

# Moving Toward Learning-Oriented Assessment: Insights from Thai EFL Contexts

Garngullaya Chimpleewanasom\*

## Abstract

Assessment shapes what teachers prioritize, how learners study, and how institutions define success. Yet in many EFL contexts, including Thailand, assessment practices remain heavily influenced by high-stakes, CEFR-aligned proficiency tests that exert strong washback on teaching and learning. Recent policy directions requiring university students to take standardized or in-house CEFR-referenced tests have intensified this pressure, often shifting instructional attention toward test preparation and away from ongoing learning. Considering this backdrop, Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) offers a productive approach by positioning assessment as a continuous process embedded within classroom interaction. This article examines LOA through four core principles: tasks as learning opportunities, active learner agency, feedback-for-action, and ecological integration, and discusses how these principles can guide English language instruction. Drawing on empirical evidence from Thai EFL studies, the article illustrates how LOA can enhance reading, speaking, and writing development by strengthening coherence between instruction, assessment, and learner engagement. These studies show that LOA can promote deeper learning, build evaluative judgment, and support learner autonomy, while also highlighting persistent challenges such as teacher workload, peer-feedback reliability, limited class time, and restricted digital infrastructures. The article concludes by outlining practical strategies for teachers, learners, and institutions, and by identifying future directions for research and practice. In particular, it underscores the need for digital tools capable of tracking learners' engagement with feedback, which remain underdeveloped but crucial for advancing LOA implementation. Overall, the article demonstrates how LOA can contribute to more meaningful, transparent, and learning-focused English instruction in exam-driven EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), classroom assessment, feedback-for-action, language classroom practices

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\* Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

Corresponding author: Garngullaya.ch@gmail.com

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## Introduction

Assessment has always been central to education, serving purposes that range from certifying achievement to informing instruction. Traditionally, assessment has been dominated by summative functions, such as high-stakes examinations or end-of-course evaluations that certify learners' performance. The rise of formative assessment shifted attention toward using assessment to support learning during instruction, introducing practices such as feedback, peer review, and self-assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Earl, 2013). Yet in practice, both summative and formative approaches have often been implemented in partial or fragmented ways. Summative assessments may dominate due to institutional or policy pressures, sometimes reducing learning to exam preparation, while formative assessment is occasionally interpreted narrowly as "giving comments," limiting its potential impact (Yorke, 2003; Carless, 2006). Increasingly, scholars emphasize that assessment should not be defined by format but by whether it meaningfully supports learning.

Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) emerged as a response to this need. Rather than positioning assessment as summative or formative, LOA reframes assessment as a learning-centered orientation. Carless (2007) proposes that LOA integrates assessment of, for, and as learning, emphasizing that any assessment, regardless of purpose, should create learning opportunities. In this orientation, summative tasks can generate actionable feedback, and formative practices can be aligned with accountability requirements while still maintaining a focus on learning.

Over the past two decades, LOA has been elaborated in several directions. Jones and Saville (2016) conceptualize LOA as a systemic model linking assessment design to institutional and policy contexts so that assessment promotes positive washback "by design." Turner and Purpura (2016) emphasized the ecological nature of LOA in second language classrooms, highlighting how tasks, questioning, scaffolding, and interaction help learners notice gaps and adjust performance. With the increasing use of digital tools, LOA has expanded further: Chong and Reinders (2023) document global examples of technology-supported LOA practices; Voss (2021) shows that digital platforms such as Blackboard, Canvas, and Moodle can document learning evidence for ongoing improvement; and Jitpaisarnwattana and Saville (2025) argue that technology enhances LOA by making assessment processes more visible and supporting learner involvement.

Across these developments, LOA consistently emphasizes four core principles in language classrooms: Tasks as Learning Opportunities, in which assessment activities

themselves create learning; Active Learner Agency, where students engage in self- and peer assessment and develop evaluative judgment; Feedback-for-Action, guiding improvement rather than justifying grades; and Ecological Integration, recognizing that assessment is shaped by classroom interaction, institutional policy, sociocultural factors and increasingly digital technologies that extend learning beyond the classroom.

