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LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT LITERACY AND CHALLENGE IN ASSESSMENT ALIGNING PRACTICES AMONG SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS IN INDONESIA

Maryati Salmiah[1], Diah Safithri Armin[2], Fadlan[3]
[1,2,3]*Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia*

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Abstract: This study investigated the challenges encountered by secondary English teachers in North Sumatra, Indonesia, when enacting Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) to align classroom assessment with intended learning objectives. While previous LAL research has examined teachers' assessment knowledge and practices, further attention is needed to how assessment knowledge is enacted when teachers attempt to maintain alignment under actual classroom conditions. A qualitative descriptive design was employed to examine this process in secondary-school contexts. Data were collected from sixteen English teachers across sixteen secondary schools in North Sumatra through individual semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. Interview transcripts and observation notes were analysed thematically. The findings showed that teachers demonstrated different forms of assessment knowledge and formative practice, but the enactment of assessment alignment remained uneven. Key challenges involved differentiating assessment while maintaining construct validity, translating assessment concepts into classroom decisions, working within resource and time constraints, and making the relationship among learning objectives, assessment tasks, and assessment criteria explicit. Teachers also reported using assessment evidence to adjust subsequent instruction, although student engagement with feedback, self-assessment, and reflection was less consistently evident. These findings suggest that assessment alignment is a situated professional practice shaped by the interaction of assessment knowledge, professional judgment, learner needs, and contextual conditions. Strengthening teachers' LAL therefore requires sustained, practice-oriented professional learning that supports teachers in designing aligned assessment, developing meaningful feedback, and using assessment evidence for instructional decision-making.
Keywords: *language assessment literacy, assessment alignment, classroom assessment, English teachers, Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Assessment plays a central role in English Language Teaching (ELT) as it connects curriculum goals, classroom instruction, and learning outcomes. Early work on assessment literacy emphasised teachers' capacity to design and use assessment to support learning rather than merely to report achievement (Stiggins, 1991). Building on this foundation, Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) has been widely recognised as an essential teacher competence that enables assessment to be valid, fair, and pedagogically meaningful. LAL encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to design, implement, and interpret assessments effectively in educational contexts (Ali, 2024; Puspawati et al., 2024; Vogt et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Within ELT, LAL supports the integration of assessment principles into instructional practice, allowing teachers to align learning objectives, assessment tasks, and feedback in ways that promote student learning (Kremmel & Harding, 2020; Sumardi & Guci, 2023).

The notion of alignment in assessment is most commonly grounded in Biggs' (1996) concept of constructive alignment, which emphasises coherence among intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks. From this perspective, assessment alignment occurs when assessment tasks are explicitly linked to learning objectives, assessment criteria are transparent to learners, and assessment evidence is used to inform feedback and instructional decisions. In language education, aligned assessment practices are closely associated with assessment-for-learning, in which assessment functions not only as measuring achievement but also as a process for eliciting and using evidence support subsequent

learning. In K-12 EFL education, formative assessment may involve feedback, peer assessment, self-assessment, questioning, and instructional adjustment, although its enactment is influenced by teachers' and students' assessment literacy as well as broader educational and cultural conditions (Amirian, 2025; Hidayat & Purnawarman, 2024; Kang & Lam, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). These ideas echo Stiggins' (1991) early argument that assessment should be an integral part of instruction rather than an external evaluation tool.

Teachers' LAL is important for the quality of classroom assessment and for the formative use of assessment evidence (Farid et al, 2024; Kang & Lam, 2024; Umam et al., 2023). Recent studies suggest that teachers may recognise the purposes of classroom assessment while varying in how assessment knowledge is translated into formative practice (Estaji, 2024; Hidayat & Purnawarman, 2024; Latif & Wasim, 2024; Munasih et al., 2024; Zhang et al, 2024). For example, Ali and Mjenda (2024) found that English teachers used a range of classroom assessment procedures and recognised feedback as useful for evaluating teaching and identifying students' understanding. However, limitation remained in the diagnostic use of assessment to identify learning difficulties and provide appropriate support. Recent educational reforms in Indonesia, particularly the Merdeka Curriculum, require teachers to apply reflective and flexible assessment practices that emphasise student-centred learning and higher-order thinking skills (Sumardi & Guci, 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of LAL's importance, research continues to show persistent gaps between teachers' assessment knowledge and classroom practices (Latif & Wasim, 2024; Puspawati & Murtiningsih, 2025; Umam et al., 2023). Recent evidence suggests that this relationship is better understood as a challenge of translating assessment knowledge into contextually appropriate practice. Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023), for example, identified teacher-related, learner-related, and institution-related constraints on the implementation of learning-oriented assessment. These include challengers related to assessment procedures, task and rubric design (Armin, Purnomo, & Alvindi, 2024; Estaji, 2024; Tian et al., 2023), learner engagement, classroom time, and institutional assessment policies. Similar concerns have been reported in secondary English education. Rana and Rana (2025), using teacher interviews and classroom observations, found that secondary English teachers employed formative assessment and feedback to support students' learning, while limited professional training constrained opportunities to strengthen these practices.

