

## Investigating EFL Professor's Conceptions and Practices of Assessment in Moroccan Higher Education

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**Abstract:** Assessment is largely believed to have an indelible importance both as a conception and a practice in higher education, locally and globally, all along with its elemental aspects of designing, administering, and scoring tests. Recently, many Moroccan critical professorial voices have highlighted their dissatisfaction with the inappropriate and ineffective ways these interrelated procedures are being operated, and have strongly called for rethinking and implementing them. This study, therefore, sets out to investigate the actual conceptions held and practices manifested by Moroccan university professors in the EFL context by means of a field survey based on Brown's "teacher's conceptions of assessment" inventory (TCoA) which covers the fundamental notions of "student accountability", "school accountability", "improvement", and "irrelevance". To this end, the study, on one hand, provides a synoptic review of previous relevant research to lay a definitional and theoretical framework on the basis of which data analysis will be carried out. On the other hand, this analysis investigates the attitudes and perceptions of Moroccan EFL university professors permanently teaching at eight different Moroccan universities towards actual assessment modes and their implementation. This study is accordingly meant to explore these professors' testing mode preference, as well as to look at their attitude towards overall purposes of assessment.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Assessment, EFL, Professors' Conceptions.

### 1. Introduction

Assessment, defined by Dhindsa, Omar, & Waldrip (2007) as "a systematic process for gathering data about student achievement" (p. 126), is an essential component of teaching and has always been a

crucial aspect in education. Academicians, including administrators and teachers, are normally in charge of choosing forms of assessment and the tasks to be assessed; however, the aim of assessment is perceived of differently among numerous stakeholders namely students, parents and decision makers (Cavangah, Waldrip, Romanoski, & Dorman, 2005). According to Goodrum, Hackling, & Rennie (2001), they consider assessment as “a key component of teaching and learning process” (p. 2) since they believe that it “enhances learning, provides feedback about student progress, builds self-confidence and self-esteem, and develops skills in evaluation” (p. 2). Consequently, an effective learning is the outcome of an interrelation between teaching, evaluation, and results obtained by students.

Ideally, in higher education, assessment takes various forms to serve the various purposes of a given course. Usually, a course has different assignment types, each one designed to cover a specific course objective (e.g. readings, essays, presentations, quizzes, etc.), in addition to common conform final exams. All these different assignments provide both formative and summative assessment of the students' performance. They also give information about their learning outcomes, and their strengths and weaknesses in learning. Therefore, one function of assessment is to act and see into the students' accountability of the knowledge, opportunities and resources they are provided with at the university. Not only the student is concerned with assessment outcomes; these can also reflect on the professors' teaching (good or poor), their examination/correction standards (tough, flexible) as well as the overall department quality which is, for

example, underestimated when too many students fail or succeed (Brown et al, 2014).

In Morocco, academic assessment often takes the form of common final examinations deployed at a large high stake level, particularly at the end of secondary school (Baccalaureate), and during all university semesters (year-to-year grade promotion). Moreover, in an educational context that stresses on the importance of examinations and where large classes have become very common, Moroccan teaching contents and practices have become more about explicit elements that will be tested in a direct way. Much importance is also given to students' scores at all levels, that is why more emphasis is put on ensuring the students' mastery of the course material which is going to be evaluated. This encourages mechanic drills, rote learning, and strategies of memory-based learning.

Many academicians express a dissatisfaction of such reductive practices related to teaching in view of assessment, and believe that there should be a change in such practices that openly stand against the idea of what good teaching is (Chen, Brown, Hattie, & Millward, 2012; Chen, 2008). Therefore, since any change needs to be actively supported and carried out by many agents to be fulfilled (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998), Morocco is believed to have a sound basis to expect such reform that can affect not only assessment, but also curriculum development and the entire teaching and learning enterprise (Bouziane, 2017; Melouk, 2001; Zaki, 1990). Thus, while professors may not have a total command of the policy and practices of official examinations, they are likely to use assessment to positively enhance the students' learning

outcome by means of improving the nature, quality and quantity of what they are being taught and assessed accordingly.

Moreover, in higher education, assessment has recently been geared towards learner-centered achievements, by means of taking into account students accountability and improvement (Webber, 2012), although the actual university context does not facilitate this task. Students' grades are now seen not only as discriminatory rudiments to pass or fail, but also as indicators of elements that have been achieved or those that need to be improved by learners (Yorke, 2009).

Any reform of assessment needs to start with changing the professors' view about, and their behavior towards assessment. To do so, it becomes evident to have a closer idea about how assessment is perceived of by Moroccan university professors. This 'insider' opinion will be helpful to decision makers to develop a new curriculum and implement a new way of assessment.

