitutes evidence of higher-order thinking within a specific discipline, as well as how acquired knowledge is best demonstrated through AA tasks (MacLellan, 2004)⁵². For instance, a biology course's alternative assessments might ask students to create detailed models illustrating complex biological processes, while in a literature course, students could engage in in-depth analysis and interpretation of texts through critical essays. Additionally, curriculum planning needs to address choices around the suitability of AA for individual or collaborative outcomes, the role of feedback in the learning process, and how to capture multiple facets of student performance (Brown & Hudson, 1998)².

Ensuring clear alignment between AA tasks and learning objectives ensures the validity, reliability, and overall meaningfulness of assessment results. A well-aligned curriculum creates a cohesive learning experience for students, where they understand that assessment directly measures the skills and knowledge that the course aims to develop (Wiggins, 1998)²⁷. To achieve this alignment, educators may benefit from using strategies such as "backward design," where they begin with identifying desired learning goals and subsequently select appropriate AA

tasks to measure whether students have successfully met those goals.

Collaborative Approaches to Assessment Design and Implementation

It is crucial that students, faculty members, administrators and other professionals who work with students, and other stakeholders collaborate to make the assessment process an institution-wide priority. It is suggested that the formation of assessment committees, peer review and calibration activities, and students' involvement in assessment development will improve assessment discussion, mutual understanding, and create inclusive and effective assessment practices (Tran, 2017)³⁵.

One effective collaborative strategy is the formation of assessment committees or working groups. These cross-functional teams should include a diverse representation of students, faculty, administrators, and, where relevant, external experts with specialized knowledge of assessment design. These committees can facilitate dialogue, consensus-building, and the creation of assessment policies, procedures, and practices that are responsive to the needs and perspectives of the entire educational community.

Peer review and calibration activities offer another powerful way to implement collaborative assessment. Within these activities, faculty members share their AA materials, provide constructive feedback to one another, and engage in discussions to align their understanding of quality standards. This process fosters consistency, addresses concerns about potential subjectivity within AA practices, and builds educators' confidence in their ability to assess student work fairly (O'Neil & Padden, 2022)²⁶. Where a committee forms to evaluate a student's work once or over time, resembling that of a doctoral thesis defense, the outcome is a less biased consensus on its quality, ensuring reliability and fairness while effectively and more accurately measures the intended learning outcomes (Brown & Hudson, 1998; MacLellan, 2004)^{2,52}.

Utilization of Technology for Assessment Innovation

Technology plays a significant role in eradicating barriers and fostering innovation in assessment. Electronic portfolios, discussion boards, multimedia activities, and Differentiating Instruction with Digital Storytelling Tools (DIDSTs) can complement the flexibility, reality, and efficiency of AA. Additionally, assessments should be customized to accommodate students' diverse capabilities and learning needs. By integrating technology into the classroom, teachers can

develop an assessment approach that is both effective and engaging for students while simultaneously meeting the institution's rigorous academic standards (Tran, 2018)³⁷.

E-portfolios serve as an excellent example of technology-enabled AA. These digital repositories allow students to curate evidence of their work, showcasing skill and progress (Barrett, 2005)²⁸. E-portfolios encourage self-assessment, and a deeper understanding of one's own learning journey. Additionally, online discussion forums facilitate asynchronous, peer-reviewed reflection, and collaborative problem-solving activities (Barrett, 2005)²⁸. Such platforms promote critical thinking, communication, and the ability to engage constructively with the ideas of others.

Multimedia projects are another promising option, enabling displays of learning through a diverse range of formats, including videos, infographics, podcasts, or interactive presentations. Students get to tap into their individual strengths while demonstrating their knowledge, creativity, and communication skills in engaging ways. Furthermore, by incorporating data analytics tools, educators can gain valuable insights from assessment data. These tools assist in visualizing student learning patterns, identifying areas requiring additional support, and making evidence-based decisions to improve both instructional practices and student outcomes (Yancey, 2009)⁵³.