Within Indonesia, recent studies have provided more detailed evidence of the relationship between assessment knowledge and classroom practice (Aria et al., 2022; Damayanti et al., 2024; Isnawati, 2023; Septiawati & Hadi, 2026; Wijaya, 2023; Wiyaka, et al., 2024). Sumardi and Guci (2023) found that teachers' knowledge and understanding of HOTS-based language assessment did not fully correspond with their ability to construct assessment tasks representing higher-order thinking skills. Damayanti et al. (2024), using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, identified variation in secondary EFL teachers' assessment knowledge, perspectives, and classroom practices across different school backgrounds. More recent research has also examined the alignment between learning objectives and assessment practices in Indonesia secondary EFL classrooms (Lestari & Yusuf, 2025). Together, these studies show that assessment knowledge, classroom practice, and assessment alignment are closely related, but they should not be treated as interchangeable dimensions of teachers' LAL.

Although recent studies have advanced understanding of teachers' LAL, formative assessment, and assessment alignment, further attention is needed to how these dimensions interact in everyday secondary English classroom. Existing research shows that teachers may possess assessment knowledge while encountering challenges in translating that knowledge into assessment design and classroom practice. Research also indicates that the enactment of formative and learning-oriented assessment is shaped by learner, institutional, and contextual conditions (Amirian, 2025; Jalilzadeh & Coombe, 2023; Muhammadpour & Sabet, 2025; Tien et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). What remains important, therefore, is to understand the challenges teachers encounter when attempting to maintain alignment between intended learning objectives and classroom assessment while responding to the realities of their teaching contexts. Examining this process can provide a more situated understanding of LAL as professional knowledge enacted through classroom assessment decisions.

Addressing this gap requires a shift from measuring what teachers know about assessment to examining how assessment literacy is enacting

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in practice. In particular, there is limited qualitative evidence on how English teachers navigate the alignment of learning objectives, assessment tasks, feedback, and classroom realities across diverse school contexts. Accordingly, this study examines the challenges encountered by secondary English teachers in North Sumatra, Indonesia, when enacting LAL to align classroom assessment practice with intended learning objectives. Guided by constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996), the study focuses on how assessment knowledge is translated into decisions about assessment tasks, learner support, assessment criteria, feedback, and the use of assessment evidence within different classroom conditions. Based on this focus, the study addresses the following research question: What challenges do secondary English teachers in North Sumatra encounter when enacting Language Assessment Literacy to align classroom assessment practices with intended learning objectives?

The study also reflects Indonesia's commitment to improving the quality and equity of education under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). By exploring how teachers align assessment with pedagogical intentions, this research contributes to understanding the kind of professional learning and institutional support needed to strengthen assessment literacy at the school level. The findings may also inform teacher professional and ongoing discussion about classroom assessment within Indonesian curriculum reform.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the challenges secondary English teachers encountered when enacting Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) to align classroom assessment practices with learning objectives. This approach was selected because it allowed for a rich and contextualized understanding of teachers' experiences and reasoning processes in their actual teaching environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the study aimed to generate context-sensitive insights into recurring challenges that shaped assessment alignment across different school contexts.

In this study, assessment alignment was defined as the extent to which teachers coherently connected intended learning objectives, assessment tasks, assessment criteria, feedback, and the instructional use of assessment evidence. Assessment practices were considered aligned when task reflected intended learning objectives, assessment criteria were communicated transparently to students, feedback supported learning, and assessment evidence informed subsequent instructional decisions. This operational definition was informed by Biggs' (1996) concept of constructive alignment and principles of assessment for learning. This definition also reflects Stiggins' (1991) view of assessment literacy as the capacity to integrate assessment into instruction to support learning, rather than treating assessment as a separate evaluative event.

Purposive sampling was used to select sixteen English teachers from sixteen secondary schools located in five districts in North Sumatra, Indonesia, covering two urban and three rural areas. The participants represented diverse school and professional backgrounds. Seven teachers taught in urban schools and nine in rural schools. Seven participants taught at junior secondary schools and nine at senior secondary schools. Fifteen held bachelor's degree, while one held a master's degree. In terms of teaching experience, four were novice teachers, six had between five and ten years of teaching experience, and six were experienced teachers. This variation was intended to capture differences in the contextual and professional conditions within which classroom assessment was designed and enacted.

Data were collected through two main procedures, namely semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' perspectives on assessment alignment and the challenges they encountered in practice. The interview questions addressed difficulties in designing assessment tasks aligned with learning objectives, the influence of school policies and curriculum requirements, constraints related to time, facilities, and institutional support, experiences with digital assessment tools, strategies for balancing formative and summative assessment, and approaches to adapting assessment for learners with diverse proficiency levels. All sixteen teachers participated in individual face-to-face interviews lasting approximately 15-20 minutes. Indonesian Language and English were used flexibly during the interviews so that participants could explain their assessment experiences and reasoning in the language with which they were most comfortable. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants consent and transcribed for analysis.

Classroom observations were conducted after interviews to allow triangulation between reported practices and observed assessment activities.

