



# English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Concerning Continuous Assessment in Omani Cycle 1 Schools

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## Authors' contributions

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. 'All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** In this study, the authors investigated English language teachers' beliefs on continuous assessment, the relationship between their beliefs and continuous assessment practices, and factors influencing teachers' continuous assessment practices in Cycle 1 schools in the South Batinah Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman.

**Study Design:** The authors used a mixed-methods approach employing an explanatory sequential design. In the first phase, a questionnaire investigating teachers' beliefs and assessment practices was distributed to 154 teachers. In the second phase, interviews and artefact observation were conducted with three teachers. Principal components analysis was used to analyze questionnaire data, whereas interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

**Results:** The results indicate that teachers demonstrate positive beliefs towards the implementation of continuous assessment. They highlighted some aspects of the benefits of continuous assessment such as providing feedback to learners and parents and encouraging teachers to use a variety of methods, reflect on their assessment practices and adapt their techniques. However, discrepancies were found between teachers' reported beliefs and their continuous assessment practices. These discrepancies resulted from large class size, lack of time, syllabus and timetable load, mixed learner abilities, lack of clarity of the assessment handbook, parents' attitudes, and inadequate assessment training.

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**Conclusion:** The study is significant because it helps clarify the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their assessment practices. In addition, the study provides information for policymakers, assessment designers, and training program designers on the current implementation of continuous assessment in Cycle 1. The study significantly contributes to the existing literature since to the best of the authors' knowledge it is the first study conducted in Oman investigating teachers' beliefs on the practices of continuous assessment in Cycle 1 schools.

**Keywords:** *Continuous assessment; English language teachers; beliefs; Sultanate of Oman; mixed-methods.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is an essential component in the process of teaching and learning. Therefore, teachers' role is critical in understanding their learners and matching learners' performance with accurate assessment. Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Alnabhani, and Alkalbani [1] have commented that teachers' classroom assessment practices must be in congruence with the suggested practices of the assessment experts. Based on the first author's experience as an assessment officer who moderates assessment and the implementation of continuous assessment (CA) by teachers, a gap was observed between teachers' assessment practices and the official student assessment handbook (SAH) issued by the Omani Ministry of Education in Cycle 1 schools from grades 1 to 4. This gap resulted in providing imprecise assessment decisions of learners' real achievement of the learning outcomes. Although the emphasize of the assessment of young learners in these grades is on formative assessment through gathering different information about students' performance using a variety of assessment tools, teachers tend to mostly use summative assessments by awarding marks and giving graded tasks based on specific rating scales. These marks are accumulated to report on students' achievements at the end of the academic year. However, little formative data and feedback is provided on the students' gradual progress and the techniques used to monitor their improvements throughout the academic year. Although the SAH provides detailed illustration on various assessment tools, principles, strategies, outcomes, and criteria of assessment assisting teachers to carry out assessment in a systematic way, teachers are still not able to incorporate and align the guidelines with their actual teaching and assessment practice. According to the first author's observations, teachers have different beliefs about assessment which affect their practices. For instance, some teachers believe

that students' achievement should only be evaluated by exams; however, others think that students should not be tested. This variation in teachers' beliefs regulate what teachers implement and how this implementation is reflected in their classes [2]. According to Al Sawafi [3], this variation may be due to a lack of understanding in the purpose and the rationale for using such practices. Ultimately, the occurrence of this variation and its lack of implementing the suggested methods and assessment criteria underlined and documented in the SAH may negatively influence the students' academic achievement [4].

Consequently, the authors aimed to investigate teachers' beliefs about implementing CA, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their CA practices as well as the factors that influence teachers' beliefs and their CA practices in Cycle 1 schools in Batinah South Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman. Three research objectives were formulated as follows:

- RO 1. To identify teachers' beliefs about CA in Cycle 1 schools.
- RO 2. To determine the relationship between teachers' beliefs and CA practices.
- RO 3. To identify the factors that inhibit teachers' CA practices.

### 1.1 Based on the Objectives, the Following Three Questions were Drafted

- RQ1. What beliefs do teachers have about CA in Cycle 1 schools?
- RQ2. What is the relationship between teachers' beliefs and CA practices?
- RQ3. What are the factors that inhibit teachers' CA practices?

Since the authors were concerned with the teachers' beliefs and practices of CA in Cycle 1

schools including 1-4 grades, the present article is expected to make a significant contribution in informing and updating the Ministry of Education (MOE) on the current implementation of CA in Cycle 1 and the influence of teachers' beliefs on their practices. Thus, the results of this article help the assessment designers to craft training programs based on teachers' assessment needs and effectively plan the quality of trainings programs creating more efficient strategies for conducting assessment. This will contribute to raise the standards of the teachers' assessment professional development and empower them with effective assessment strategies. Decision makers can also use the findings of this study to critically evaluate the SAH, find out its deficiencies from the teachers' viewpoints and work towards improving it. Since this work provides insight into the factors that inhibit teachers' CA practices and beliefs in Oman, it will help educational planners take these factors in consideration while planning the assessment. It is hoped that this research will deepen teachers' knowledge to raise awareness of their beliefs on their assessment practices.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach was adopted to collect and analyze the data. According to the viewpoints of post-positivists, the use of various research methods instruments allows researchers to study the problem from different perspectives, thus increasing the reliability and reducing the possibility of bias [5]. To collect quantitative and qualitative data, an explanatory sequential design was employed by which the collection of the quantitative and qualitative data occurred sequentially in two phases. Creswell [6] outlines that the explanatory sequential strategy "is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data" (p. 24). In this study, the authors used a questionnaire as the instrument for the quantitative approach to