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to explore the opinion of Moroccan higher education professors about assessment and its purpose. It does this by examining their conceptions as revealed by a reformulated existing self-report inventory (Brwon, 2006). The study attempts to introduce their view about assessment that may vary from that of professors from other countries. The resulting insights will allow us to highlight significant issues given much importance as being related to assessment, as well as will permit us to compare and contrast conceptions of assessment as seen by Moroccan professors and their foreign counterparts.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

### **2.1. Conceptions of Assessment**

Conception is a word that refers to the capacity or process of generating ideas or understanding notions (Thompson, 1992). In other words, “conceptions refer to the ideas, values and attitudes people have toward what something is (i.e. what they think it is and how it is structured) and what it is for (i.e. its purpose)” (Brown & Gao, 2015, p. 4). Conceptions are formed gradually through familiarity with a phenomenon, or responses to it (Brown & Goa, 2015; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Ajzen, 2005; Pajares, 1992). Gunstone (1992) even suggests that the term ‘conception’ can be used interchangeably with the term ‘belief’.

As for ‘assessment’, it serves two main purposes. The first one is to make value judgments about students, teachers, schools and curricula; while the second purpose is to judge the overall quality of the teaching and learning as a whole. Particularly, one can say that assessment is used by teachers not only to diagnose areas of difficulty for students, but also to help them improve their own learning (Brown & Hattie, 2012). In general, assessment is used as a device to evaluate learners’ performances and teachers’ quality. It also helps improve the students’ learning and adjust/modify teaching for better results (Brown, 2008; Warren & Nisbet, 1999; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Webb, 1992; Heaton, 1975). Thus, there is a legitimate expectation that teachers should have similar conceptions of assessment depending on whether the evaluative or improvement functions are given more priority within a

given policy context.

## **2.2. Professors' Conceptions**

According to Fives & Buehl (2012), teachers' attitudes and beliefs have an effect on the course content, teaching techniques, and assessment practices. Therefore, teachers' conceptions of assessment involve what is being tested, for what purpose and how it is tested. Teachers' beliefs have been defined differently to include "teachers' subjectively reasonable beliefs" (Harootunian & Yarger, 1981), "untested assumptions" (Calderhead, 1996), and "implicit theories" (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

Teachers' perceptions are organized in a way as to include both major and minor beliefs (Pajares, 1992; Thompson, 1992). These beliefs depend on the psychological or cultural environment where a specific event takes place. They, accordingly, vary among people with different mindsets, experiences and interactions (Ekeblad & Bond, 1994; Pratt, 1992).

The study of teachers' conceptions of assessment is important because there exists evidence that teachers' conceptions of teaching, learning, and curricula influence strongly how they teach and what students learn or achieve (Pajares, 1992; Thompson, 1992). These conceptions represent different categories of ideas held by professors and teachers behind their descriptions of how they view and experience educational matters (Pratt, 1992). Therefore, they represent the professors' opinions, explanations and contacts in a given teaching environment (Marton, 1981). It should be stressed that Professors' conceptions are

the term to be used throughout this study with its complex and multi-dimensional framework.

### **3. Previous Research in the Field**

Foregoing research on teachers' conceptions of assessment was conducted in different environments and investigated many issues. While some researchers worked on the purposes of assessment and the different preferences between formative and summative test forms (Berry, 2008; Carr, 2001; Black & William, 1998; Torrance & Pryor, 1998), others considered the purposes of assessment (Newton, 2007; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Besides, it was not until Brown came up with his famous 'Teachers Conception of Assessment' TCoA account in 2006 that more research has started to accumulate in the field. It is a self-report inventory that highlights teachers' beliefs about the multi-component levels of assessment by means of correlating and interweaving the four purposes of assessment, namely school accountability, student accountability, teaching/learning improvement, and irrelevance and, hence, creating an independent overall categorical model whose patterns are believed to hold more importance.

Studies on TCoA have been carried out in different areas and contexts, for instance, in New Zealand (Brown, 2006, 2011), China (Brown & Gao, 2015), Hong Kong (Brown et al., 2009), the Netherlands (Segers & Tillema, 2011), Egypt (Gebril & Brown, 2013), and Tunisia (Hidri, 2015). Different results have been reported from different studies. For example, teachers were found to believe in the use of assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning (Öz, 2014; Young &

Jackman, 2014; Brown & Remesal, 2012; Brown & Michaelides, 2011; Segers & Tillema, 2011; Barajas, 2010). Having the purpose of improvement as a priority in assessment seems extremely reasonable as the primary function of teaching is choosing the most adequate teaching content and activities, and checking their utility for the learning improvement. As a matter of fact, assessment as a post teaching practice should follow the same understanding of the major aim of such instructional practices (Brown et al., 2009; Brookhart, 2003; Fraser & Spiller, 2001). In contrast to that, findings by Brown, Pishghadam and Sadafian (2012) suggest that Student Accountability as a purpose of assessment stands of a higher importance than Improvement. It is worth mentioning that, in all the existing studies so far, teachers don't agree on the notion that assessment is irrelevant; assessment is always relevant whether it is designed for the sake of students' evaluation or the general learning improvement.