Classroom observations were conducted using a structured observation sheet designed to capture evidence of assessment alignment practices. The observation focused on three main areas. The first area examined assessment planning, including the clarity of assessment objectives, the alignment between assessment tasks and learning objectives, variation in assessment forms (formative and summative; test and non-test), and the inclusion of higher-order thinking skills. The second area addressed assessment implementation, including clarity of instructions, assessment of language skills, fairness in administration, use of digital tools, and adaptation to students' proficiency levels and learning needs. The third area focused on the use of assessment evidence, including feedback provision, transparency of assessment outcomes, instructional use of evidence, and opportunities for student reflection. All sixteen teachers were observed once during a complete classroom session lasting approximately 90 minutes, equivalent to two instructional periods. The three researchers shared responsibility for the observations, with one researcher assigned to each classroom session. The researcher acted as anon-participant observer and documented assessment-related practices using the structured observation sheet. Observation notes were written immediately after each classroom visit to maintain accuracy and contextual detail.

To ensure content validity, the interview guide and observation sheet were reviewed by two lecturers in English education with expertise in language assessment. Their feedback was used to refine item clarity, ensure consistency with the study's focus on assessment alignment, and confirm the suitability of instruments for secondary school contexts.

The interview transcripts and observation notes were analyzed thematically, informed by Braun and Clarke's (2019) framework approach to thematic analysis. The analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were then generated to capture meaningful units related to assessment planning, task design, differentiation, feedback practice practices, use of technology, and instructional use of assessment evidence. The first and second researchers initially coded the data manually and independently. They subsequently compared their codes and interpretations through analytical discussions. Where interpretations differed, the researchers returned to the relevant interview excerpts and observation notes, considered alternative interpretations, and resolved differences through consensus.

To enhance transparency, the analysis followed a systematic progression from raw data to themes. For example, teachers' descriptions of limited access to devices, multimedia equipment, or internet connectivity were initially coded as resource constraints. These codes were subsequently considered within the broader theme of contextual conditions affecting assessment practice.

Similarly, teachers' descriptions of simplifying tasks, adjusting vocabulary, or providing additional language support were initially coded as forms of assessment adaptation. These codes contributed to the broader theme concerning differentiation and construct validity. Across all stages, codes and sub-themes were compared within and across participants and data sources to identify recurring and contrasting patterns. Themes were refined through iterative comparison to ensure coherence between empirical evidence and analytical interpretations.

Interview and observation data were compared throughout the analysis. Convergence was identified when teachers' reported assessment practices were also evident during classroom observations. Divergence was considered when reported practices were not clearly reflected in the observed lesson or when classroom observations revealed practices that were not emphasised during the interview. These differences that were not analytically meaningful rather than assuming that one data source was necessarily more accurate than the other.

The researchers are lecturers in English Education with academic backgrounds in language assessment and teacher education. This professional positioning provided familiarity with assessment principles and school-based practices, which supported informed interpretation of the data. At the same time, the researchers recognized that their academic backgrounds could influence how classroom assessment practices were interpreted. Reflexive discussions were therefore used during the analytical process to examine assumptions, consider alternative interpretations, and avoid evaluating teachers' practices solely against idealised models of assessment.

To strengthen reflexive rigor, a focused group discussion was conducted after the preliminary

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themes had been developed. The discussion involved sixteen participants comprising teachers and university students, while a senior lecturer with expertise in assessment participated as a resource person. The participating teachers included teachers involved in the study, whereas the university students were not research participants. During the discussion, the researchers presented the preliminary findings and invited participants to consider whether the interpretations reflected assessment practices and challenges encountered in educational settings. This process provided an opportunity to challenge interpretations that might have been overly shaped by the researchers' academic perspectives.

The focused group discussion served as an interpretative validation activity rather than an additional source of empirical data. The discussion was not audio-recorded or transcribed for thematic analysis. instead, written notes were taken on comments and suggestions provided by the participants and the resource person. These inputs were used to clarify and refine the researchers' interpretations but were not coded or incorporated into the dataset as additional findings.

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation by comparing teachers' interview accounts with their observed classroom assessment practices and through the interpretive validation activity described above. Transferability was supported by providing contextual information about participants from different school locations, school levels, educational backgrounds, and levels of teaching experience. Dependability was enhanced through the consistent use of the same interview guide and observation framework across participants and through documentation of the analytical process. Confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in interview excerpts and observation notes and by discussing alternative interpretations during the analytical process.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university research ethics committee and local educational authorities prior to data collection. All participants received an information sheet explaining the study's purpose and school affiliations were anonymized. Interview recordings, transcripts, and observation notes were stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings on the challenges secondary English teachers encountered when enacting LAL to align classroom assessment with intended learning objectives. Analysis of the interview and observation data generated six interrelated themes: 1) differentiation and construct validity, 2) resource constraints affecting assessment opportunities, 3) the translation of conceptual assessment knowledge into practice, 4) time and curriculum constraints, 5) the alignment of learning objectives, assessment task, and assessment criteria, and 6) feedback and the constructional use of assessment evidence. Across these themes, teachers demonstrated elements of assessment knowledge and formative practice, although their enactment varied according to classroom and school conditions.

Differentiation efforts and the problem of validity

A recurring challenge concerned the tension between accommodating students' different proficiency levels and maintaining the validity of assessment tasks. Interview data showed that teachers adjusted assessments according to students' perceived abilities. These adjustments included modifying vocabulary, varying task difficulty, providing additional language support, and selecting assessment forms that were more accessible to particular learners. Such practices reflected teachers' efforts to address leaner diversity. However, they also created challenges in ensuring that the assessment continued to measure the intended learning objectives consistently.