investigate teachers' beliefs about CA, practices such as methods, feedback and recording and the factors that influence their implementation of CA. The questionnaire was piloted to ensure its fit for the study. As proposed by Pallant [7] the Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be above 0.70 to ensure the validity of the instrument. In the present study, the Cronbach alpha values for the first and second part of the questionnaire were respectively 0.754 and 0.833, thus demonstrating sufficient validity. Additionally, two qualitative instruments were used to collect data: interviews and artefact observation.

The target population of the quantitative study includes English teachers of Grades 1 to 4 in Cycle 1 schools in the South Batinah Governorate. The convenience sample of schools and teachers is distributed in six *wilayats* (states). Consequently, using a questionnaire for the current study was an appropriate and efficient way to collect data from many teachers in the Batinah South Governorate.

Only 154 out of 274 teachers responded to the questionnaire, excluding 32 teachers who participated in the pilot phase of the questionnaire. Three teachers were interested in participating in the second (qualitative) phase, which included semi-structured one-on-one interviews and artefact observation. Therefore, the selection of the convenience sample was based on their willingness, which was indicated in their responses in the questionnaire.

### 2.1 The Questionnaire Consisted of the Four Following Parts

#### Part 1: Demographic information

This first part included six closed-ended items asking teachers to provide demographic information about their teaching experience, qualification, number of learners, grade level, number of lessons and assessment training.

**Table 1. Distribution of schools and teachers among six wilayats**

Wilayat	Total number of schools	Total number of teachers
Rustaq	8	61
Al-Musnah	8	78
Barka	10	97
Wadi Alkawil	1	9
Nakhal	2	15
Al-Awabi	2	14

#### Part 2: Teachers' beliefs about continuous assessment

The second part consisted of 20 closed-ended items about teachers' beliefs about CA, and a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree" options. It was used to measure the teachers' beliefs.

#### Part 3: Teachers' practices of continuous assessment

This part was a set of 12 items regarding teachers' practices of CA, and a 5-point Likert scale that used measurement ranging from "Used very often" to "Never used".

#### Part 4: Factors influencing teachers' assessment practices

This part comprised of two multiple-choice questions indicating the challenges in implementing CA. The second question included an open ending question for participants if they wanted to add additional opinions.

## 2.2 Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used to provide further insight into teachers' beliefs, their actual practices, and the challenges of CA. The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol, and open-ended questions were mostly used to "give the respondents opportunities to develop their responses in ways which the interviewer might not have foreseen" [8].

## 2.3 Artefact Observation

Artefact observation was used to triangulate the data obtained from the interviews and the questionnaire. The observation included teachers' planning for assessment such as observing how teachers planned for assessments in their preparation books and the techniques used. In addition, the authors through their observations focused on the formal and informal assessment records, such as how teachers activated formal and informal records, how they made use of the results obtained and how they identified their learners' strengths and weaknesses in the informal records. Furthermore, the authors observed types of feedback given by teachers such as grades, symbols or written comments and samples of learners' activities to identify the types of questions used by teachers as well as the feedback they provided. Additionally, the teachers' written reports were observed to see

how reports were written and how teachers described the learners' performance when reporting to parents.

The data was collected in the following three sequences: (1) the administration of the questionnaire, (2) the semi-structured interview, and (3) the artefact observation. The instrument was distributed online through a WhatsApp account with the help of supervisors and senior teachers. The first author then personally contacted each senior teacher, introduced herself, explained the purpose of the study and arranged to send the questionnaires directly to them through WhatsApp to forward to the English teachers' group in their schools. The senior teachers were very co-operative and in turn represent the questionnaires to other English teachers in their schools.

The first author contacted the school principals of the participants to get permission to visit the schools and informed them of the nature of the study. The principals showed willingness to co-operate. The first author then personally contacted the three teachers and arranged for the meetings. Before starting the interviews, the teachers were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviews and that their data would only be used for the purpose of the study and that pseudonyms would be used. One interview was conducted with each teacher for approximately one hour in Arabic to give the teachers more confidence to speak fluently apart from some phrases and terms related to assessment with which teachers were familiar. From the authors' perspective, one interview was sufficient since the three teachers provided rich data which covered the intended questions. The interviews were audio recorded as agreed upon and were then translated into English and transcribed.

The artefact observations took place on the same day during and after the interview. The teachers were informed in advance about what the first author wanted to observe. The teachers kept samples of their work and their students' work such as preparation books, students' portfolios, activities, and records. While conducting the interviews, the teachers referred to the documents to give some examples of the topics discussed. After receiving the teachers' permission, the first author took photographs of samples of documents as evidence.