In many studies on assessment conceptions, results show that some factors were given much importance over others. Studies done in Hong Kong and China (Brown, Kennedy, Fok, Chan, & Yu, 2009; Li & Hui, 2007) have shown that the teachers' conceptions of assessment have gone beyond the four agreed on factors, and called for the addition of more options. However, in the contexts of New Zealand and Tunisia, Gebril and Brown (2013) and Hidri (2015), have found that their adopted TCoA inventory should encompass only three options to match the teacher's conceptions in their countries' respective educational contexts.

Many studies, therefore, have shown remarkable differences in



assessment conceptions maintaining the effectiveness of some purposes and overlooking others. However, there seems no study that has investigated TCoA among either secondary school or university teachers in Morocco. Consequently, the present study seeks to know more about the TCoA in the Moroccan context.

#### **4. Assessment in Moroccan Higher Education**

In general, Morocco has always had a top down, centralized educational system, which means that all decisions are made by higher authorities. Educational institutions serve just to convey the pedagogical policies designed by the government, and it is the job of professors and teachers to implement and perform such rules and regulations. Assessment practices throughout Moroccan schools are mostly common standardized tests that professors design and use to decide whether students are granted to move to the following grade/semester. Since 2000, there have been significant reforms in the educational system that have brought about many imperative changes to higher education in Morocco as they have called for various improvements in the curricular, teaching practices and assessment. Such reforms did not exclude assessment; so as Bouziane and Ziyad (2018) put it, there has been “an outstanding transformation (...) in the conceptualization of assessment from an end-product measurement phase to a decisive and pervasive determinant of students’ learning” (P: 23).

Within the Moroccan educational setting, evaluation and testing are given a great significance. For both undergraduate and postgraduate

levels, professors are in charge of not only designing tests, but also administering them to their students, and are also expected to ensure their validity. Assessment is given a huge importance, since succeeding in exams is an indicator for students' good achievement, professors' high quality teaching, and universities' fine standing. Still, it is believed that the "Moroccan educational system lacks an efficient culture of evaluation that is fair and acceptable to educators and students" (Ahmed, 2018, p: 4). Some of these problems have been presented by Melouk (2001), as quoted from Ahmed (2018), who highlighted that evaluation is in its initial stages in Morocco because of five factors. First, teachers and supervisors lack training in the technical aspects of evaluation. Second, evaluation field research is scarce in Morocco. Third, an independent body responsible for examination evaluation and production does not exist in Morocco. Fourth, the teaching and learning milieu in which national examinations are run makes teachers' incorporation of continuous assessment in their daily practices a difficult matter. Fifth, teachers commonly believe that they are not concerned with evaluation and testing issues.

As based on the author's empirical observation and a ten-year day-to-day teaching experience, assessment in Moroccan higher education can be said to have been suffering from serious problems at the level of design and implementation, especially in a constantly changing context which has known many restructuring reforms. Reasons for this are numerous. The first one is the increasing number of university students which has become a variable that makes any form of assessment hard to put into practice, and which has resulted into the abolition of mid-

term tests in many departments in different Moroccan universities. Such kind of formative assessment has proved to be inappropriate in terms of accounting for deep and valid examinations which normally require more time, energy as well as adequate infrastructure. Due to this largely uncontrollable growing number of students each and every year, any attempts towards providing a balance between summative large scale testing and any form of formative or alternative assessment has not met big success. Another newly emerged factor that has recently affected the area of assessment in higher education is the introduction and integration of MCQ exams in large-scale language testing; reference here goes back to the universities of Ibn Tofail and Ibn Zohr where this form of examination has been used since 2014 although “many professors criticize this kind of tests as lacking validity and not fully ensuring reliability, as well as because of its negative backwash effect on foreign language teaching and learning” (Brigui, 2017, p:1).