One teacher described how assessment difficulty was adjusted to accommodate differences in students' proficiency:

> "I usually use the same form of assessment, but I adjust the level of difficulty according to the students' abilities. For example, I use more familiar vocabulary in the questions so that they do not have difficulty answering them" (T-10)

This practice illustrates an attempt to make assessment more accessible while retaining a common assessment format. However, modifying the linguistic demands of task may influence the evidence elicited if the adaptation substantially changes what students are required to demonstrate.

Table 1 summarises the main patterns of assessment differentiation identified in the data

and the tensions these adaptations created between accessibility and construct consistency.

Table 1. *Differentiation efforts and the problem of validity in classroom assessment*

Theme Summary	Illustrative evidence and Interpretation
Balancing accessibility and validity – Teachers adapted assessment tasks or support according to differences in students' proficiency.	"Sometimes I already make easy questions but some students still find them difficult." Spontaneous simplification improved accessibility but weakened construct validity.
Reactive assessment adaptation – Some adjustments were made during assessment activities in response to students' difficulties.	Observations showed unplanned modifications rather than pre-designed differentiated tasks, reducing assessment consistency.
Tension between accommodation and construct consistency – Changes in task difficulty or linguistic support could influence the evidence elicited from students.	Teachers modified task difficulty, vocabulary, or the level of linguistic support to accommodate differences in students' English proficiency.
Need for principled differentiation – Assessment adaptations required attention to intended learning objectives and assessment criteria.	Teachers valued inclusiveness but lacked frameworks such as clear rubrics or learning indicators.

Classroom observations further indicated that some adaptations were made in response to students' difficulties during assessment activities rather than being fully planned in advance. Interview data also showed that differentiation did not always involve changing the entire assessment task. In some cases, teachers retained the same task but varied the level of linguistic support provided to students. these practices demonstrate teachers' efforts to make assessment accessible to learners with different levels of English proficiency. At the same time, such adaptations required careful consideration of whether changes in task difficulty or support altered the competence that the assessment was intended to elicit.

Resources constraints and unequal opportunities for assessment

A second challenge concerned the availability of resources needed to implement varied forms of language assessment. Teachers reported different levels of access to digital devices, multimedia equipment, and internet connectivity. These conditions influenced the assessment formats that could be implemented in their classrooms. Resource constraints were particularly relevant to assessment activities requiring audio, digital platforms, or individual devices. However, access to technology varied across schools and should not be understood as a simple urban-rural divide.

One teacher described how limited access to individual devices affected listening assessment:

> "Technology is one of the main difficulties. Because this is a boarding school, the students do not use mobile phones. For listening assessment, we use one speaker for the class, which is less effective. It would be better if each student had access to an individual device." (T-15)

This account illustrates how infrastructure and school policies could influence the feasibility of particular assessment formats.

In contrast, other teachers reported having sufficient access to school facilities or digital assessment tools. One teacher indicated that technology was not a major difficulty because classroom equipment such as a projector was available, while another reported using Quizizz, Google Forms, and an institutional e-learning platform for assessment activities. These contrasting accounts indicate that opportunities for technology-supported assessment differed across school settings.

Table 2 summarise the contextual conditions related to resource avail illustrates how differences in access to technology and facilities shape teachers' assessment opportunities.

Table 2. *Contextual disparities between urban and rural assessment practices*

Theme Summary	Illustrative evidence and Interpretation
Limited access to individual devices.	Access to device influenced the feasibility of particular assessment formats, especially listening and technology-supported assessment.
Variation in digital access across schools.	Some teachers reported resource limitations, whereas others had access to classroom equipment and digital

	platforms.
Technology and assessment format.	Available infrastructure influenced teachers' choices of how assessment could be administered.
Context-sensitive assessment opportunities.	Resource availability functioned as an enabling or constraining condition rather than a direct indicator of teachers' LAL.

These patterns suggest that assessment alignment was shaped not only by teachers' knowledge, but also by the material and infrastructural conditions under which assessment was enacted. Greater access to technology, however did not by itself ensure assessment alignment because teachers still needed to determine whether a particular tool was appropriate for the language skill and intended learning objective being assessed.

Conceptual understanding and its translation into assessment practice

A third challenge concerned the translation of conceptual assessment knowledge into classroom practice. Teachers varied in their familiarity with assessment terminology and principles. Some were able to explain concepts such as validity, fairness, formative assessment, and different purposes of language testing. Others were less familiar with formal assessment terminology, even when they reposted using related practices in their classrooms. This variation suggests that teachers' LAL involved different levels of explicit conceptual knowledge and practical experience.

One teacher explained:

> "I sometimes do not know the formal terms, such as placement test or diagnostic test, although I may already use similar practices. So, I do not fully understand all the theories and terminology." (T-6)

Another teacher highlighted the difficulty of applying assessment theory under actual classroom conditions:

> "Knowledge about assessment is theoretical, while its application in the classroom is more practical. Sometimes the theory cannot be fully applied because students and learning environments are different." (T-1)

Table 3 summarises the main patterns in teachers' conceptual and practical assessment knowledge, particularly how explicit understanding of assessment concepts was translated into classroom practice.