**Table 2. Participant background information**

Name	Teaching experience (years)	Qualification	Number of learners in each class	Grades taught	Number of lessons	Assessment training
Hekma	6–12	BA	26–30	1 and 3	21	Workshop by senior teacher
Mariyam	13–20	BA	More than 30	2	7	Course provided by the ministry
Reem	13–20	BA	26–30	2	7	Course provided by the ministry

**Table 3. Teachers' demographic data**

Years of teaching experience	Highest teaching qualification	Number of learners in each class	Grade levels being taught	Total number of lessons being taught per week	Training in assessment
(64.29%) 6 to 12 years	(92.21%) bachelor's degree (BA).	(45.45%) of teachers /more than 30 learners	approximately equally among grades except for the third grade, (18.185%).	(57.14%)/21 lessons per week.	22.08% /not received any training in assessment.

Data from the questionnaire, interviews and artefact observation were analyzed, summarized, and presented in tables and graphs. In the initial stage, the data was organized and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze Part 1, which included participants' demographic information. The frequencies were converted into percentages, and data was illustrated in tables. However, Parts 2 and 3, which comprised statements about teachers' beliefs and practices, were analyzed using principal components analysis (PCA). PCA is used to minimize a large number of items into a smaller number of factors that can be analyzed and interpreted with ease [7]. PCA was used as the extraction method to extract factors, and Varimax rotation method, specifically an orthogonal approach, was used to improve the interpretability of the factor solution to reach a simple structure. The benefit of Varimax rotation is that it maximizes the variances of the loadings within the factors while maximizing differences between high and low loadings on a particular factor [9]. The fourth part, on the challenges of implementing CA, was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the data were presented in the form of bar charts.

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyze the qualitative data [10]. The first author began by transcribing the three teachers' interviews and then thoroughly read the transcribed data line by line. The first author coded the important words, phrases, and sentences which was useful for the analysis and provided answers to the research questions. According to Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield [11], codes help capture important features that are related to the research questions. The relationships between codes were then examined and combined into themes and sub-themes. In relation to that, Gavin [12] mentions that there should be similar features between codes to create themes and subthemes. Then, the authors checked the relevancy and meaning of themes to determine the final themes. Subsequently, the themes were labelled, analyzed, and interpreted. Additionally, the written notes, comments and photographs taken during artefact observation were examined to find a relationship between them and the data from the interviews. Finally, the data was merged and combined into the relevant categories and sub-categories.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results is divided into two sections. The first section addresses the results obtained from the teacher's questionnaire to answer the questions of the study. It includes the analysis of the demographic information of the participants, the analysis of the items in the questionnaire through principal components analysis (PCA) and the factors that inhibit the implementation of CA from the teachers' perspective. The second section presents the findings obtained from the interviews and artefact observation. It starts by illustrating the use of thematic analysis (TA). It then identifies the main themes, providing a detailed discussion of each theme.

#### 3.1 Quantitative Results

SPSS was used to analyze the participants' demographic information, which helped establish a general idea of the participants in relation to their statements. In this section, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the teachers' responses. Table 3 presents a summary of the results of the demographic data.

A total of 20 items in the questionnaire were used to identify teachers' beliefs about CA. PCA was used to determine a limited number of factors that illustrates the interrelationship between a set of items [7]. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted using SPSS to examine the suitability of data for PCA. The authors used PCA as the extraction method to extract factors. The extracted factors should exceed an eigenvalue of 1. As can be seen in Table 4, seven components have an eigenvalue higher than 1 (5.039, 1.888, 1.817, 1.46, 1.204, 1.137, 1.007) with a total of 67 % of the variance.

The factors were then rotated using the Varimax rotation method, specifically the orthogonal approach. The Varimax techniques help to reduce the number of items that are highly loaded in each factor [7]. To determine the number of factors to keep, a scree plot was produced. The plot shows the eigenvalues on the y-axis and the number of factors on the x-axis [9]. As can be seen in Fig. 1, there is a break between the second and third components and another small break between the third and fourth components. The authors decided to retain three components since "factor analysis is used as a data exploration technique, therefore the

interpretation and the use you put it to is up to your judgment" [7] (p. 161).

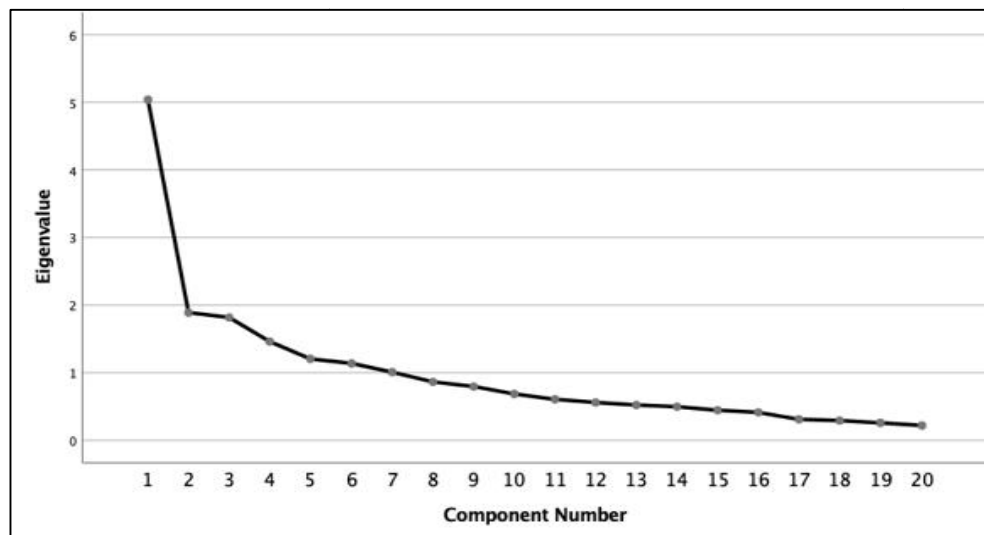
After identification of the factors, a frequency analysis was conducted for all items in the scale to see the teachers' level of agreement with the items in each factor. The 5-point Likert scale