Moroccan professors, students, and parents generally view examinations as reliable mechanisms for accomplishing educational goals and meaningful social status. Still, any improvement policy of assessment would start from professors as they are the first active contributors. Therefore, it is needed to ensure that professors have positive beliefs about this policy. Hence, it is important to investigate how assessment is perceived and practiced by professors, the focus of this study, especially that there is a dramatic lack in sound theoretical background in the Moroccan higher educational context.

## **5. The study**

This study aims to investigate the conceptions of assessment of Moroccan university professors in an EFL context. Data are collected using the teachers' conceptions of assessment (TCoA) inventory by Brown (2006). The analysis looks into the importance of each of the four factors as suggested by Brown, namely, Student Accountability, School Accountability, Improvement and Irrelevance. While studies on TCoA are abundant, more studies are called for to be investigated in the Moroccan context, and to probe into the EFL university professors' conceptions.

### **5.1. Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What are the perceptions of Moroccan EFL university professors about classroom assessment in higher education as suggested by the TCoA inventory in terms of school accountability, students' accountability, improvement and irrelevance?
- 2- Which purpose of assessment is considered as the most important to EFL university professors?
- 3- Which testing mode is preferred by EFL university professors?
- 4- Do EFL university professors prefer to use alternative assessment modes along with summative tests?
- 5- Are Moroccan EFL university professors satisfied with the current state of assessment in their institutions?

### **5.2. Study Methodology**

### **5.2.1. Subjects**

Subjects of this study are 25 EFL university professors teaching at the departments of English Studies at the Faculties of Letters and Humanities, the Faculty of Education, and the Ecole Nationale de Commerce et de Gestion" (ENCG). To create a generalizability of conceptions and try to come up with a more representative view of different professors' attitudes and opinions towards the investigated topic, professors were selected as to belong to 8 different universities among the 12 existing Moroccan ones. Therefore, subjects of this study come from the following universities: Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra (N.5), Ibn Zohr University, Agadir (N.4), Mohamed V University, Rabat (N.4), Moulay Ismail University, Meknes (N.4), Hassan II University, Casablanca (N.2), Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech (N.2), Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fes (N.2), and Hassan 1<sup>st</sup> University, Settat (N.2). The variables of age, gender or years of teaching were not important in this study.

### **5.2.2. Research Instrument**

As a research instrument, an online questionnaire comprising 30 questions was administered to subjects. This questionnaire encompasses the Teacher Conceptions of Assessment version III abridged (TCoA) inventory (Brown, 2006), in addition to three more questions designed to answer further queries in the study. This TCoA consists of a three-point likert scale 27 items or indicators (Appendix). Responses to the TCoA are combined into nine factors, each made up of three items, which form four related conceptions of assessment (i.e.

Student Accountability, School Accountability, Improvement and Irrelevance).

School Accountability and Student Accountability include three main indicators each, namely: 'assessment provides information on schools', 'assessment is accurate', 'assessment evaluates schools', in addition to 'assessment categorizes students', 'assessment assigns scores to students' work' and 'assessment determines students' qualifications' respectively'.

Improvement includes four secondary factors, each of which has three indicators: 1) assessment describes abilities (assessment determines the quantity of learning, establishes learning content, and measures meta-cognitive thinking skills among students) 2) assessment improves learning (assessment provides feedback on students' performance, feeds back learning needs to students and improves students' learning), 3) improves teaching (assessment is integrated with teaching, modifies teaching and allows different instructions for students) and 4) assessment is valid.

Irrelevance, also includes three minor factors: 1) assessment is bad (against beliefs, unfair, interferes with teaching), 2) assessment is ignored (little use of results, results are filed and ignored and impacts teaching) and 3) assessment is inaccurate (measurement error, error and imprecision and imprecise process).

### **5.3. Results and Discussion**

This research is of an exploratory design. It is also quantitative since the questionnaire was analyzed and made to yield numerical data that

were conducted to statistics. Findings are presented as follows.

1- What are the perceptions of Moroccan EFL university professors about classroom assessment in higher education as suggested by the TCoA inventory in terms of school accountability, students' accountability, improvement and irrelevance?

Professors' reports on their perceptions of assessment purposes are presented in tables below. Table 1 presents information about the first factor which is school accountability. This factor was examined by providing answers to three indicators or questions. Yielded data indicate that professors show a great degree of agreement on the three asked questions with frequencies of 62,5%, 60,9% and 66,7% respectively. These findings suggest that assessment results increase pressure on schools as much as on students. Both the quality of a school and that of individual students are judged based on students' scores. One can say that this function of assessment is covertly assumed in higher education, unlike in secondary schools, as the examination systems consider tests to give a direct evaluation of the students' learning and an indirect one to estimate the value of schools (Gebril and Brown, 2013).

