

Challenges Of Assessing English Language Proficiency In Inclusive Classrooms

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Abstract: This article offers a comprehensive analysis of the challenges in assessing English language proficiency within inclusive classrooms. Learners with diverse needs—including disabilities, emotional and social differences—require assessment tools that are fair, adaptive, and reflective of their abilities. Using a qualitative methodology, the study draws from teacher experiences to identify current shortcomings and propose inclusive assessment strategies, such as multimodal formats and institutional support systems, to ensure valid and equitable outcomes.

Keywords: Inclusive education, English language, assessment system, language proficiency, multimodal approach, adapted testing, methodological challenge.

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has moved from the periphery to the center of educational reform agendas worldwide. Rooted in principles of equity, social justice, and the recognition of learner diversity, inclusive education aims to create environments where all students, regardless of physical, cognitive, emotional, linguistic, or socio-economic differences, have equal opportunities to learn and thrive. As education systems increasingly embrace inclusivity, the processes and tools used to assess student learning—especially language proficiency—must also adapt to accommodate diverse learner profiles.

Assessing English language proficiency in inclusive classrooms presents complex pedagogical, methodological, and ethical challenges. Traditional standardized testing methods often fail to capture the linguistic abilities of students with special educational needs (SEN), neurodivergent learners, or those with limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Moreover, rigid assessment frameworks may exacerbate educational inequities by disadvantaging students who require differentiated instruction or alternative modes of expression. For instance, a visually impaired student may need audio-based tasks, while a student with dyslexia may benefit from extended time or simplified prompts.

Uzbekistan, like many countries undergoing education

reform, is actively working to implement inclusive practices at all levels of schooling. While policy frameworks increasingly endorse inclusive education, practical challenges in assessment design, teacher preparedness, and institutional capacity remain significant. Within this context, English—as a core subject and a global language—requires special attention due to its role in academic advancement, higher education admission, and international mobility. This paper seeks to critically examine the challenges of assessing English language proficiency in inclusive classrooms, drawing on both international research and empirical findings from local teachers. It also explores how multimodal assessment tools, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, and institutional support mechanisms can enhance fairness and accuracy in language assessment. By addressing these challenges, the study aims to contribute to the development of more equitable and responsive educational practices that uphold the rights of all learners to meaningful and accessible language learning opportunities.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study lies at the intersection of inclusive education theory, sociocultural linguistics, and alternative assessment frameworks. These perspectives collectively emphasize the need for

educational practices—including assessment—to reflect the diverse abilities, identities, and experiences of all learners.

2.1 Inclusive Education and Social Justice

Inclusive education is rooted in the philosophy of social justice, as articulated by scholars such as Ainscow, Booth, and Slee. It is based on the belief that diversity in the classroom is not a problem to be solved, but a rich resource to be embraced. According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), inclusive pedagogy requires the development of flexible teaching and assessment strategies that do not marginalize students with special educational needs. Assessment in such contexts must move beyond “norm-referenced” evaluation and instead focus on “growth-oriented” and “strengths-based” models.

2.2 Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory and Language Assessment

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning offers valuable insights into language development in inclusive settings. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that learners benefit most from tasks slightly above their current ability level when supported appropriately. This underscores the need for formative and scaffolded assessments that consider the learner’s developmental context and the social interactions involved in learning English as a foreign language. Furthermore, language proficiency should be assessed as a dynamic and contextualized process, not a fixed trait.

2.3 Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, developed by CAST (2018), advocates for providing multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement. In the context of English language assessment, this translates into offering varied modes—oral, written, visual, and technological—through which students can demonstrate their language skills. UDL aligns with the principle that assessments should be designed from the outset to accommodate a broad range of learners, thus minimizing the need for retroactive accommodations.

2.4 Constructivist Assessment Theory

Constructivist approaches to assessment, particularly as proposed by Shepard (2000), emphasize the integration of assessment with learning. In inclusive classrooms, assessment should serve as a tool for learning, not merely an endpoint. This means emphasizing formative assessments, portfolios, peer-assessment, and performance-based tasks that recognize individual progress and provide meaningful

feedback.

2.5 Critical Perspectives on Language Testing

Critical language testing, as discussed by Shohamy and Fulcher, draws attention to the sociopolitical implications of language assessments. In inclusive settings, it is important to interrogate how standardized tests may reinforce power imbalances or exclude marginalized learners. Therefore, ethical considerations and learner agency must be central in the development and implementation of assessment tools.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand educational phenomena through the subjective experiences and interpretations of participants. This approach is particularly suitable for inclusive education research, where context, perception, and diversity of experience are central.