Tabel 3. *Academic qualification and its influence on teachers' assessment literacy*

Theme Summary	Illustrative evidence and Interpretation
Variation in explicit assessment knowledge.	Teachers differed in their familiarity with formal assessment concepts and terminology.
Practice without explicit terminology.	Some teachers described assessment practices that they did not necessarily identify using formal assessment terms.
Theory-practice tension.	Teachers recognised that assessment principles needed to be adapted to learner and classroom conditions.
Need for procedural assessment knowledge.	Enacting LAL required teachers to translate conceptual understanding into decisions about tasks, criteria, feedback, and instructional follow-up.

Taken together, the findings indicate that conceptual understanding alone did not ensure consistent assessment alignment in practice. Teachers needed to translate assessment principles into decisions about task design, assessment criteria, feedback, and the use of assessment evidence. This translation was influenced by students' proficiency levels, classroom conditions, and teachers' practical experience. The challenge therefore concerned not simply what teachers knew about assessment, but how explicit and practical assessment knowledge were integrated during classroom assessment.

Time and curriculum constraints in assessment practice

A fourth challenge concerned the time and curriculum conditions within which classroom assessment was planned and implemented. Teachers were expected to ensure that assessment reflected learning objectives and curriculum requirements while also working within scheduled instructional time and school

assessment programmes. For some teachers, these demands reduced the flexibility available for designing, administering, and reviewing assessment activities. The challenge was therefore not simply to follow curriculum requirements, but to translate them into feasible assessment practices within everyday classroom conditions.

One teacher explained the importance of maintaining alignment with curriculum expectations:

> "The challenge is to make sure that the assessment really matches the learning objectives. I have to adjust the questions to the competencies that students are expected to achieve." (T-7)

Other interview accounts indicated that assessment administration and discussion could take longer than the time scheduled for a lesson, particularly in classes with many students. However, these constraints were not experienced uniformly. Some teachers reposted greater institutional flexibility as long as their assessment remained consistent with curriculum requirements, while others indicated that school facilities and policies created few major constraints.

Table 4 summarises the main time, curriculum, and institutional conditions that shaped teachers' opportunities to plan and implement aligned classroom assessment.

Table 4. *Teaching experience and curriculum implementation challenges*

Theme Summary	Illustrative evidence and Interpretation
Alignment with curriculum competencies.	Teachers considered curriculum competencies and intended learning objectives when developing assessment.
Limited time for assessment processes.	Assessment administration, discussion, and follow-up sometimes exceeded available instructional time.
School assessment schedules.	Institutional schedules and curriculum requirements influenced when and how assessment could be implemented.
Variation in institutional flexibility.	Some teachers experienced constraints, whereas others reported greater flexibility within their schools.

Curriculum alignment and assessment design

A fifth challenge concerned the explicit alignment of assessment tasks with intended learning objectives. Classroom observations indicated that assessment objectives were not always communicated clearly to students before assessment activities were introduced. In several observed lessons, teachers provided instructions for completing a task without explicitly explaining the learning objective or assessment criteria. Interview data provided further insight into this pattern. Teachers commonly described assessment as a way to measure students' ability, monitor achievement, or determine whether learning objectives had been reached. However, the connection between these objectives and specific assessment tasks was not always made explicit in classroom practice.

One teacher described the purpose of assessment as follows:

> "Assessment helps the teacher identify students' strengths and weaknesses, provide feedback, and determine whether they have achieved the learning objectives." (T-3)

This account demonstrates an awareness of the relationship between assessment and learning objectives. However, classroom observations suggested that this relationship was not always made visible to students during assessment activities. The challenge therefore appeared to lie less in recognising the purpose of assessment and more in making the alignment among learning objectives, assessment tasks, and assessment criteria explicit in classroom practice.

Table 5 summarises the main patterns concerning the alignment of intended learning objectives, assessment tasks, and assessment criteria identified across the interview and observation data.

Table 5. *Clarity and alignment of assessment objectives with learning goals*

Theme Summary	Illustrative evidence and Interpretation
Limited communication of assessment objectives – Learning objectives were not always explicitly communicated before assessment activities.	Observations revealed that teachers introduced tasks without linking them to learning outcomes.

Implicit links between objectives and tasks – The relationship between the intended competence and the assessment task was not always made explicit.	Teachers designed instruments based on textbook order rather than curriculum indicators.
Limited transparency of assessment criteria – Criteria for successful performance were not always explicitly communicated to students	During some observed assessment activities, teachers explained how students should complete the task but did not explicitly communicate the criteria for successful performance.
Need for explicit assessment alignment – Alignment involved making the relationship among objectives, tasks, and criteria visible in classroom assessment.	Teachers described assessment as a way to determine whether learning objectives had been achieved, while classroom observations showed that the links among learning objectives, assessment tasks, and assessment criteria were not always made explicit to students.

A related issue concerned the transparency of assessment criteria. Although teachers could describe the abilities or competencies they intended to assess, the criteria for successful performance were not always communicated explicitly before students completed the task. This reduced the visibility of the relationship between the intended learning objective and the basis on which student performance was evaluated.

Taken together, the interview and observation data revealed a distinction between recognising the importance of learning objectives and making assessment alignment explicit in classroom practice. Teachers generally understood that assessment should provide evidence of student achievement. However, the links among learning objectives, assessment tasks, and assessment criteria were not always clearly communicated during assessment activities.