Implementing technology-driven AA requires thoughtful planning and careful integration with overall pedagogical approaches. Educators need training and support to effectively use various digital tools, and consideration should be given to issues of digital equity and access to ensure that technology does not create new barriers to inclusion.

In summary, strategies for overcoming challenges in alternative assessment include providing professional development and teacher training, integrating alternative assessment into the curriculum, adopting collaborative approaches to assessment design and implementation, and leveraging technology for assessment innovation. By implementing these strategies, Vietnamese universities can enhance the quality and effectiveness of assessment practices and promote more meaningful learning outcomes for students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Fostering a culture of AA in Vietnamese higher education requires key stakeholders to clearly understand how conventional assessment practices can be adapted to align with available opportunities, ensuring a smooth transition toward AA.

Policy level

At the policy level, several recommendations can be made to facilitate the integration of alternative assessment (AA) in Vietnamese language education. Policymakers bear leverages towards visible results, as they can issue strategies, directives and guidances at varying scopes, which mandate that AA integration comes with clear explanations as to why it is mandatory and how it is helpful to students (Luong, 2015)³⁸. These frameworks should also help in integrating the specific AA approaches proposed and the general language learning goals to support a coherent and meaningful assessment. Hence, prioritizing resource allocation for professional development is essential, as the success of AA depends on educators' knowledge and skills (Nguyen & Pham, 2019)³⁴.

Leaders should commit to applying large-scale professional development programs that enhance understanding on how to design, implement, and evaluate AA. Next, providing educators with incentives in terms of extra funds, award, or to share their practices in applying AA, would be a significant catalyst for change and culture of reflecting on and changing current practices of assessment (Darling-Hammond & Gardner, 2017)⁵⁴.

Policymakers need to allocate resources for large-scale professional development programs that equip language educators with the necessary knowledge and skills to design, implement, and evaluate AA effectively. These programs should be tailored to the specific needs of the Vietnamese language classroom, addressing cultural nuances and practical challenges. Lastly, an accountability system that extends beyond the mere distribution of report cards to evaluate the implementation of such approaches effectively would help guarantee that they benefit students' learning and personal growth as intended (Luong, 2015)³⁸.

Institutional level

At the institutional level, the successful adoption of AA in language education hinges on fostering collaboration and engagement among various stakeholders. It is crucial to establish open channels of communication and create opportunities for stakeholder engagement, involving language educators, administrators, students, and even parents in discussions about the transition to AA (Luong 2015)³⁸. This inclusive approach allows for addressing concerns, building consensus, and ensuring that the shift towards AA is supported by the entire educational community.

The formation of professional learning communities is another key strategy at the institutional level. These

communities provide a platform for language educators to share their experiences, collaborate on the design and implementation of AA tasks, and receive peer support. By fostering a collaborative environment, institutions can empower educators to embrace AA and navigate the challenges associated with its implementation. It is crucial that educators dedicate time and effort to seize professional learning opportunities and networks that may occur through PD programs beyond the confines of institutions to improve their knowledge and practices concerning AA (Nguyen & Pham, 2019)³⁴.

Student involvement is also crucial in promoting ownership and motivation in the learning process. Institutions should actively involve students in the design and evaluation of AA tasks, allowing them to contribute their perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of their learning journey (Cheng & Chau, 2013)⁵⁵. This approach not only enhances student engagement but also empowers them to take an active role in their education.

Finally, institutions should leverage technology integration to enhance AA practices in language education. The use of e-portfolios can provide a platform for students to showcase their language skills development over time, while online discussion forums can facilitate collaborative language practice and peer feedback. Encouraging the creation of multimedia language projects can further tap into students' creativity and digital literacy skills. By embracing technology, institutions can create a more dynamic and engaging learning environment that supports the effective implementation of AA.

Classroom level

The implementation of AA at the classroom level in Vietnamese language education necessitates a thoughtful and contextually relevant approach. The design of AA tasks should prioritize the development of communicative competence by incorporating real-world scenarios, cultural contexts, and opportunities for interaction and collaboration. As the literature suggests, AA's strength lies in its ability to provide "authentic, engaging, and promote deeper learning" (Brown & Hudson, 1998)². By grounding assessment in practical, culturally relevant contexts and encouraging collaboration, educators can ensure that students can effectively apply their language skills in diverse social and professional settings.