ranged from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Six items (5, 6, 13, 18, 19 and 20) indicated the teachers' beliefs about the use of assessment construct. Table 5 summarizes the responses of teachers to the items concerning the use of assessment.

**Table 4. Total variance explained**

Initial eigenvalue				Extraction sums of squared loadings		
Component	Total	% Of variance	Cumulative%	Total	% Of variance	Cumulative %
1.	5.039	25.195	17.2	5.039	25.195	25.195
2.	1.888	9.441	29.384	1.888	9.441	34.636
3.	1.817	9.085	39.27	1.817	9.085	43.721
4.	1.46	7.298	48.173	1.46	7.298	51.019
5.	1.204	6.019	55.262	1.204	6.019	57.038
6.	1.137	5.684	61.85	1.137	5.684	62.722
7.	1.007	5.033	67.755	1.007	5.033	67.755
8.	0.863	4.313	72.068			
9.	0.794	3.971	76.039			
10.	0.684	3.422	79.461			
11.	0.605	3.024	82.485			
12.	0.558	2.79	85.275			
13.	0.521	2.604	87.879			
14.	0.496	2.479	90.358			
15.	0.443	2.216	92.575			
16.	0.411	2.057	94.632			
17.	0.309	1.543	96.175			
18.	0.291	1.454	97.628			
19.	0.257	1.283	98.911			
20.	0.218	1.089	100			

*Extraction method: principal component analysis*



**Fig. 1. Scree plot 1**

The purpose of assessment construct is evaluated by three items (1, 2 and 3), whereas the implementation of assessment construct is evaluated by 11 items (4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 17). Table 6 presents teachers' responses regarding this construct.

Table 7 shows the responses of teachers regarding their beliefs on the implementation of CA.

Exactly 12 items were used to identify teachers' practices of CA. Similar procedures of analysis were used to analyze the data. All items were exposed to PCA using SPSS. PCA was also used to assess the suitability of data for factor analysis. According to Pallant [7], "the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value should be (.6) or above" (p. 157). In this study, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value is 0.828 which is above the required value of .6, which indicates the appropriateness of the factor analysis. Table 8 represents KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

The test value of  $\chi^2$  reached 548.9 with a freedom degree of 66 and is significant at an alpha of 0.05. The significance value of  $\chi^2$  means that the data is appropriate for the required statistical analysis. PCA as presented in Table 9 shows the existence of three components with eigenvalues above 1, explaining 4.4%, 1.3% and 1.1% of the variance, respectively.

To see the loadings of each variable in the three factors, the Varimax rotation method was applied. Table 10 presents the loadings of items and clearly reveals that most items are loaded in factors 1 and 2 while one item is loaded in factor 3. In component 1, items 3, 4, 5, 6, 10 and 12 are loaded, and the component is identified as teachers' CA strategies. In component 2, items 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9 are loaded, and the component is identified as teachers' CA procedures. Since only one item is loaded in component 3, the factor cannot be considered. As a result, the variable in component 3 was merged with other variables in component 2 because the item covered the same notion as items in component 2.

Fig. 2 reveals a change in the shape of the plot after the second component. Therefore, two factors were kept.

After identification of the factors, frequency analysis using SPSS was run for all items in the scale to see the teachers' level of agreement

with the items in each factor. The 5-point scale ranges from "Very often used" to "Never used". The teachers' CA strategies construct is evaluated by seven items (3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 and 12). Table 11 indicates teachers' responses about the CA strategies they commonly use.

The construct of teachers' CA procedures is evaluated by five items (1, 2, 7, 8 and 9). Table 12 presents teachers' responses to their procedures of assessment.

Nine factors were presented in the questionnaire, namely large class size, shortages of time, lack of knowledge, shortages of teaching materials, attitudes of parents towards CA, the load of syllabus, learners' mixed abilities, lack of training and lack of clarity of the assessment handbook. Additionally, the teachers were given a space to add other factors not included within the options provided. Regarding the challenges in implementing CA in their schools, 63.0% of teachers responded positively that they faced challenges. In contrast, 37.0% of teachers answered negatively that they did not have any challenge in implementation. Table 13 shows teachers' responses regarding this question.

Teachers who responded positively to the question regarding challenges of assessment implementation were asked to indicate the factors that affected their implementation of assessment. Fig. 3 presents the distribution of frequency and the percentage of responses.