Feedback and instructional use of assessment evidence

The final theme concerned how teachers used assessment evidence after students had completed assessment activities. Interview data showed variation in the instructional use of assessment results. Several teachers reported using students' performance to identify learning difficulties, provide additional practice, repeat particular content, or modify subsequent instruction. However, classroom observations indicated that feedback provided during assessment activities was not always sufficiently specific to guide students towards improvement. This distinction suggests that teachers sometimes used assessment evidence to inform their own instructional decisions, while its formative use for supporting students' active engagement with feedback was less consistently evident.

One teacher explained:

> "I use assessment results as a reference for improving my teaching methods. For example, if many students do not understand a grammar topic, I teach it again using a different approach." (T-4)

This account illustrates a formative use of assessment evidence. Rather than treating the assessment result only as a record of achievement, the teacher used evidence of students' difficulties to determine the next instructional action.

Similar practices were reported by other teachers. One teacher compared assessment outcomes across classes to determine whether her teaching approach needed adjustment, while another provided additional exercises when students had not yet understood particular content. These accounts show that assessment evidence could function as a basis for instructional planning rather than solely as information for score reporting.

Table 6 summarises the main patterns in how teachers provided feedback and used assessment evidence to inform subsequent instruction and support students' engagement with their learning.

Table 6. *Utilization of assessment results and the role of technology integration*

Theme Summary	Illustrative evidence and Interpretation
Instructional use of assessment evidence.	Several teachers used assessment result to identify learning difficulties and adjust subsequent instruction.
Variation in formative use.	Assessment evidence could inform reteaching, additional practice, or changes in teaching approach.
Limited specificity of feedback.	Feedback did not always provide students with specific guidance about how to improve their performance.

Limited student engagement with assessment evidence.	Structured self-assessment and guided reflection were not consistently evident in observed assessment activities.
Limited used of results for instruction – Minimal analysis of student errors.	Assessment results were recorded but rarely used to adjust teaching.
Weak formative feedback – Feedback was vague and motivational.	"Good", "Please improve your grammar." Lacked diagnostic detail for learning improvement.

Opportunities for students to engage actively with assessment evidence were less visible in the observed lessons. Structured self-assessment and guided reflection were not consistently incorporated into assessment activities. As a result, the use of assessment evidence remained largely teacher-directed. Teachers could identify areas requiring further instruction, but students had fewer structured opportunities to interpret feedback, evaluate their own performance, or identify their next learning steps.

Across the six themes, teachers demonstrated elements of assessment knowledge and formative practice, but the enactment of aligned assessment was uneven. The challenges did not reflect a uniform lack of LAL. Rather, they emerged from the interaction between teachers' conceptual knowledge, professional judgment, learner needs, curriculum expectations, available resources, and classroom conditions. The findings therefore point to assessment alignment as a situated process in which teachers negotiate what should be assessed, how evidence should be elicited, and how that evidence should be used to support subsequent teaching and learning.

This study examined the challenges secondary English teachers in North Sumatra encountered when enacting LAL to align classroom assessment with intended learning objectives. Overall, the findings indicate that assessment alignment was not determined by teachers' assessment knowledge alone (Estaji, 2024; Latif & Wasim, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Teachers demonstrated different levels of conceptual understanding and several forms of formative assessment practice, but the enactment of knowledge was shape by learner diversity, available resources, curriculum demands, professional experience, and classroom conditions. The central challenge therefore involved translating assessment knowledge into contextually appropriate decisions while maintaining coherence among intended learning objectives, assessment tasks, assessment criteria, feedback, and subsequent instruction.

This pattern is consistent with recent research showing that assessment knowledge does not necessarily translate directly into assessment practice (Estaji, 2024; Latif & Wasim, 2024; Puspawati & Murtiningsih, 2025). Sumardi and Guci (2023), for example, found that teachers' knowledge and understanding of HOTS-based language assessment did not fully correspond with their ability to construct assessment tasks representing higher-order thinking skills. Similarly, recent research on secondary EFL teachers has identified challenges in translating assessment knowledge into test-construction practices (Wibowo, 2025). The present findings extend this discussion by showing that the knowledge-practice relationship also involves teachers' attempts to maintain assessment alignment under actual classroom conditions. Enacting LAL required teachers to coordinate conceptual knowledge with decisions about task design, learner needs, feedback, available resources, and curriculum expectations.

The findings also complement Damayanti et al. (2024), who identified variation in Indonesian secondary EFL teachers' assessment knowledge, perspectives, and classroom practices across different school backgrounds. The present study provides a more specific perspective by focusing on the challenges teachers encountered when attempting to maintain alignment between intended learning objectives and classroom assessment decisions. From this perspective, LAL can be understood not only as knowledge that teachers possess, but also as professional knowledge that must be interpreted and enacted within particular classroom conditions.

Across the findings, assessment alignment emerged as a practical and situated challenge rather than a purely conceptual one. This was particularly evident in teachers' attempts accommodate differences in students' English proficiency through assessment adaptation. These adaptations reflected teachers' efforts to make assessment accessible, but they also created a tension between accommodation and construct consistency (Safa & Nasiri, 2025; Estaji, 2024). From a constructive alignment perspective (Biggs, 1996), assessment adaptation remains aligned when it enables learners to demonstrate the intended competence without substantially changing the construct being assessed. The

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challenge was therefore not whether assessment should be differentiated, but how differentiation could be implemented while maintaining the integrity of the intended construct.