**Table 1** Assessment makes schools accountable

Indicators/ Questions	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Total %
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<b>1- Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing.</b>	<b>62,5</b>	12,5	25	100
<b>2- Assessment is an accurate indicator of a school's quality.</b>	<b>60,9</b>	8,7	30,4	100
<b>3- Assessment is a good way to evaluate a school.</b>	<b>66,7</b>	8,3	25	100

The second table accounts for results on the second factor of assessment which is students' accountability. Professors agree with high percentages that assessment makes students accountable as it is used to place them into categories (80%), assign grade to their work (72%), and account for their qualification standards (80%). Such results reveal that scores or grades that students earn at the end of a semester, to a great extent, characterize the way they are perceived, as well as the way they pursue their education. This suggests that scores have a considerable role on students' representativeness. Students are more liable to get good grades, not to learn well.

**Table 2** Assessment makes students accountable

<b>Indicators/ Questions</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>4- Assessment places students into categories.</b>	<b>80</b>	12	8	100
<b>5- Assessment is assigning a grade or level to student work.</b>	<b>72</b>	8	20	100
<b>6- Assessment determines if students</b>	<b>80</b>	8	12	100



meet qualifications standards.				
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As for the third function of assessment which is using assessment to improve education, the TCoA inventory proposes four sets of indicators, each one of which comprises three questions. Table 3 presents answers for the first set on the perception that ‘assessment describes abilities’. While all respondents agree that assessment defines how much students have learned from teaching (88%) and what they actually learned of it (76%), 56% of them disagree that assessment measures higher order thinking skills. This indicates that assessment practices remain for a large number of professors to target surface level skills only. Reasons for this can be seen as multidimensional. While professors consider students are not proficient or deep enough to exhibit any form of critical thinking, students perceive of assessment as a means to get high grades by means of cramming information and giving it back in return later in exams. In addition to that, many professors remain reluctant to indulge in a high level critical testing as this is not what is sought and accredited by stakeholders. This unfortunate situation is the outcome of “the directing of the educational progress towards academic achievement more than towards training students for the ability to undertake research ad practice thinking.” (Douara, 2008, p. 14)

**Table 3** Assessment describes abilities

Indicators/ Questions	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Total %
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<b>7- Assessment is a way to determine how much students have learned from teaching.</b>	<b>88</b>	4	8	100
<b>8- Assessment establishes what students have learned.</b>	<b>76</b>	16	8	100
<b>9- Assessment measures students' higher order thinking skills.</b>	20	24	<b>56</b>	100

Table 4 displays the degree of agreement of the respondents regarding the second indicator, that of 'assessment improving learning'. Accordingly, respondents highly agree that assessment provides feedback to students about their learning (84%), makes them aware of their learning needs (72%), and helps them improve their learning (80%). Such results were expected as they come in accordance with what assessment is commonly believed to be used for. Casually, assessment is defined as a means to measure and report the degree students have learned of a given material. One should say that the students are the ones who should benefit the most from their exams. It is true that professors can get an idea about the students' levels, but only students can use this variable to adjust and improve their learning.

**Table 4** Assessment improves learning

<b>Indicators/ Questions</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>10- Assessment provides feedback to</b>	<b>84</b>	16	0	100

<b>students about their performance.</b>				
<b>11- Assessment feeds back to students their learning needs.</b>	<b>72</b>	24	4	100
<b>12- Assessment helps students improve their learning.</b>	<b>80</b>	20	0	100

In alignment with improving learning, whether assessment improves teaching has also been probed. As shown in the following table, a great number of answers suggest that there exists an agreement on the fact that assessment is actually integrated with teaching practices (88%), and that assessment results even serve to modify current teaching (76%), 56% of answers disagree that assessment allows different students to get different instruction. This data reveals that professors seem well-aware of the importance of assessment as part of their teaching practice, and are also aware that assessment tailors their way of teaching. Still, providing a diversity of teaching modes and methods to students based on their results is not acknowledged. This may be due to the fact that summative assessment, most common at the university level, doesn't give room for further re-teaching, nor does the great number of students allow such further sub-grouping on a one assessment level basis.

**Table 5** Assessment improves teaching

<b>Indicators/ Questions</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>

<b>13- Assessment is integrated with teaching practice.</b>	<b>88</b>	8	4	100
<b>14- Assessment information modifies ongoing teaching of students.</b>	<b>76</b>	20	4	100
<b>15- Assessment allows different students to get different instruction.</b>	24	20	<b>56</b>	100

Surprisingly, all respondents disagree that assessment is valid. 58,3% believe that results are not trustworthy, 56% disagree that results are consistent, and 45,9% refuse the idea that results can be depended on. The majority of professors acknowledge the flaws of the current distribution of scores. This attitude could result from already experienced instances when they could witness a discrepancy between a student's real proficiency level and his/her exam grade. Such a case has been frequently faced, and professors have been torn on many occasions between their neutrality in reporting assessed scores, and their humanly necessity to give each student what they really deserve.