The use of formative assessment strategies is equally crucial. Employing a variety of formative AA techniques, such as oral presentations, written reflections,

and peer feedback, allows educators to provide ongoing, descriptive feedback that focuses on students' strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010)¹⁸. This approach fosters a more interactive and responsive learning environment, enabling students to actively participate in their language development and track their progress. The implementation of performance-based assessment tasks further enhances the authenticity and relevance of language assessment. Activities such as role-plays, simulations, and debates offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to apply language skills in real-world contexts, promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication (Stiggins, 2005)¹⁶.

Finally, encouraging self- and peer-assessment can foster metacognitive skills and promote student autonomy in language learning. By reflecting on their own performance and providing constructive feedback to their peers, students develop a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to take ownership of their learning and make informed decisions about their language development journey (Cheng & Chau, 2013)⁵⁵. By implementing these strategies at the classroom level, educators can create a more engaging, student-centered, and effective learning environment that supports the successful adoption of AA in Vietnamese language education. It is through such a multifaceted approach that AA can truly transform language assessment practices in Vietnam, fostering communicative competence, promoting active learning, and empowering students to reach their full potential.

Consequently, there should be a concerted effort from various stakeholders for AA to become popular across the landscape of higher education. It is essential to move beyond merely capitalizing on external and emerging opportunities for rethinking assessment culture. Instead, a multi-faceted approach should be adopted as it not only addresses deeply rooted challenges but also leverages new possibilities. Therefore, the enactment of AA in Vietnamese education represents a transformative cultural and educational shift, promoting more equitable and student-centered beliefs and practices.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of alternative assessment (AA) in Vietnamese higher education, particularly in language education, has the potential to revolutionize assessment practices, fostering a more student-centered, authentic, and holistic learning experience. The literature underscores the numerous benefits of AA, including

increased student motivation, engagement, and empowerment. However, the transition to AA is not without its challenges. Deeply rooted cultural preferences for traditional assessment methods, coupled with institutional barriers and practical limitations, necessitate a strategic and concerted effort from all stakeholders.

Research strongly indicates that AA fosters intrinsic motivation, engagement, and empowerment among students (Sandford & Hsu, 2013; O'Neill & Padden, 2022; Pereira et al., 2022)^{20,24,26}. Students perceive alternative methods as fair, effective, and conducive to active participation, facilitating the demonstration of their abilities beyond traditional exam settings (Pereira et al., 2022)²⁴. Moreover, AA aligns with student-centered learning by giving educators greater control over assessment content, techniques, and the specific skills being evaluated (Sandford & Hsu, 2013; Sulaiman et al., 2019)^{20,25}. Empirical evidence further supports the positive impact of AA on learning performance. Studies demonstrate how AA can simultaneously improve various primary and secondary skills, particularly through the use of portfolios (Sandford & Hsu, 2013; Tabatabaei & Assefi, 2012; Tabatabaei & Assefi, 2020)^{20,56,57}.

The insights gleaned from this literature review highlight the need for a multi-pronged approach to promoting AA in Vietnamese language education. Policymakers, educational institutions, and educators must collaborate to create a supportive environment that fosters innovation and embraces change. The development of clear policies, comprehensive professional development programs, and the integration of technology are crucial steps in this process.

While critical stakeholders such as teachers and students have expressed visible supports towards alternative forms of assessment, how institutional leadership and administrators regard their adoption remains largely ambiguous. There is indeed a noteworthy gap in research regarding the successes and barriers of implementing non-conventional assessments on a wide scale across academic faculties. Additionally, there's a need for investigations into the integration of alternative assessments as an inherent component of comprehensive teaching and learning models. Thus, additional insights are warranted from those in executive positions on diversifying evaluative approaches within their tertiary institutions, even to an extent of transitioning entire departments towards more innovative assessment approaches. Valuable lessons taken from these may guide other institutions considering similar reforms.

