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Algerian Teachers' Perceptions of Learning-Oriented Assessment: Challenges and Insights Post-Integrated Content and Language Professional Development Program

Wafia Tihal

Ecole Normale Supérieure de Bouzareah-ENSB-, Algeria

tihal.wafia@ensb.dz<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0151-0860>

Abstract

The integration of innovative assessment practices, such as Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA), into higher education has increasingly become a focal point, capturing the attention of educators worldwide. In Algeria, however, teachers still face challenges in applying LOA, even after taking part in training programs meant to improve their teaching methods. This small-scale exploratory study investigates how Algerian teachers perceive their teaching practices following their participation in the intensive six-month Integrated Content and Language (ICL) professional development course in 2022. It is also an attempt to explore the challenges encountered with the adoption of Learning-Oriented Assessment approach in Higher Education. The study used a qualitative approach and gathered data through a Google Forms questionnaire sent to teachers who took part in the ICL program. The results show that most of them have started using LOA in their teaching and have noticed clear benefits for their students. However, a number of challenges were identified by the participants and were grouped into three major areas: (a) resistance to change due to being reluctant to move from the traditional ways of assessment to LOA; (b) time constraint, since LOA requires much time in planning and giving feedback; and (c) difficulties in designing effective rubrics for assessment. This study calls for further research to be conducted given that the implementation of LOA is still in progress and it is too early to form definitive conclusions at this stage.

Introduction

Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) came as a response to traditional testing approach that prioritize memorization over the real-world application of knowledge (Jones and Saville, 2016). It is thought to be a helpful method to learning languages that incorporates both formal and informal evaluations. The primary objective of LOA is to assist teachers and learners in planning their lessons and tracking their development over time.

The present study explores Algerian university teachers' perceptions and evaluations of a professional development program focused on learning-oriented assessment. It also examines the challenges encountered in integrating this innovative assessment approach into their teaching practices. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1- How do teachers perceive the professional development program centered on learning-oriented assessment?
- 2- What challenges have teachers encountered in implementing learning-oriented assessment practices in their classrooms?

Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) is a framework created to support learning and guide instruction by offering insightful data (Turner & Purpura, 2016). LOA is “theorized as a development and validation framework for identifying the dynamic, interactive relationships between *instruction*, *learning*, and *assessment* in the classroom.” (Brian, 217 p.28). This active interaction between instruction, learning, and assessment is based on eight inter-related dimensions namely: *Contextual dimension*, *Elicitation dimension*, *Instructional dimension*, *Socio-cognitive dimension*, *Proficiency dimension*, *Interactional dimension*, *Affective dimension* and *Technological dimension*.

Conceptual Basis of Learning Oriented Assessment

1- Contextual dimension

The contextual dimension of LOA is the whole external context of the test related to the socio-political and sociocultural context of the assessment. This dimension sets parameters for how instruction, learning and assessment will take place within the social, cultural, and political context of learning (Turner & Purpura, 2016). The contextual dimension also relates to everything related to the learner such as his background knowledge, age, education, and language proficiency and it is the first important dimension to consider in a

learning- oriented assessment. According to Smith (2014, p. 42) “the contextual dimension of LOA may offer helpful answers for informing best practices of learner-centered language instruction in the future”. It also deals with competencies in the real world and how those competencies might be related to aspirational standards or outcomes.

2- Elicitation Dimension

The elicitation dimension describes the diversity of language elicitations that take place in a classroom, ranging from planned assessments, such as tasks taken from a textbook or designed by a teacher, to unplanned, spontaneous assessments, such as teacher spontaneous questioning and feedback during talking, along with observing students in their problem-solving activities (Turner & Purpura, 2016). The elicitation dimension is mainly related to task design, delivery, administration, and scoring (Voss, 2022). It involves gathering evidence of students' understanding, abilities, knowledge and skills.

3-Proficiency dimension

The Proficiency dimension of LOA framework is the “What” of teaching and learning. Turner and Purpura (2016) state that a model of L2 proficiency addresses the specific linguistic and content *knowledge, skills, and abilities* (KSAs) of the L2 learners and should be used to inform what should be assessed, how evidence from performance is interpreted and may be tracked over time, and what should be targeted by feedback and assistance. Put it simply, it is concerned with knowledge representation (Voss, 2022)

4- Socio-cognitive dimension (previously called the Learning Dimension).