**Table 6** Assessment is valid

<b>Indicators/ Questions</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>16- Assessment results are trustworthy.</b>	16,7	25	<b>58,3</b>	100
<b>17- Assessment results are consistent.</b>	12	32	<b>56</b>	100
<b>18- Assessment results can be</b>	20,8	33,3	<b>45,9</b>	100

<b>depended on.</b>				
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Following are answers to the three last questions which are indicators of the professors' conceptions of the fourth factor of assessment which claims that 'assessment is irrelevant'. Table 7 presents answers on the set of questions examining how professors can see 'assessment as bad'. Not only 52% of the responding professors believe that assessment forces them to teach in a way against their belief, 80% see that assessment interferes with their teaching as well. This implies that while teaching, professors should always conform to the content to be tested and the way to teach it. In other words, though one can assume that university professors enjoy a great deal of freedom in designing their course content and using the teaching methods they feel most appropriate, when it comes to assessment, there are some rules of thumb that should be respected. This becomes more pertinent when the department calls for the implementation of a common exam and abide by the exams' guidelines advanced in the ministry's accreditation. What is more, answers to the third question show that assessment can be also a bad thing for students as 52% of respondents think that it is unfair to them in a sense that results may not reflect their true abilities.

**Table 7** Assessment is bad

Indicators/ Questions	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Total %

<b>19- Assessment forces teachers to teach in a way against their beliefs.</b>	<b>52</b>	36	12	100
<b>20- Assessment is unfair to students.</b>	20	28	<b>52</b>	100
<b>21- Assessment interferes with teaching.</b>	<b>80</b>	12	8	100

Still examining the factor of assessment's irrelevance, results for the following three indicators are tabulated below. The query here is to testify whether 'assessment is ignored' or not. Not surprisingly, 72% of respondents agree that they conduct assessment, but make little use of the results, while 64% admit that assessment results are filed and ignored. This is what actually happens in contexts where only summative end of term assessment is implemented. Assessment scores serve particularly to distinguish passing students from failing ones. Once this purpose is achieved, exam papers or grades have no further need. Answers for the last question emphasize what respondents answered for questions 19 and 21. That is, 68% believe that assessment has a relatively great impact on teaching.

**Table 8** Assessment is ignored

<b>Indicators/ Questions</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>22- Teachers conduct assessments but make little use of the results.</b>	<b>72</b>	12	16	100
<b>23- Assessment results are filed and ignored.</b>	<b>64</b>	20	16	100

<b>24- Assessment has little impact on teaching.</b>	24	8	<b>68</b>	100
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Table 9 displays respondents' answers on the last set of questions which serve as indicators to the inaccuracy of assessment. 88% of professors agree that assessment can be imprecise that is why results should be treated cautiously (80%). This inaccuracy is emphasized when most exam formats come in the form of essays, the correction of which is not always objective. Two professors can actually assign two different scores to the same essay given the fact that each one highlights and overweights some characteristics over the others. In addition to that, a large scale examination calls for the correction of a large number of exam copies, a thing that is very hard to be accomplished as objectively as it should be, especially in a context governed by time constraints.

**Table 9** Assessment is inaccurate

<b>Indicators/ Questions</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>25- Assessment results should be treated cautiously given measurement error.</b>	<b>88</b>	12	0	100
<b>26- Teachers should take into account the error and imprecision in all assessment.</b>	<b>88</b>	8	4	100
<b>27- Assessment is an imprecise</b>	<b>60</b>	28	12	100

process.				
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2- Which purpose of assessment is considered as the most important to EFL university professors?

To answer this research question, an overall counting of the results' percentages of each indicator within the four assessment functions was performed. Results yielded, tabulated below, show that Moroccan EFL university professors believe that the major purpose of assessment is to account for students' level with a high agreement percentage of 77,3%. On the second rank comes their perception of the irrelevance of testing as a process with a total of 65,2%, followed by their belief that assessment actually makes schools accountable. Still, with a percentage that is slightly above average, i.e. of 54,8%, professors could attest on the importance of assessment to improve education.

It is entirely logical and rational to give more importance to examination scores (students' accountability) along with the quality of schools. Results imply that professors believe that a high quality school shows in its students' high scores on examinations. This is common within an examination – driven society, where schools take pride in having a high percentage of students passing.