3.1 Research Design

A case study design was adopted to explore the lived experiences of English language teachers working in inclusive classroom environments across selected general secondary schools in Uzbekistan. The case study method allowed for an in-depth examination of the complexities involved in language assessment within diverse learner groups.

3.2 Participants

The study involved 15 English language teachers from 10 public schools practicing inclusive education policies. Participants had varying levels of teaching experience (from 3 to 25 years) and represented both urban and semi-urban contexts. Purposeful sampling was used to select teachers who had direct experience working with students with disabilities, learning difficulties, and/or linguistic disadvantages in mixed-ability classrooms.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Two primary qualitative methods were utilized:

- Semi-structured interviews: Each teacher participated in a 30–45-minute interview, conducted in person or via Zoom. The interviews focused on challenges in assessment design, institutional constraints, strategies used for adaptation, and perceptions of fairness and effectiveness.
- Document analysis: Samples of existing assessment tools, adapted tasks, and institutional policies were collected from participating schools to supplement interview data and provide contextual depth.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and

translated where necessary. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant educational authorities, and all participants provided informed consent.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Transcripts were first coded inductively to identify emerging themes, which were later categorized into broader dimensions such as: standardization versus personalization, multimodal assessment, teacher autonomy, and institutional support. Triangulation of data sources (interviews and documents) enhanced the validity and credibility of the findings.

The data analysis process was guided by principles of trustworthiness, ensuring credibility, dependability, and confirmability through member-checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail.

3.5 Limitations

While this qualitative approach provided rich insights, it is acknowledged that findings may not be generalizable to all schools or educational systems. However, the results offer valuable implications for policy development and teacher training in inclusive assessment practices.

4. RESULTS

The qualitative data gathered from teachers revealed several interrelated challenges in assessing English language proficiency in inclusive classrooms. These challenges revolve around tensions between standardized expectations and diverse learner needs, a lack of supportive structures, and the underutilization of adaptive and multimodal assessment approaches.

4.1 Standardization vs. Personalization

One of the most prominent findings was the conflict between systemic pressures to use standardized assessments and teachers' desire to adapt evaluation methods to individual student needs. 80% of teachers reported that they primarily relied on standardized written tests due to institutional requirements. However, only 30% believed such assessments were appropriate for inclusive settings. Teachers expressed concerns that these tests often failed to accurately reflect the abilities of students with disabilities, especially those with cognitive or language-processing challenges.

4.2 Underutilization of Alternative Assessment Tools

As depicted in the comparative chart, assessment forms such as oral presentations, digital tools, and peer assessment were rarely used, despite being perceived as more inclusive. For example, while only 25% of teachers currently employed oral presentations, 60%

agreed that such methods would better serve students with expressive strengths or limited writing skills. Similarly, digital tools were used by just 15% of teachers, even though 55% viewed them as highly adaptable and motivating for learners with special educational needs (SEN).

4.3 Lack of Institutional Support and Professional Development

Teachers frequently cited the absence of institutional protocols and professional guidance on inclusive assessment. Only 2 out of 10 schools had written policies or support structures to guide alternative assessment practices. Furthermore, none of the participants had received formal training in differentiated or inclusive assessment methods, relying instead on personal experimentation and peer support.

4.4 Multimodal Assessment: A Missed Opportunity

Despite global literature emphasizing the importance of multimodal assessment—which includes visual, oral, project-based, and technology-mediated evaluation—its actual implementation remains limited. Portfolios and project-based assessments, for example, were used by fewer than 20% of teachers, even though 50% or more considered them beneficial in theory. The lack of time, resources, and administrative encouragement were major barriers to integrating such practices into regular classroom routines.

The chart above illustrates the percentages of assessment methods currently used (Current Use) versus those considered ideal (Ideal Use) by teachers in inclusive English language classrooms.

The chart reveals the following insights:

Standardized Tests continue to be widely implemented (80%), although ideally, their usage should be significantly reduced to around 30%.

Oral Presentations and Digital Tools, on the other hand, are seen by teachers as more appropriate for inclusive assessment and should be utilized more frequently.