This dimension recognizes the importance of understanding the socio-cognitive processes of the learner (problem solving skills); that is, how L2 learners process information and learn, how performance evidence is interpreted, and how inferences from evidence are used to provide feedback and assistance in order to close learning gaps and promote further learning. Focusing on the learner, this dimension concerns how learners process input in the tasks or instruction that they are presented with; it also tracks how learners process feedback or assistance they are given, and it tracks how

learners are able to engage in reasoning and other task demands. This dimension is one side of the instructional dimension (Pur, 2022).

5- Instructional dimension

This dimension relates to how teachers, or the instructional materials they provide, offer feedback or present information to students for their understanding and processing. It is related to how teachers organize explicit instruction or how they provide opportunities for implicit learning. This is the other side of the socio-cognitive dimension. In the instructional dimension, the input is meant to be processed, remembered, and used; that is, scaffolded feedback (Voss, 2022; Purpura, 2022)

6- Affective dimension

This aspect of LOA highlights the important role of affective factors—such as emotions, beliefs, attitudes toward learning, personality traits, and motivation—in shaping learning success and influencing LOA itself (Havener, 2016). These elements not only determine how learners interact with the material but also influence their reactions to teaching strategies and assessment methods, ultimately affecting their learning outcomes. For instance, students with positive emotions and high motivation are more likely to take on challenging tasks than those who are in a negative emotional state (Pekrun, 2014). Furthermore, the interaction between learning, assessment, and instruction—which is essential to the LOA framework—is based on the emotive component. Harlen & James (1997) argue that by considering learners' emotional and motivational states, LOA fosters a supportive learning environment, leading to more meaningful and successful learning experiences. This is particularly significant as it reflects the growing understanding that learning is not just a cognitive process but is closely connected to emotional and social factors (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008).

7-Socio-interactional dimension

The socio-interactional dimension highlights that a lot of LOAs involve spontaneous language elicitation activities, which are followed by evaluation, feedback or assistance, all of which are embedded in talk-in-interaction. This stresses the critical role of the socio- interactional dimensions in bridging learning gaps (Purpura & Turner, 2014). Moreover, this dimension involves

learners being actively involved in the assessment process through opportunities to collaborate and exchange formative feedback with one another, as well as to engage in peer evaluation of assignments” (Konstantinidis, 2012, p54). The socio-interactional dimension is not limited to regular classroom, but rather can extend to even outside the doors of the classroom with the incorporation of technological platforms. This is confirmed by Dean (2014) who advocates that “Technological platforms and other aspects of the elicitation allow for interactional concerns to be carried over into large-scale assessment, thus broadening the field of LOA beyond the classroom itself” (p.52)

8-Technological dimension

This dimension has been added to LOA framework by Purpura in 2022. Purpura highlighted its undeniable importance, and stipulated that the technological dimension refers to the ability to use the internet and telecommunications technologies (ICT) in daily routines. He also tapped into the importance of developing digital literacy skills with ICT so as to be able to design a test, administer it and score it online. Voss (2022) stressed the supporting role of technology in learning-focused assessment. In the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) conference which took place in Paris in 2022, Voss argues that teachers can design tasks through technology. He added that digital platforms can assist the learning journey of the learner and provide quality feedback. This is supported by Purpura (2022), who states that teachers need to familiarize themselves with computer use and be trained in online scoring. These are crucial considerations related to technology.

Method

The study is qualitative in nature, using a Google form questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions and a few close-ended questions. Close-ended questions in this qualitative study served as a helpful tool for gathering baseline data, gaining a fast sense of the participants' overall opinion, and confirming specific aspects of their experiences. The open-ended questions were planned to obtain in- depth qualitative data by exploring teachers' experiences and challenges with learning-oriented assessment Practices. A purposive sample of ten participants was selected for the study. The participants were university teachers who had

participated in Cohort 1 of the professional development program. This program, conducted in 2022, was a six-month intensive Integrated Content and Language (ICL) professional development course delivered via Zoom by distinguished teachers and education experts from Columbia University in the United States, in collaboration with the Algerian ministry of higher education. Participants consent was obtained prior to participation. They were informed about the purpose of the study, and were assured that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research process. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to interpret patterns and themes in the participants' responses, and descriptive statistics to summarize and present the responses clearly. Although a Google Form questionnaire was distributed to all participants who actively engaged in the program, and whose number exceeded twenty, only ten provided responses.