This finding also illustrates the distinction between conceptual assessment knowledge and procedural assessment decision-making (Al-Akbari et al., 2025; Kang & Lam, 2024). Some teachers could articulate assessment principles such as validity and fairness, while applying these principles required context-sensitive professional judgement. Understanding why assessment should be valid and fair did not automatically provide teachers with clear solutions for adapting assessment to heterogenous classrooms. LAL therefore involves not only knowledge of assessment principles but also the ability to use those principles when making classroom assessment decisions.

The findings also suggest that challenges in assessment alignment cannot be attributed solely to teachers' assessment knowledge (Al-Akbari et al., 2026; Prastikawati et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2025). The situated nature of assessment alignment was evident in relation to school resources. Access to digital devices, internet connectivity, multimedia equipment, and school policies concerning students' use of devices influenced the assessment options available to teachers (Al-Lawati et al., 2023). In some settings, limited access to individual devices made particular forms of language assessment more difficult to administer, whereas in other settings digital platforms expanded the range of possible assessment activities (Zhang et al., 2025; Su & Lee, 2024). However, access to technology did not automatically result in stronger assessment alignment. Teachers still needed to determine whether the available tools were appropriate for the language skill and intended learning objective being assessed.

This finding complements Damayanti et al. (2024), who reported variation in Indonesia secondary teachers' assessment practices across different school backgrounds. It is also consistent with Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023), who identified institutional and available resources among the factors shaping teachers' implementation of learning-oriented assessment. The present findings further suggest that contextual conditions influence the ways assessment knowledge can be enacted. Resource constraints should therefore not automatically be interpreted as evidence of limited LAL. Instead, resources functions as enabling or constraining conditions within which teachers exercise assessment judgment.

Variation in teachers' conceptual knowledge and assessment practices suggests that explicit assessment knowledge and practical experience do not always develop in the same way (Zhou et al., 2024). Some participants could explain assessment principles using formal terminology, while others described relevant assessment practices without necessarily being familiar with their technical labels. This distinction indicates that practical assessment knowledge may develop through classroom experience even when teachers have limited familiarity with formal assessment terminology (Amirian, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

However, practical experience alone did not necessarily ensure systematic assessment alignment. Teachers frequently drew on professional judgment when adapting tasks, selecting assessment formats, or responding to students' difficulties. Such judgment is important because classroom assessment requires responsiveness to leaners and local conditions. At the same time, professional experience can be strengthened by opportunities to examine assessment decisions against explicit learning objectives, assessment criteria, and evidence of student learning. This supports professional development that connects assessment concepts with authentic classroom decision-making rather than treating LAL primarily as theoretical knowledge.

Viewed through constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996), the findings show that assessment alignment involves more than selecting an assessment task that appears relevant to the content being taught. Alignment requires a coherent relationship among intended learning objectives, assessment tasks, assessment criteria, feedback, and subsequent instructional decisions. The observed difficulties in communicating assessment purposes and making assessment criteria explicit suggest that this coherence was not always visible in classroom practice. At the same time, teachers frequently attempted to adapt assessment to students' proficiency levels and classroom realities. Assessment alignment therefore involved continuous negotiation between intended learning outcomes and the conditions in which assessment was implemented. Form an LAL perspective, this negotiation highlights the importance of teachers' assessment judgment. Alignment cannot be achieved simply by following curriculum indicators or using a particular assessment format. Teachers need to

interpret the intended competence, select an appropriate method for eliciting evidence, determine suitable criteria, and decide how the resulting evidence should inform subsequent teaching and learning. These decisions represent the procedural dimension through which assessment knowledge becomes classroom practice.

The findings concerning the use of assessment evidence further illustrate the uneven enactment of formative assessment. Several teachers reported using assessment results to identify students' difficulties, repeat content, provide additional exercises conduct remedial instruction, or modify their teaching approach. These practices demonstrate that assessment evidence was not used solely for grading or reporting. In this respect, teachers showed elements of assessment for learning by allowing evidence of student performance to inform subsequent instruction. However, the formative use of assessment evidence was more evident in teachers' instructional decisions than in students' active use of feedback (Lee & Mao, 2024; Xie & Liu, 2024). Classroom observations suggested that feedback was sometimes brief and evaluative, while structured opportunities for self-assessment and reflection were less consistently visible (Kang & Lam, 2024; Xie & Liu, 2024). This distinction is important because formative assessment involves not only teachers responding to evidence but also learners understanding their current performance and identifying how to improve it. This pattern is consistent with recent EFL research. Rana and Rana (2025) showed that secondary English teachers used formative assessment and feedback to scaffold students' learning, while opportunities for professional development remained important for strengthening these practices. Similarly, Ali and Mjenda (2024) found that English teachers recognised the value of feedback and classroom assessment but varied in their diagnostic use of assessment evidence. Zhang et al.'s (2024) systematic review of K-12 EFL formative assessment further highlights feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment, and instructional adjustment as important formative practices whose enactment is shaped by assessment literacy and contextual conditions. The present findings therefore reveal an important distinction between teachers' use of assessment evidence and students' use of that evidence. Strengthening LAL should address both dimensions by helping teachers use assessment results for instructional decision-making while also developing feedback practices that enable students to understand and act on assessment information.