Future research should focus on investigating the long-term impact of AA on student learning outcomes in the Vietnamese context. Longitudinal studies can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of AA in promoting communicative competence, critical thinking, and other desired learning outcomes. Additionally, research exploring the role of technology in facilitating AA, particularly in addressing challenges related to large class sizes and resource constraints, is warranted.

In summary, the successful integration of alternative assessment methods in Vietnamese higher education requires insights on the challenges and potential pathways for stakeholders. In examining the institutional barriers and strategies for overcoming them, this literature review aims to inform policymakers, educators, and administrators about the dimensions needed to promote its effective implementation. By developing supportive policies, implementing practical strategies for overcoming institutional barriers, conducting further research and evaluation, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders at all levels, Vietnamese universities can enhance the quality and effectiveness of assessment practices, leading to more meaningful and transformative learning outcomes for students.

APPENDIX

Table 2

Table 2: Differences Between the Traditional and Alternative Assessment Approaches in Language Learning and Original Sources

Feature	Traditional assessment	Alternative Assessment	References
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primarily to measure and rank students based on their knowledge and skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To provide a comprehensive understanding of student learning, growth, and progress; - To foster holistic language learning experiences. 	<p>(a) Nguyen, T. H. H., & Truong, A. T. (2021)⁴⁷. EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom writing assessment at high schools in central Vietnam. <i>Theory and Practice in Language Studies</i>, 11(10), 1187-1196.</p> <p>(b) Stiggins, R. (2005)¹⁶. From formative assessment to assessment for learning: A path to success in standards-based schools. <i>Phi Delta Kappan</i>, 87(4), 324-328.</p> <p>(c) Cheng, L., Selamat, A., Puteh, F., & Mohamed, F. (2016)⁴. A Review of Recent Methodologies, Technologies And Usability in English Language Content Delivery. <i>Jurnal Teknologi</i>, 78, 1-11.</p>
Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standardized tests quizzes; - multiple-choice questions; - true/false questions; - short-answer tests; - written essays. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Essays; - Projects, multimedia projects; - Portfolios, online portfolios; - Presentations, performances; - performance-based tasks; - demonstrations; - Observations. 	<p>(a) Herman, J. L., Aschbacher, P. R., & Winters, L. (1992)¹⁵. A practical guide to alternative assessment. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.</p> <p>(b) Glaser, R., Chudowsky, N., & Pellegrino, J. W. (Eds.). (2001)¹³. <i>Knowing what students know: The science and design of educational assessment</i>. National Academies Press.</p> <p>(c) Nguyen, T. T. H, Diep, N. D., & Hang, D. T. T. (2020)⁴⁷. Testing the performance of Vietnamese Expats Learning Vietnamese Language on Digital Platforms. <i>Vietnam Journal of Science, Technology and Engineering</i>, 62(4).</p>
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recall of facts; - Content knowledge; - Application of procedures and formulas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Application of knowledge in real-world contexts; - critical thinking; - problem-solving; - creativity; - communication; - collaboration. 	<p>(a) Nasab, F. G. (2015)²². Alternative versus Traditional Assessment. <i>Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research</i>, 2(6), 165-178.</p> <p>(b) Quansah, F. (2018)²³. Traditional or performance assessment: What is the right way to assessing learners. <i>Research on Humanities and Social Sciences</i>, 8(1), 21-24.</p> <p>(c) Darling-Hammond, L., Ancess, J., & Falk, B. (1995)⁵⁸. <i>Authentic assessment in action: Studies of schools and students at work</i>. Teachers College Press.</p>