The last question in Section 4 asked teachers to provide suggestions to improve the current assessment practices. Out of 154 respondents, 100 respondents provided suggestions for improvement. Descriptive statistics using SPSS were performed to analyze the teachers' suggestions. As shown in Fig. 4, the responses of teachers were classified and labelled under four categories: (1) improving the SAH, (2) training, (3) materials, and (4) class size.

## 3.2 Qualitative Findings

The second section of the analysis discusses the results obtained from the interviews and artefact observation. A thematic analysis (TA) was used "to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices; 'experiential' research which seeks to understand what participants think, feel, and do" [11] (p. 297). After transcribing and reading data



carefully, data was coded. According to Clarke et al. [11], coding is the basic structure for themes, and themes construct the framework that organizes and reports the research analysis. Additionally, codes help to define similarities,

variations, relationships, and patterns [13]. In the present study, eight main categories were identified with sub-categories as presented in Fig. 5.

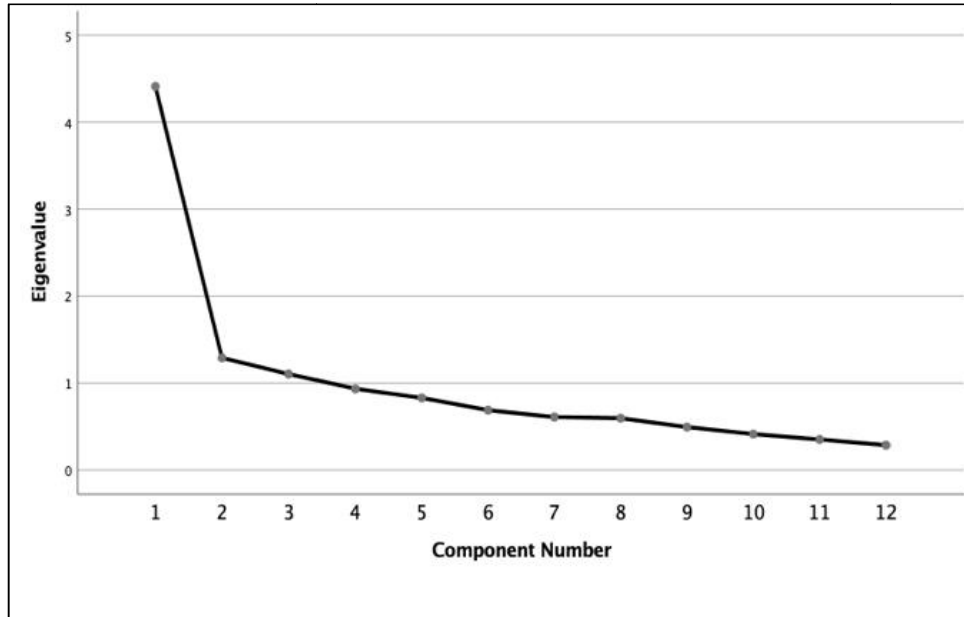


Fig. 2. Scree plot 2

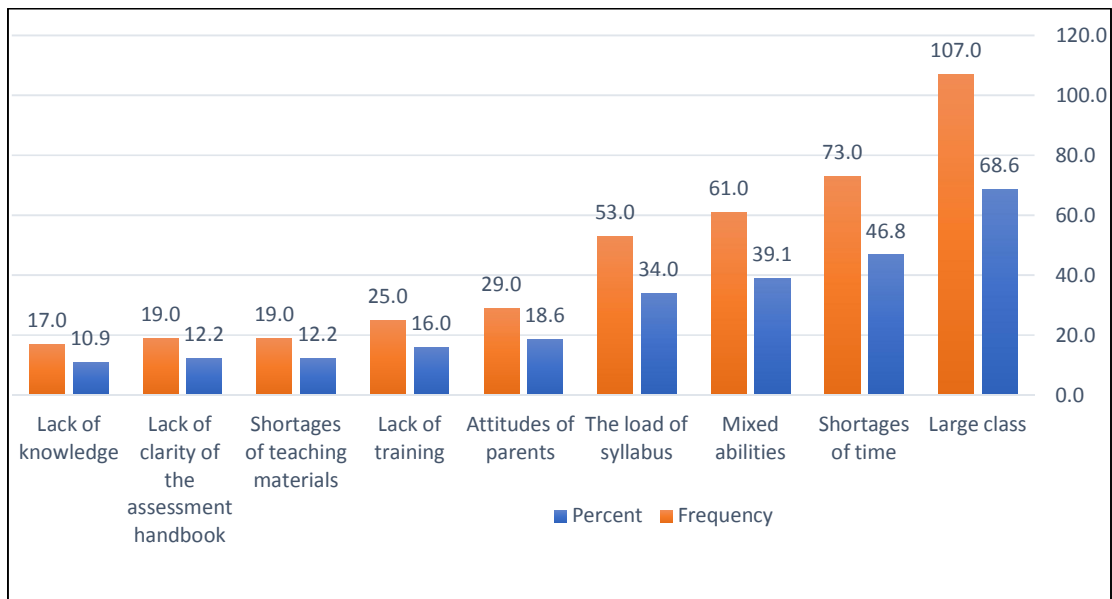


Fig. 3. Factors influencing teachers' assessment practices

**Table 5. Percentage of teachers' responses regarding the use of continuous assessment**

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
	1	2	3	4	5
5. The information on how to conduct continuous assessment is clear and understandable.	1.9	15.6	10.4	59.1	13
6. Continuous assessment provides feedback to learners about their achievement.	0.6	13.6	11	54.5	20.1
13. I feel confident when I write comments about my learners' achievement in their descriptive reports.	2.6	7.8	11	53.2	25.3
18. Continuous assessment informs teachers about their learners' needs.	0.6	5.8	9.1	62.3	22.1
19. Continuous assessment provides feedback to parents about their children's achievement.	0.6	11	7.8	48.1	32.1
20. Continuous assessment results are trustworthy.	0.0	13.6	22.1	55.8	8.4