However, the first striking characteristic in this result is to find out that improvement as an assessment function comes last according to professors' perceptions. In fact, there seems an attitudinal disconnection between the quality of schools, of students and educational improvement. Professors proved to give little importance



to improvement as a reason behind assessment. The relative gap existing between accountability and improvement-oriented assessment most likely comes from the fact that in higher education, assessment is mainly summative, after which students get very little or no feedback. Therefore, it is probable that professors' conceptions clearly illustrate this disregard given to improvement as a post testing task.

This finding disconfirms the results of some previous research in the field. Brown et al. (2011), for example, found out that teachers strongly agree that the primary function of tests is to motivate students and make them work and learn better. Such finding was the obvious outcome of the use of the formative type of assessment in a context that encourages adopting a testing approach that goes beyond giving value judgments, to encouraging the students and monitoring their learning.

Another striking feature in these results is the common conception of assessment as irrelevant. This idea might result from the widespread belief that the examination system is inappropriate, unfair or invalid, and that students' grading is not based on merit. Professors are getting more frustrated not to be fair in a context where cheating, nepotism and fraudulent behaviors are massively increasing.

**Table 10** Overall percentages of the four assessment factors

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Agreement</b>	<b>Neutrality</b>	<b>Disagreement</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>

Schools' Accountability.	<b>63,4</b>	9,8	26,8	100
Students' Accountability	<b>77,3</b>	9,3	13,3	100
Improvement	<b>54,8</b>	20,2	25	100
Irrelevance	<b>65,2</b>	13,1	21,7	100

3- Which testing mode is preferred by EFL university professors?

**Table 11** Professors' test form preference

	<b>Essay/Paragraph questions</b>	<b>Questions about definitions of concepts</b>	<b>Multiple-choice questions</b>	<b>Total Number (N)</b>
<b>Number of preferences</b>	<b>11</b>	2	<b>11</b>	25
<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>45,8</b>	8,4	<b>45,8</b>	100%

The yielded data indicate that MCQ tests and essay / paragraph questions were equally the most preferred modes of assessment for EFL university professors with a frequency of 45,8 %, whereas the third type of tests was lower in the preference frequency. It should be mentioned that essay or paragraph question exam type is the most frequently used type in higher education, a fact that is obviously accounted for in the data. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that only two universities make use of MCQ tests in their assessment system. This means, only 9 professors form the target populations could actually use MCQ tests, but the high percentage obtained shows that even professors from other universities would prefer to use that

exam type. One advantage of MCQ exams is that they are of a high degree of objectivity and fairness and high reliability. They can also be employed in any disciplines whether practical or theoretical courses (Brigui, 2017).

4- Do EFL university professors prefer to use of alternative assessment modes along with summative tests?

**Table 12** The use of alternative assessment

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Total Number (N)</b>
<b>Using alternative assessment</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>

Drawing on the table above, 92% of professors agree to use alternative assessment modes beside the commonly used summative tests. This entails that faculty members point at the importance of formative assessment along with summative assessment. However, even though, overall, there exists an interest in alternative-assessment among the professor participants, yet the implementation of new forms of assessment; portfolio assessment, peer and self-assessment in this case, needs support from the administration and among all the faculty members to be fully effective. On the other hand, students also should be acculturated to the use of such forms of assessment to reduce dependency on final exams.

5- Are Moroccan EFL university professors satisfied with the current state of assessment in their institutions?

**Table 13** Satisfaction of professors with assessment

	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Total Number (N)</b>
<b>Number of preferences</b>	3	0	<b>22</b>	25
<b>Percentage %</b>	12	0	<b>88</b>	100%

A total of 22 professors representing 88% admit their dissatisfaction of the state of assessment in its design and implementation. Although targeted professors recognize the lack of effectiveness of traditional forms of assessment and would rather opt for other forms of alternative assessment, they always keep that tradition. Their persistence seems to stem from the top-down nature of authority control in the structure of higher education system. The faculty members may not have a control over those practices but to implement what came to them from the Ministry of Higher Education. This, however, does not seem the only cause of professors' dissatisfaction of assessment; add to this the great number of assessed students, the lack of sufficient logistics during exam days, the short time allocated to corrections, and the imposed exam coordination between faculty members most of whom share neither the same teaching practices nor the same assessment principles. All this has brought about a unanimous sense of dissatisfaction regarding assessment in the actual Moroccan EFL higher education context.

## 6. Summary of Findings

This study sought to understand the meaningfulness of assessment through professors' lenses. Therefore, according to their reported perceptions on the purposes of assessment and related issues, it can be concluded that Moroccan university professors view good assessment from three major aspects: purposes of assessment, outcomes of assessment, and forms of assessment. All these factors account for indicators of what a 'good' assessment stands for.