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Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absolute grading, lack of feedback to the progress of students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Descriptive feedback focused on strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement of students' performance and progress; - Can be adapted to cultural context to avoid negative emotional responses. 	<p>(a) Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2003)¹⁷. Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices.</p> <p>(b) Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998)¹². Assessment and classroom learning. Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 5(1), 7-74;</p>
Assessment of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primarily individual performance; - Mostly lower-order thinking abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual performance; - group work; - collaboration; - self-assessment; - peer assessment. 	<p>(a) Chappuis, J., Stiggins, R., Chappuis, S., & Arter, J. (2012)²¹. Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right—using it well. Pearson.</p> <p>(b) Topping, K. J. (1998)¹¹. Peer assessment between students in colleges and universities. Review of Educational Research, 68(3), 249-276.</p>
Student roles	<p>Passive recipient of information and assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active participant in learning and assessment; - Taking ownership of their progress. 	<p>Shepard, L. A. (2000)⁵⁹. The role of assessment in a learning culture. Educational Researcher, 29(7), 4-14.</p>
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Objective; - Efficient; - Easy to administer and grade; - Provides comparable data; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authentic, deemed as fair, more effective, more comprehensive and participatory; - Engaging and motivating; - Promotes deeper learning, thinking, reflection and self-regulation; - Relevant to real-world skills; - Allows for diverse formats (e.g., e-portfolios, multimedia projects). 	<p>(a) McMillan, J. H., & Hellsten, L. (2010)³⁰. Classroom assessment: Principles and practice for effective standards-based instruction. Pearson Education Canada.</p> <p>(b) Wiggins, G. (1998)²⁷. Educative assessment: Designing assessments to inform and improve student performance. Jossey-Bass Publishers.</p> <p>(c) Barrett, H. C. (2005)²⁸. Electronic portfolios as digital stories of deep learning. On the Horizon, 13(2), 45-52</p> <p>(d) Yancey, K. B. (2009)⁵³. Reflection and electronic portfolios: Inventing the self and reinventing the university. In Electronic Portfolios 2.0 (pp. 5-16). Routledge.</p>

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Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May not reflect real-world skills; - Can induce anxiety; - Limited focus on higher-order thinking skills; - Lack of resources and training for implementation in Vietnam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time-consuming to develop and assess; - Less institutionally standardized; - May lack objectivity in terms of exact evaluative criteria; - Can be challenging with large class sizes. 	<p>(a) Linn, R. L. (2000)¹⁴. Assessments and accountability. <i>Educational Researcher</i>, 29(2), 4-16.</p> <p>(b) Duncan, N. (2012)⁶⁰. Beyond testing: towards a theory of educational assessment.</p> <p>(c) Parandekar, S. D., Yamauchi, F., Ragatz, A. B., Sedmik, E. K., & Sawamoto, A. (2017)²⁹. Enhancing school quality in Vietnam through participative and collaborative learning.</p> <p>(d) Tran, H. T. (2017)³⁵. Exploring alternative assessment practices in Vietnamese higher education: Opportunities and challenges. <i>Vietnamese Educational Review</i>, 14(2), 45-58.</p> <p>(a) Airasian, P. W. (2001)⁶¹. <i>Classroom assessment: Concepts and applications</i>. McGraw-Hill.</p> <p>(b) Mueller, J. (2005)⁶². The authentic assessment toolbox: enhancing student learning through online faculty development. <i>Journal of Online Learning and Teaching</i>, 1(1), 1-7.</p> <p>(c) Barrett, H. C. (2005)²⁸. Electronic portfolios as digital stories of deep learning. <i>On the Horizon</i>, 13(2), 45-52</p>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standardized achievement tests; - SAT, ACT; - Final exams; - Quizzes, multiple-choice tests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research projects; - Design challenges, portfolios, E-portfolios, multimedia projects; - Presentations, performances, exhibitions; - Debates, online discussions; - Simulations; - Peer reviews, self-reflections. 	

BIODATA AND AFFILIATIONS

Ms. Ngo Nguyen Thien Duyen completed her MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL at Macquarie University, Australia. She has published articles in local and international journals. She is currently a lecturer at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance. Her research interests include but are not limited to TESOL, teacher professional development, assessment practice, and intercultural communication. Mr. Vo Trong Nghia completed his Master Degree in TESOL at Monash University, Australia. He is currently a lecturer at Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance. His interests include but are not limited to effective English classroom practices and integration of technology in teaching and learning.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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