Results

For a more comprehensive analysis, the participants' responses have been categorized into two distinct sections: “*Evaluation of the professional development program centered on learning-oriented assessment practices*” and “*Challenges encountered with Learning-Oriented Assessment Practices*”

I-Evaluation of the professional development program and Implementation of Learning-Oriented Assessment Practices

The participants' insights into the ICLHE professional development program and the integration of the learning-oriented assessment approach in their teaching unveil the following:

Question 1: *Did you find the professional development program centered on learning-oriented assessment practices beneficial for your teaching practice?*

The results are displayed in the following figure:

Fig 1: Benefits of Learning-Oriented Assessments

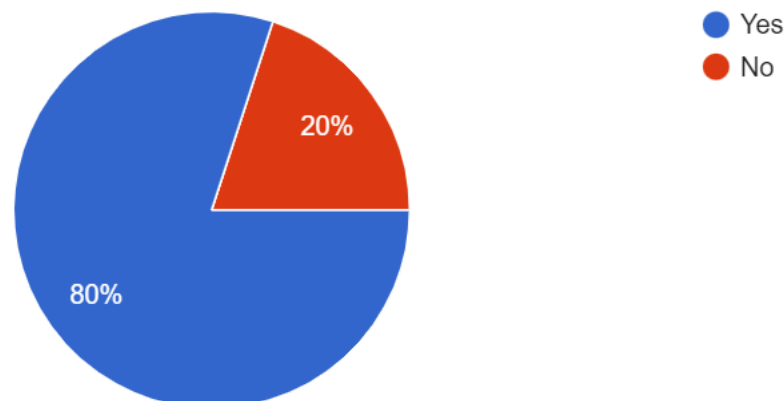
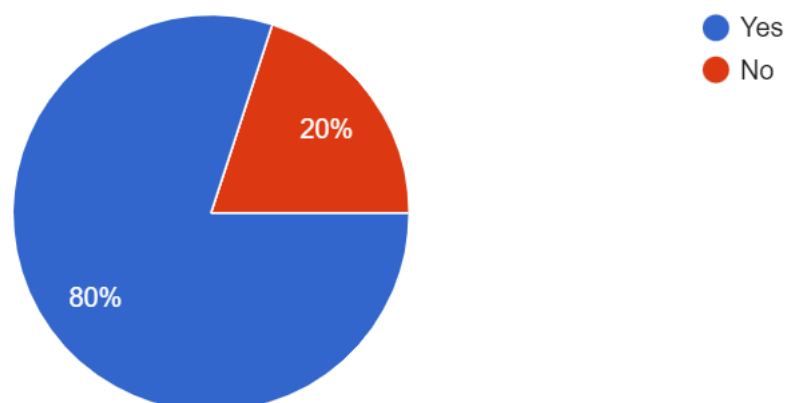


Fig.1 shows clearly that 80% of the respondents found the professional development program beneficial for their teaching practice. Although 20% of the participants considered it unhelpful, the findings incontestably indicates that the overwhelming majority perceive significant value in the program, particularly in relation to fostering learning-oriented assessment practices. This shows the importance of professional development programs which goes in line with Bardakçı & Yoğun (2023, p. 1498) who clearly stipulate that “Opportunities for teacher professional development are vital for teachers both to improve themselves in order to better understand their capacity/ competences and satisfy the needs of learners and the institutions they work for”

Question Two: *Have you incorporated LOA into your teaching after completing the program?*

The results are better illustrated in the following figure:

Fig 2: Implementation of LOA in Modules



In response to the second question, 80% of the respondents attest that they have incorporated LOA in their teaching modules. These are probably the same individuals who responded positively to the first question. The remaining 20%, who did not, may be attributed to those who perceived the professional development program in its entirety as non-valuable and not offering the needed assistance.