These findings have implications for teachers' professional learning. Professional development in LAL should move beyond introducing assessment terminology and general principles (Al-Akbari et al., 2025; Estaji, 2024; Giraldo, 2021; Lei & Lei, 2026; Mirsanjari, 2025; Puspawati et al., 2024). Teachers need opportunities to work authentic classroom assessment problems, such as adapting tasks for different proficiency levels, developing assessment criteria, reviewing the alignment between tasks and intended competencies, and interpreting assessment evidence for instructional follow-up (Giraldo, 2021; Haggag, 2023). Collaborative examination of actual assessment tasks may help teachers make the reasoning behind their assessment decisions more explicit (Cui et al., 2025; Yu, 2024). Such support is particularly important because the findings do not indicate a uniform lack of assessment knowledge among teachers. Rather, teachers demonstrated different combinations of conceptual knowledge, practical experience, and contextual adaptation. Professional learning should therefore help teachers connect these dimensions instead of assuming that the same form of assessment training will address all classroom challenges.

Taken together, these findings extend existing research on LAL in Indonesian secondary education by focusing specifically on the challenges teachers encounter when enacting assessment knowledge to align classroom assessment with intended learning objectives. Rather than positioning assessment literacy as a competence that teachers either possess or lack, the findings show that its enactment is shaped by the interaction of conceptual knowledge, professional judgment, learner diversity, curriculum expectations, available resources, and opportunities to use assessment evidence formatively (Al-Akbari et al., 2026; Estaji, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). This perspective foregrounds assessment alignment as a situated professional practice in which teachers coordinate assessment knowledge with task design, learner needs, assessment criteria, feedback, curriculum expectations, and contextual realities. Strengthening teachers' LAL therefore requires more than increasing their knowledge of assessment terminology or principles. Teachers need opportunities to design and review assessment tasks, examine the relationship

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between tasks and intended construct, develop informative feedback, and use assessment evidence to make instructional decisions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges encountered by secondary English teachers in North Sumatra, Indonesia, when enacting Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) to align classroom assessment with intended learning objectives. The findings show that assessment alignment involved more than teachers' conceptual knowledge of assessment. Teachers demonstrated different forms of assessment knowledge and formative practice, but the enactment of this knowledge was shaped by learner diversity, available resources, curriculum demands, time constraints, and classroom conditions. Challenges were particularly evident when teachers needed to differentiate assessment while maintaining construct validity, make the relationship among learning objectives, assessment tasks, and assessment criteria explicit, and use assessment evidence to support subsequent teaching and learning.

This study contributes to LAL research by highlighting assessment alignment as a situated professional practice. The relationship between assessment knowledge and classroom practice cannot be understood simply as a gap between what teachers know and what they do. Enacting LAL requires teachers to exercise professional judgement while responding to learner needs, curriculum expectations, available resources, and institutional conditions. The findings therefore highlight the procedural dimension of LAL, particularly teachers' ability to connect assessment principles with task design, assessment criteria, feedback, and instructional decision-making. The findings also have practical implications for teacher professional development. LAL development should move beyond one-off training on assessment concepts and terminology towards sustained, practice-oriented professional learning. Such professional learning could support teachers in designing assessment tasks aligned with intended learning objectives, developing clear assessment criteria, providing informative feedback, and using assessment evidence to guide subsequent instruction. Existing professional forums, such as MGMP, could provide opportunities for collaborative and practice-oriented LAL development. For example, teachers could collaboratively design and review assessment tasks, examine their alignment with intended learning objectives, develop assessment criteria, and discuss how assessment evidence can inform feedback and subsequent instruction. Such professional learning should remain sensitive to differences in school resources and classroom conditions so that assessment principles can be translated into practices that are both educationally sound and feasible. In addition, sustained mentoring can be implemented through structured peer partnerships between senior and junior teachers. Mentoring cycles may involve co-designing assessment tasks aligned with learning objectives, observing classroom assessment practices, and engaging in reflective discussions on feedback strategies and the use of assessment results for instructional improvement. Such ongoing, practice-based mentoring would support teachers in gradually strengthening procedural assessment skills and in addressing alignment challenges specific to their classroom context. By connecting conceptual assessment knowledge with collaborative examination of classroom assessment practices, schools and professional learning communities may better support teachers in enacting LAL within their particular teaching contexts.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. The study involved sixteen secondary English teachers from North Sumatra, and its findings are intended to provide a contextualised understanding rather than statistical generalisation. Although interview data were complemented by classroom observations, each teacher was observed during only 90-minute classroom session. A single observation may not capture the full range of assessment practices that teachers use across different lessons and assessment situations. In addition, the cross-sectional design did not allow the study to examine how teachers' LAL and assessment practices developed over time.

Future research could examine teachers' assessment practices over longer periods to understand how LAL develops through continued classroom experience and professional learning. Intervention studies could also investigate how sustained, practice-oriented professional development influences teachers' ability to design aligned assessment, provide formative feedback, and use assessment evidence for instructional decision-making. Comparative studies across Indonesian provinces and school contexts would provide further insight into how different educational conditions shape the enactment of

LAL. In addition, mixed-methods research could examine patterns of assessment alignment across larger group of teachers while retaining qualitative attention to the reasoning behind their assessment decisions.

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