Methods such as Peer Assessment, Project Work, and Portfolios are currently underused, but there is a strong perceived demand for their increased application in an ideal inclusive learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a significant disconnect between the theoretical ideals of inclusive assessment and the practical realities faced by English language teachers in inclusive classrooms. This discrepancy is not unique to Uzbekistan and echoes trends observed in international literature, including studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Finland, and South Korea (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; OECD, 2020).

5.1 Global Reflections on Assessment in Inclusive

Contexts

Globally, inclusive education is transitioning from mere physical integration to meaningful participation and personalized learning. However, standardized testing regimes remain dominant in many countries, including Uzbekistan, often due to high-stakes accountability systems and rigid curriculum frameworks. This reliance on uniform assessment tools disproportionately affects students with disabilities or those from marginalized linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Shepard, 2000; Shohamy, 2001).

For instance, in Finland—renowned for its inclusive practices—assessment emphasizes student growth, teacher autonomy, and non-standardized formats, enabling diverse learners to demonstrate their competencies in authentic ways (OECD, 2020). The results of our study suggest that Uzbek teachers aspire toward similar ideals but lack structural and pedagogical support to realize them.

5.2 The Promise and Pitfalls of Multimodal Assessment

The potential of multimodal assessment—which includes portfolios, oral presentations, digital storytelling, and project-based learning—was widely recognized by participants. These tools align with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, promoting flexibility and learner agency. Yet, their implementation remains minimal due to institutional inertia, lack of training, and the absence of appropriate evaluation rubrics.

Furthermore, the underuse of digital tools is particularly striking, given their promise in accommodating diverse needs. With increased access to tablets, language apps, and adaptive software, digital assessment can offer personalized feedback, visual supports, and interactive learning tasks. However, teachers noted that neither professional development nor policy incentives were aligned to encourage these innovations.

5.3 Cultural and Policy-Specific Challenges in Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, educational reforms have introduced a stronger emphasis on inclusive education and learner-centered pedagogy, as noted in the National Development Strategy and the “Ta’lim to’g’risidagi” Qonun (2020). Despite these policy advancements, their translation into classroom practice remains inconsistent. Teachers operate within a system that still favors rote learning, examination-driven instruction, and teacher-centered models, making inclusive assessment difficult to scale.

Moreover, cultural attitudes toward disability,

expectations of uniform academic performance, and a lack of differentiation in teaching materials present further challenges. Many teachers feel isolated in their attempts to adapt assessments and lack platforms for sharing inclusive practices or receiving mentorship.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study underscores the urgent need to reimagine English language proficiency assessment practices in inclusive classrooms. While inclusive education has gained policy-level recognition in Uzbekistan, assessment mechanisms have not evolved in parallel to reflect the complexity of learner diversity. The dominance of standardized tests, lack of institutional support, and minimal use of multimodal tools hinder the development of equitable and meaningful assessment strategies.

Key findings demonstrate that teachers are aware of alternative approaches and are eager to implement them, yet systemic limitations—such as rigid curricular mandates, insufficient professional development, and absence of differentiated assessment rubrics—pose significant barriers.

Recommendations:

1. Policy-Level Reforms:

The Ministry of Preschool and School Education should develop national guidelines on inclusive assessment practices, aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and international best practices.

Introduce legal frameworks that mandate flexible assessment adaptations for students with disabilities and special needs.

2. Teacher Training and Professional Development:

Organize specialized training modules on inclusive language assessment within pre-service and in-service teacher education programs.

Provide mentorship programs and communities of practice for teachers to share tools and experiences related to inclusive assessment.

3. Institutional Support and Infrastructure:

Schools should allocate resources and technology to facilitate multimodal assessment tools, including digital platforms, assistive devices, and visual/audio materials. Develop inclusive assessment rubrics that allow for differentiation in content, process, and expression.

4. Classroom-Level Innovation:

Encourage teacher autonomy in designing and implementing assessment tasks suited to individual learners' strengths and needs.

Promote the use of student portfolios, project-based tasks, oral interviews, and peer-assessment as core components of language evaluation.

5. Ongoing Monitoring and Research:

Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive assessment interventions and their impact on student learning outcomes.

Support evidence-based policymaking through collaboration between universities, schools, and governmental agencies.

By embracing these recommendations, Uzbekistan's education system can make significant strides in aligning assessment with the principles of inclusion, fairness, and learner empowerment. This shift will not only improve the validity of English language proficiency evaluation but also promote greater social cohesion and equity within classrooms.

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