**Table 6. Teachers' responses regarding the purpose of assessment**

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Continuous assessment determines if learners achieve the learning outcomes.	0.6	5.2	7.1	61.7	25.3
2. Continuous assessment helps learners improve their learning.	0.6	2.6	10.4	59.1	27.3
3. Continuous assessment is integrated with teaching practice.	0.6	2.6	8.4	64.9	18.2

**Table 7. Percentage of teachers' responses regarding the implementation of assessment**

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
	1	2	3	4	5
4. Learners should know the criteria used for their assessment.	0.0	2.6	13	46.8	37.3
7. Continuous assessment increases teachers' workload.	1.9	17.5	6.5	51.9	22.1
8. Continuous assessment needs to be based on different evidence of learners' work.	1.3	2.6	6.5	56.5	33.1
9. Continuous assessment needs to be based on different assessment tools.	1.3	0.6	3.2	58.4	36.4
10. I need more training on how to conduct continuous assessment.	2.6	16.2	17.5	46.8	16.9
11. Teachers use assessment results to improve their teaching.	1.9	11.7	20.1	48.1	18.2
12. I am well trained to implement continuous assessment tools in the class.	1.9	11	14.9	57.8	14.3
14. Paper-and-pencil tests (e.g., quizzes, class tests, etc.) are more effective than other assessment tools.	22.1	49.4	16.2	10.4	1.9
15. Continuous assessment is time-consuming.	4.8	36.4	12.3	36.4	6.5
16. Continuous assessment has little effect on teaching.	5.8	29.2	17.5	44.8	2.6
17. Teachers conduct continuous assessment but make little use of the results.	6.5	53.2	24	15	0.6

**Table 8. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's test of sphericity**

<b>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy</b>		<b>0.828</b>
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	548.924
	df	66
	Sig	0

\* Significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$

**Table 9. Total variance explained**

Initial eigenvalue				Extraction sums of squared loadings		
Component	Total	% Of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Of variance	Cumulative %
1	4.412	36.766	36.766	4.412	36.766	36.766
2	1.289	10.744	47.509	1.289	10.744	47.509
3	1.03	9.194	56.703	1.103	9.194	56.703
4	.933	7.779	64.482			
5	.829	6.908	71.390			
6	.688	5.733	77.123			
7	.608	5.070	82.193			
8	.596	4.963	87.156			
9	.493	4.109	91.265			
10	.412	3.437	94.703			
11	.351	2.923	97.625			
12	.285	2.375	100.000			

**Table 10. Component matrix**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
1.	0.246	0.435	-0.073
2.	0.2	0.741	-0.02
3.	0.723	0.075	-0.003
4.	0.57	0.205	-0.424
5.	0.758	0.221	-0.032
6.	0.498	0.4	0.306
7.	0.038	0.841	-0.078
8.	0.215	0.764	-0.171
9.	0.524	0.533	0.134
10.	0.667	0.217	-0.101
11.	-0.074	-0.126	0.898
12.	0.668	0.156	-0.09

As illustrated in Fig. 5, the first category was assessment and teaching. The second category was the implementation of assessment. The third main category was the assessment of different language skills and learning outcomes. The fourth main category was feedback and motivation. The fifth category was self-and peer assessment. The sixth main category was recording and reporting. The seventh category

was collaboration with stakeholders. The eighth category was challenges. Additionally, the data obtained from the artefact observation was merged with the interview data, and the evidence found was used to triangulate the data from the interviews. The artefact observation provided evidence to the areas related to planning, types of questions, projects, feedback, formal and informal records, and reports.