Question 3: *Would you recommend the adoption of learning-oriented assessment practices to your colleagues?*

Fig 3: Recommendation for Learning-Oriented Assessment Practices

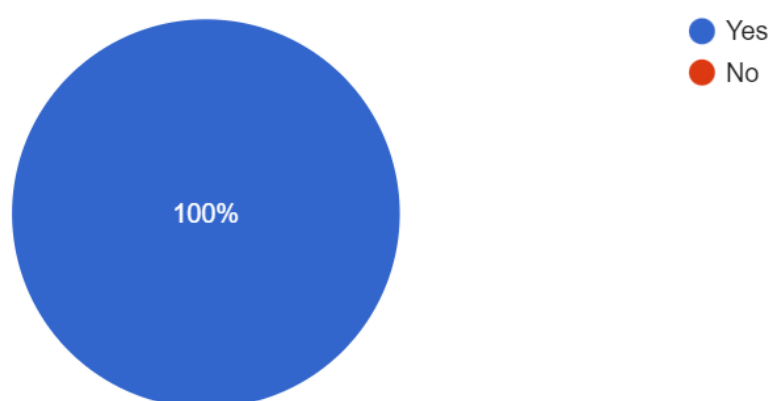


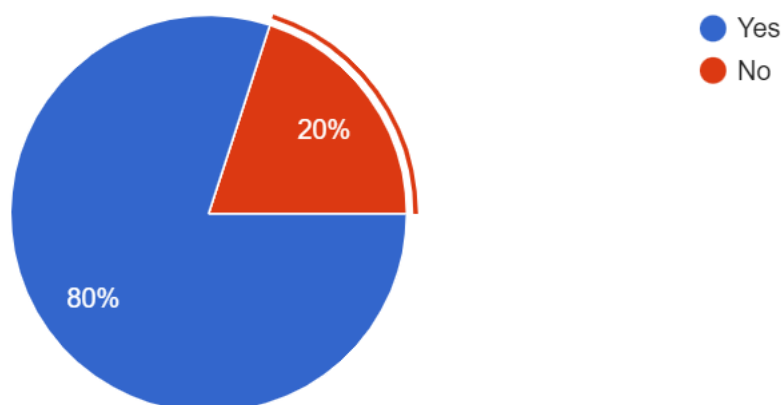
Figure 5 demonstrates the participants' responses regarding their willingness to recommend the adoption of Learning-Oriented Assessment practices to their

colleagues. The purpose of asking this question is to find out whether teachers believe LOA to be a valuable tool in their teaching practices. The findings clearly demonstrate that every participant in this study considers the new framework worth adopting, even those who previously, in question 1, viewed the teaching professional program as unhelpful, which shows that all the teachers are aware of the great assistance that LOA brings in the learning experience.

Question 4: *Have you observed any increase in students' engagement and understanding since you started using learning-oriented assessment?*

The findings are presented in the figure below:

Fig 3: Impact of Learning-Oriented Assessments on Student Engagement and Understanding



Almost all the participants, representing 80%, have reported observing ameliorations in students' engagement and understanding while incorporating the LOA approach. This means that the approach is positively affecting the learning experience. It is worth noting that in 2015, Carless discussed the idea of 'engagement' and affirmed that LOA plays a pivotal role in boosting learners' active engagement, thereby guaranteeing a high quality of education in higher education. On the other side, 20% of the participants deny having perceived any kind of improvement. They probably believe that the professional development program is not really significant in the teaching and learning process.

II- Experiences and challenges with Learning-Oriented Assessment Practices

The second part of the questionnaire, ranging from question 5 to question 8, focuses on the experiences of teachers with LOA practices and thoroughly explores the difficulties encountered while adopting learning-oriented assessment in higher education.

Question 5: *As an ESP teacher, name the most notable obstacles you may have encountered while implementing learning-oriented assessment practices in your teaching. What did you do to address them?*

All the participants unanimously affirmed that they have indeed faced many obstacles in implementing learning-oriented assessment practices. The teachers' obstacles are presented as follows:

- a- "The students' habits of the old system die hard"*
- b- "large classes, heterogeneity of learners, lack of experience of collaborating colleagues"*
- c - "Students did not adhere easily to the process because of test frustration and fear of failure; clarification, correction and feedback with test templates enhanced the process afterwards"*
- d- "Of course there are. Amongst the most important I guess is teachers' adaptation to this brand-new approach".*
- e- "May be LOA assessment practices were not clear at the beginning but later the process has become a source of inspiration for me and my learners. (Practice makes perfect, we may succeed in some pedagogical practices and we may revise ineffective ones"*