Accordingly, a good assessment should be able to account for the students' level and have a positive impact on students' learning. This implies that, according to the professors, a good assessment should have an emphasis on learning as well as on reporting scores, but should especially not interfere with teaching. A good assessment occurs when teachers create an environment as they control for cheating and any other revenues that undermine the validity of assessment. Justice in exam motivates real learning and makes students know that their efforts pay off. A good assessment should not be used as a power to penalize students, but to help them know more about their weaknesses to overcome later. Professors agree that a good assessment not only reflects students' progress, but also the extent to which the teacher was able to transfer the information.

Regarding the type of questions in a test, professors prefer both constructed responses (essay type) and selected ones (MCQ). They also favor variation in assessment. A good assessment should include traditional assessment in addition to alternative assessment forms.

Overall, the study reveals that, based on the professors' perceptions, the current state of assessment is far from being satisfactory. There is a dire need to shift focus from what actual assessment assesses, and the way this is performed. While it is important that professors develop beliefs about the purposes of assessment that lead to improved outcomes, the stakeholders should help implement that change in the conditions, purposes and consequences of assessment to expect a similar change in attitudes, beliefs and by-product.

## **7. Conclusion**

The current study examines how EFL university professors in Morocco conceive of assessment both as a notion and a practice within their large scale assessment system. This is achieved by using Brown's TCoA inventory and comparing its outputs to previous study results. The Moroccan context which is an examination-driven society depends on professors to implement tests as well as prepare students to take them. Therefore, any attempt to discuss assessment matters needs to take into account how teachers perceive of assessment first, and how they perform their assessing role. It is worth admitting that using mixed research methods, such as interviews in addition to questionnaires, could have been more beneficial in unveiling the teachers' conceptions and beliefs of assessment more precisely and deeply.

To sum up, results of this study show a discrepancy between how professors think of assessment, and how they actually perform their assessment. This might be due to the relatively hard situation and difficult context professors are forced to deal with in their high

education institution, precisely, the great number of students which need to be assessed as opposed to the insufficiency of the available human resources and logistics. This situation calls for the total adoption of the summative form of assessment to minimize the frequency of getting evaluation done in such a discouraging quasi-non-conducive context.

As for suggested research recommendations, further studies should try to pinpoint how can the professors' assessment conceptions be reflected in their real assessment, highlighting if conceptions affect the actual assessment practices or vice versa. More research should also be geared towards digging into the real causes that make Moroccan professors' conceptions of assessment differ, at least partly, from those in other countries. Finally, it would be interesting to spot and reveal the university students' own perceptions to see if there is a common ground between how assessment is seen by the two performing agents in every assessment, namely professors and students.

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## Appendix

Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment Inventory (Brown, 2006, p. 168)

1- Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

2- Assessment is an accurate indicator of a school's quality.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

3- Assessment is a good way to evaluate a school.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

4- Assessment places students into categories.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

5- Assessment is assigning a grade or level to student work.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

6- Assessment determines if students meet qualifications standards.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

7- Assessment is a way to determine how much students have learned from teaching.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

8- Assessment establishes what students have learned.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

9- Assessment measures students' higher order thinking skills.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

10- Assessment provides feedback to students about their performance.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

11- Assessment feeds back to students their learning needs.

*Agree            Neutral/Undecided            Disagree*

12- Assessment helps students improve their learning.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

13- Assessment is integrated with teaching practice.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

14- Assessment information modifies ongoing teaching of students.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

15- Assessment allows different students to get different instruction.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

16- Assessment results are trustworthy.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

17- Assessment results are consistent.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

18- Assessment results can be depended on.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

19- Assessment forces teachers to teach in a way against their beliefs.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

20- Assessment is unfair to students.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

21- Assessment interferes with teaching.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

22- Teachers conduct assessments but make little use of the results.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

23- Assessment results are filed and ignored.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

24- Assessment has little impact on teaching.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

25- Assessment results should be treated cautiously given measurement error.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

26- Teachers should take into account the error and imprecision in all assessment.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

27- Assessment is an imprecise process.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

28- Which type of tests do you prefer?

Essay questions \_\_\_ Questions about definitions of concepts \_\_\_ Multiple-choice questions \_\_\_

29- Using alternative ways of assessment (portfolio assessment, self- assessment, peer assessment) is very much required in the actual university context.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*

30- I am satisfied with the actual mode and way of assessment in the English Department.

*Agree*            *Neutral/Undecided*            *Disagree*