**Table 11. Teachers' continuous assessment strategies**

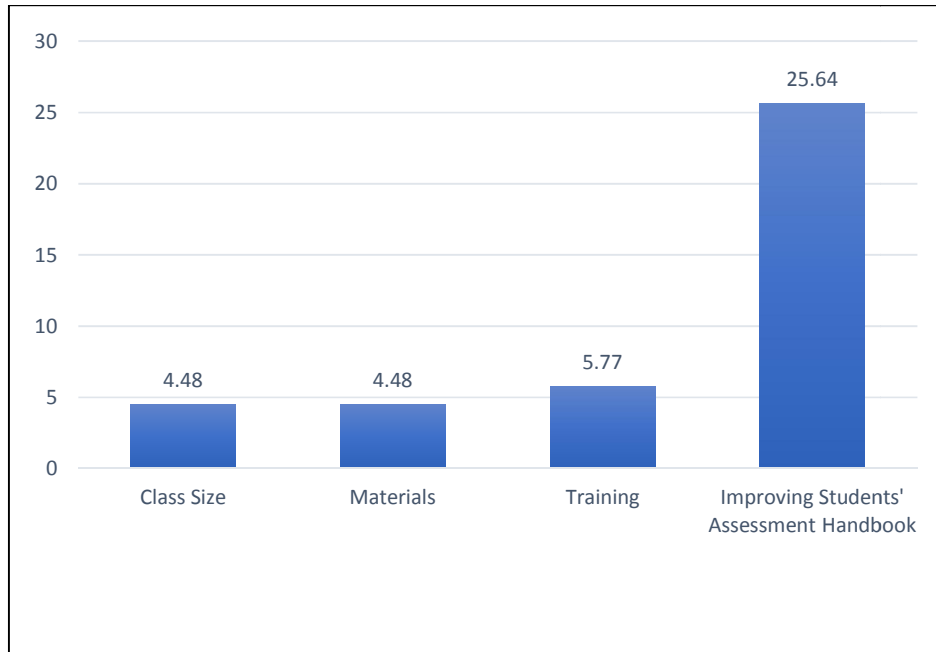
Item	Never used	Seldom used	Occasionally	Often used	Very often used
	%	%	%	%	%
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
3. I observe learners' performance during everyday classroom teaching.	0.6	5.2	15.6	46.8	31.8
4. I record learners' progress during everyday classroom teaching.	1.3	14.3	26	44.8	13.6
5. I use assessment results to improve my teaching.	2.6	7.8	13	51	25.3
6. I use a variety of assessment tools to assess my learners' progress.	0.6	0.6	13	55.2	30.5
10. I provide my learners with feedback on a regular basis.	1.9	5.8	14.9	56.5	20.8
11. I provide feedback to students' work only by awarding marks.	11	44.8	25.3	15.6	3.2
12. I provide written feedback comments along with marks.	2.6	14.3	14.3	45.5	23.4

**Table 12. Teachers' assessment procedures**

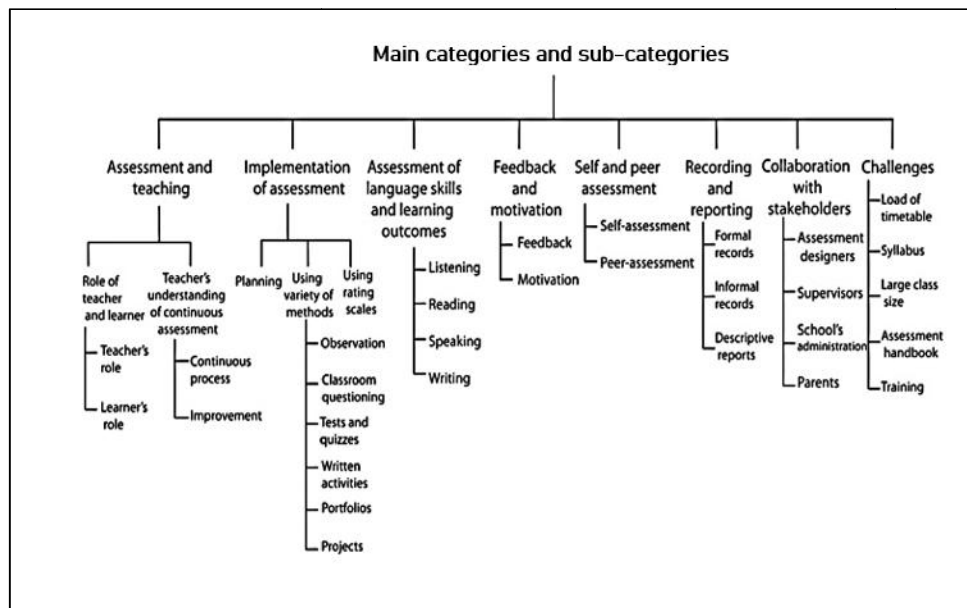
Item	Never used	Seldom used	Occasionally	Often used	Very often used
	%	%	%	%	%
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1. I incorporate assessment in my daily preparation.	1.9	11.7	24	48.7	13.6
2. I share the criteria of continuous assessment with my learners before the actual assessment process.	5.8	11.7	23.4	47.4	11.7
7. I involve learners in assessing their peers' work.	7.8	16.9	20.8	41	13
8. I involve learners in assessing their own work.	7.1	18.2	17.5	44.8	12.3
9. I use assessment results to identify my learners' needs.	1.3	6.5	11.7	55.8	24.7

**Table 13. Teachers' responses regarding challenges in implementing assessment**

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	97	63.0
No	57	37.0
Total	154	100.0



**Fig. 4. Teachers' suggestions**



**Fig. 5. Main categories and sub-categories**

### 3.3 Summary of Findings

The results of the data analysis revealed that teachers value the use of CA and believe that it improves teaching and learning, helps them reflect on their teaching and assessment techniques and provides feedback for learners and parents. Additionally, they believe that CA is linked with the teaching process and helps students achieve learning outcomes. The teachers also reflected on the importance of using a variety of assessment tools to achieve learning outcomes. However, according to the teachers, using CA gives them more responsibilities, since they are required to use summative and formative assessments. Therefore, teachers think that they are unable to fulfil all the requirements of the assessment such as daily planning for assessment, integrating assessment while teaching, providing learners with the assessment criteria and detailed feedback which identifies their strengths and weaknesses and involving learners in the process of assessment through self-and peer assessment. The teachers highlighted different challenges in applying CA such as the high number of learners, shortages of time, syllabus load, lack of clarity of some aspects in the assessment handbook and lack of assessment training.