Based on their feedback, the participants have pointed out several major challenges that are thematically coded into three main categories: **a- resistance to changes** characterized by total refusal to switch from the 'safety zone' of traditional assessment methods to a new, 'risky' zone of the "LOA" framework, **b- time constraints** as the implementation of LOA requires more time for planning, and providing feedback and **c- difficulty in designing a rubric for assessment** that ensures clear evaluation criteria and reflect the essence of learning. This collective acknowledgement exhibits the complexity involved in effectively integrating assessment methods that prioritize student learning outcomes. To address these challenges, teachers seem to agree that they need to

implement strategies to gradually and cautiously shift students' mindset and habits towards the new assessment practices. The participants propose working collaboratively by sharing both their experiences and resources which they strongly believe would be of great assistance in reducing some of these issues. Furthermore, they highlighted the need for considering the emotional dimension of assessment which is completely overlooked in the traditional assessment practices. Students' anxiety, and fear of failure can be real impediments. That is why, they strongly recommend creating a supportive learning environment and providing clear instructions, along with constructive feedback to alleviating these concerns. All these point to the teachers' own challenge in accommodating to the new assessment approach which may need time and support to fully integrate it into their teaching practices. They also are convinced that initially with time and practice, all the challenges would disappear.

Question 6: *In your opinion, what are the key benefits of adopting learning-oriented assessments in the classroom?*

In response to question 5, the participants highlight the idea that using LOA leads to a higher level of learning regarding the specific content or skill being assessed.

Some of their answers are shown as follows:

- a- *“There is twice as much learning of the assessed element”*
- b- *“taking into account all the aspects of learning (dimensions), activating domain competencies, more valid and reliable assessment”*
- c- *“more student's self-confidence and awareness of their strengths and weaknesses; more specific test items that target background knowledge and achievement of determined competences”*
- d- *“According to me, LOA is beneficial because it gives the learners independence and autonomy to steer their learning, which is basically based on reliable evidence. In addition, it enables the teachers to get appropriate feedback about the effectiveness of their teaching”.*
- e- *“If the benefits are theoretically positive, the LOA approach needs first to be implemented, which is not yet the case. This research occurs at a moment when LOA is trying to get implemented. Let us give it the time to be so before*

embarking on research of this kind. It is too early to say something on LOA implementation”.

Teachers' responses reveal that adopting learning-oriented assessments has many benefits. The participants observed that incorporating this approach in their teaching practices positively increases students' self-confidence, fosters their autonomy and helps them grasp and retain the material. They also point out that using this framework addresses students' weaknesses, enabling them to receive feedback about the effectiveness of their teaching. In addition, they insist on considering all dimensions of learning when assessing students in order to effectively evaluate various facets of their understanding, which indicates a belief in the holistic nature of learning. It is to be noted that the participants recommend adjusting assessments to individual students' needs and abilities and emphasize the importance of designing test items that specifically address students' prior knowledge along with the pre-determined competencies. However, one participant advocates that it is too early to draw conclusive interpretations on LOA implementation. This teacher argues that LOA is still in the process of being implemented and suggests caution in rushing into research on its effectiveness.

Question 7: *What changes, if any, have you observed in your students' attitudes regarding assessments since adopting learning-oriented practices?*

Although it may be too early to draw conclusions about how students' attitudes have changed, teachers can gain useful insights on the changes they have seen in their learners after implementing learning-oriented practices. The participants point out four positive and notable changes in students' attitudes. Firstly, the learning process appears to have increased students' motivation, engagement, and inspiration. Secondly, they become more aware of the purpose and value of assessments. Thirdly, they seem to be autonomous, and open to taking charge of their own learning process, which totally aligns with the principles of learning-oriented assessment. Fourthly, students are developing important transferable skills that can benefit them in various areas of their education. What is striking is that the participants have all noticed that high achieving students seem to appreciate the shift towards learning-oriented practices, whereas students who may not be performing as well academically prefer the traditional assessment system. This not only indicates that some students may take time to adapt to the

new approach but also shows that teachers are taking a reflective approach when assessing how learning-oriented practices affect their students' learning results.

Question 8: *Are there specific resources or support mechanisms you feel would further enhance your ability to implement learning-oriented assessment practices effectively?*

All the participants agree that there are numerous resources that may help in the effective implementation of LOA. The pivotal one is understanding the theoretical foundation of learning-oriented assessment practices, followed by the inclusion of technology which is an essential requirement for successfully incorporating LOA into the assessment process. The participants refer to E-learning platforms, in particular, "Moodle" and "Canvas", indicating their ability to help teachers assess their students through supplying them with automated grading, and providing them with the possibility to track their students' progress over time. Moreover, the responses reveal that the need for specialized resources in the form of subject matter texts can also be of great support and encourage team work, affirming that working collaboratively in designing test design is undoubtedly more fruitful than if designed individually. It is worth noting that teachers' responses to question 8 indicate that true preparation, undoubtedly through training or professional development, is pivotal for successfully implementing learning-oriented assessments.

In sum, to successfully implement LOA in the teaching and learning practices, a number of support mechanisms are highlighted by the participants, including training sessions, practice opportunities, collaborative work, coordination sessions, peer observation reports, and conferences.

Discussion

The major aim of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the 2022 Integrated Content and Language professional development program, with a focus on how it has influenced their adoption of Learning-Oriented Assessment in their teaching practices four years after completing the program. Most participants found the professional development program helpful for their teaching, similar to what Bardakçı & Yoğun (2023) observed in Turkey, where such programs were seen as essential for improving teachers' skills and meeting students' needs. In this context, teachers' responses also show that learning-oriented assessments can be beneficial in many ways, such as helping students

learn better, making them more aware of their progress, and giving teachers important feedback. They seem to agree with Zeng et al. (2018), who, in their critical meta-analysis, argue that LOA benefits student learning because it works both as a way of learning and a tool for learning. They also emphasize the need for careful implementation and patience to fully understand its impact.

Regarding the number of constraints encountered by teachers while implementing LOA in their teaching practices, the results of the current study have shown some notable parallels with the study conducted in Iran by Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023). The Algerian and Iranian teachers in both studies have identified the same range of challenges encountered when implementing LOA, ranging from student resistance to the traditional assessment method, as well as time constraints, and difficulty to design a rubric for assessment. This implies that EFL teachers face the same obstacles, probably because they are not yet familiar with LOA principles, which indicate their need to a more training on the use of this new assessment approach. All of these call for a special support and resources to overcome resistance and address these challenges, which may involve skills development initiatives and promoting the benefits of LOA in boosting deeper understanding and imparting meaningful learning. It goes without saying that it is very important to emphasize the value of ongoing dialogue, cooperative planning, and intelligible communication to collectively overcome challenges emerging from the implementation of learning-oriented assessments in the educational experience.

In terms of the benefits of incorporating LOA in their teaching practices, the findings of the current study seem to be in accordance with a recent study undertaken by Er and Farhady in 2023, on the impact of LOA on EFL students' academic writing ability. The participants in this study reported having observed many positive changes in students' attitudes after adopting learning-oriented practices. These comprise increased motivation, awareness, autonomy, commitment to learning, and effective use of language skills. On the same line, Turkish students in the afore-mentioned study showed high achievement on different LOA tasks; they became more engaged, more responsible and more self-confident.

All the participants share the view that LOA encourages and push students to take charge of their own learning process and underline the importance of

building this autonomy on reliable evidence. The role of LOA in offering teachers valuable feedback on the effectiveness of their instructional methods is undeniable. However, in Algerian higher education, it needs more time to be fully integrated before its impact can be accurately assessed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude, the main findings reveal a multifaceted approach to effectively adopting learning-oriented assessment in teaching practices. The participants stress the importance of theoretical knowledge, effective test design, appropriate rubric for assessment, specialized subject matter resources and teacher preparation, along with diversity of professional development opportunities. Indeed, teachers' perspectives line up with Konstantinidis (2012), about the amount of time needed before a course starts. Konstantinidis mentioned that “much time and effort were necessary to devise the learning outcomes, activities, and assignments, as well as to develop the materials for the course, in advance of the course's commencement” (2012,p.53). This implies that LOA can assist educators in refining their teaching strategies and suggests a willingness to engage with a range of resources to enhance its effectiveness.

It is highly recommended to conduct further research and gather long-term data in order to build strong evidence base on the impact of Learning-Oriented Assessment in enhancing Algerian learning outcomes. In Algerian higher education, Learning-Oriented Assessment approach is still in the early stages of implementation, making it precocious to provide judgments about its effects on students' outcomes.

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