### 3.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study has generated rich data about teachers' beliefs and assessment practices, there are four limitations that must be mentioned. First, since the study sample covered just one governorate (South Batinah), it does not represent the entire population of Cycle 1 teachers in the whole Sultanate of Oman. As such, to validate the results of the study, a larger sample is needed. Second, the number of participants involved in the qualitative phase was limited to only three teachers due to teachers' unwillingness to take part in the interview. Third, the interviews and artefact observation were conducted during students' mid-term holidays. Therefore, only a few learners' samples were found with teachers since teachers had already distributed most activities to their learners. Fourth, the authors excluded classroom observation as a data-collecting tool due to time constraints. However, it is believed that classroom observation could be valuable to provide more evidence of teachers' assessment practices in the classroom and the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices.

### 3.5 Implications

Results and findings of the current study provide insight into teachers' beliefs, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their assessment practices, as well as the challenges encountered in the implementation of assessment in Cycle 1 schools. As a result, key implications can be drawn from the findings of the study which will be valuable for policy and decision-makers, assessment designers, training program designers and stakeholders such as supervisors, school leaders and senior teachers.

### 3.6 Implications for Policy and Decision-makers

Assessment is a critical issue in the educational process, and it is evident from the findings that there are shortcomings in the implementation of the CA in Cycle 1 schools. The present article highlights some contextual factors from the teachers' points of view for instance high number of learners, shortages of time and syllabus load that affect teachers' CA practices and limit the efficient implementation of the CA. Consequently, policy makers should carefully examine these contextual factors as well as evaluate the appropriateness of implementing CA in the Omani educational system to help provide suitable conditions for effective practice.

### 3.7 Implications for Assessment Designers

The second implication which can be drawn from this study is that it is significant for assessment designers to evaluate the practicality and suitability of the SAH in terms of assessment tools, learning outcomes, marking descriptors and other elements included. Teachers indicated that some aspects in the SAH were not suitable and needed to be improved such as the outcomes and the rating scale. Assessment designers should not assume that teachers can easily implement what is included in the SAH. However, familiarizing teachers with any change or updating issues in the assessment is crucial as well as clarifying with teachers the purposes and advantages for the inclusion of any aspect in the SAH. This could be achieved by involving teachers in the process of designing or modifying learners' assessment, since teachers are the implementers of assessments.

### **3.8 Implications for Managing Assessment Training Programs**

Training is critical for the effective implementation of assessment. However, the findings document limited assessment training for teachers. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should ensure that all teachers have continuous in-service assessment training via different means such as training courses, workshops, seminars, and conferences. Such assessment training will enable teachers to gain assessment skills and empower them with strategies to properly conduct assessment. For example, teachers need to develop their techniques in implementing formative assessment. Teachers' feedback on training is very important because it may reflect their beliefs regarding assessment which help design appropriate training programs and plan training programs based on teachers' assessment needs. To guarantee the success of training, the collaboration of supervisors and school leaders are influential in providing guidance and support for teachers and monitoring the impact of training in the field. Finally, since the cascading model is widely used by the Ministry of Education in training teachers through senior teachers, the latter should be provided with intensive preparation and training in assessment to perform this role professionally and provide support for teachers in their school.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

The authors investigated Omani teachers' beliefs and practices concerning CA in Cycle 1 schools in the Batinah South Governorate. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect data through a questionnaire, interviews, and artefact observation. The findings and results shed light on teachers' beliefs, the implementation of CA as well as the challenges teachers face in implementing CA. Even though teachers value the use of CA, some conflicts were identified between teachers' beliefs and their practices of assessment. Teachers believe that CA is involved in the teaching process and help them reflect on their teaching and adapt their techniques to suit learners. However, in the actual practice, it was found that the planning of assessment was inadequate, and that teachers faced difficulty focusing on assessment during the teaching process. Additionally, teachers thought that CA assists in improving learners' performance through the implementation of different assessment tools and the feedback

provided, but it was revealed that the practices were limited to some tools such as quizzes, tests or written activities and teachers' feedback tended to be more summative than formative. Even though teachers regarded the use of self and peer assessment, there was a limitation in using them in a real context. Teachers' beliefs were influenced by some factors such as teachers' experience, learners' age and understanding, and the schools' environment. Additionally, teachers' assessment practices were influenced by some constraints which hindered the effectiveness of CA such as large numbers of learners in each class, shortages of time for conducting assessment, timetable loads, syllabus load, lack of assessment training, parents' attitudes, and the lack of clarity of some assessment criteria. Consequently, there is a need to provide further support for teachers to deal with these constraints to improve the quality of learners' assessment.

### **CONSENT**

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the authors.

### **DISCLAIMER**

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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