In the Thai EFL context, the need for LOA has become increasingly evident. Recent policy discussions indicate a growing reliance on CEFR-aligned, high-stakes proficiency examinations in higher education (Wudthayagorn, 2025). Universities are required to administer standardized or in-house CEFR-referenced tests, with expected benchmarks such as B2 for undergraduate and C1 for graduate study. While these policies aim to elevate national proficiency, they also intensify pressure on learners and teachers, particularly when institutions rely on commercial tests that may impose financial burdens and exacerbate inequities. Such reliance can lead to test-focused preparation and inconsistent representations of proficiency. These concerns highlight the importance of complementary classroom-based assessments that provide richer evidence of progress, reduce test-driven pressure, and empower teachers as key assessment agents.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the value of LOA in language classrooms, particularly in Thailand and other exam-driven contexts. By positioning assessment as a driver of learning rather than a measurement endpoint, LOA offers both a conceptual lens and a practical pathway toward developing reflective, engaged, and autonomous lifelong English language learners.

### **Core Principles of LOA**

Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) has been developed as a framework that reorients assessment towards the goal of supporting learning across contexts. Drawing on foundational work by Carless (2007), Jones and Saville (2016), Turner and Purpura (2016), Saville (2021), and Chong and Reinders (2023), this paper synthesizes four converged core principles: (1) tasks as learning opportunities, (2) active learner agency, (3) feedback-for-action, and (4) ecological and contextual integration. These principles form a coherent framework for designing assessments that support language development in meaningful, context-sensitive ways.

### **(1) Tasks as Learning Opportunities**

The first principle emphasizes that assessment tasks should function as learning tasks. Carless (2007) argues that tasks must promote deep engagement with intended learning outcomes rather than rote recall or mechanical exercise. From this perspective, assessment is most effective when learners acquire knowledge or skills during the task itself.

In English language classrooms, designing authentic, communicative tasks reflects this principle well. For example, narrating a recent event through a collaborative poster or digital slideshow requires learners to use target grammar and vocabulary in purposeful ways. Such tasks generate assessable evidence of performance, but equally important, they create opportunities for negotiation of meaning, idea development, and communicative practice.

### **(2) Active Learner Agency**

The second principle is learner involvement, where students participate actively in self-assessment, peer assessment, and reflection. Turner and Purpura (2016) highlight that such involvement supports the development of evaluative judgment, the capacity to interpret criteria and judge quality. Carless (2007) similarly positions learner agency as central to LOA's intent.

Practical tools such as self-assessment checklists and simplified peer-review rubrics enable learners to take responsibility for monitoring their progress. Chong and Reinders (2023) further illustrate how digital platforms (such as e-portfolios and online peer review systems) expand opportunities for learner participation by enabling learners to document, revise, and reflect on work over time. Through these practices, learners develop skills in self-regulation and become less dependent on teacher-led correction.

### **(3) Feedback-for-Action**

Feedback within LOA is not retrospective commentary but forward-looking - timely, specific feedback aimed at guiding learners' next steps. Carless (2015) argues that feedback must be actionable to influence improvement, and Turner and Purpura (2016) highlight how classroom interactions - teacher prompts, clarification requests, and peer scaffolding - serve as real-time assessment moments that shape learning.

A common implementation is the draft–feedback–revision cycle in writing courses. Learners submit an early draft, receive focused comments on content or organization, revise

with guidance, and resubmit. This iterative process transforms feedback into a learning resource rather than a justification of grades. Over time, learners internalize these processes and become more able to monitor, evaluate, and adjust their own work.

#### **(4) Ecological Integration**

LOA is inherently ecological. Assessment is shaped not only by tasks and feedback but also by classroom interactional patterns, institutional policies, sociocultural expectations, and technological environments. Turner and Purpura (2016) emphasize how assessment emerges dynamically within classroom discourse, where teacher questioning, peer scaffolding, and collaborative tasks produce continuous evidence of learning.

At a broader level, Jones and Saville (2016) propose a systemic model in which classroom assessment aligns with curricular frameworks and policy structures - “impact by design.” For example, a speaking task aligned with CEFR descriptors ensures coherence between classroom practice and institutional standards.

Saville (2021) extends this ecological view by highlighting the role of digital assessment environments, noting that tools such as online quizzes, automated feedback systems, and learning platforms can broaden the spaces in which assessment and learning occur. Similarly, Chong and Reinders (2023) show how technology supports sustained engagement through multimodal feedback, collaborative writing platforms, and e-portfolios that track learning across time and contexts.

#### **Empirical Evidence of LOA in Thai EFL Contexts**

Recent research in Thailand provides growing empirical support for Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) across reading, speaking, and writing classrooms. Although findings vary across studies, evidence consistently shows that LOA-based models enhance student engagement, promote reflective learning, and, in several cases, lead to measurable improvements in language performance. Four recent studies: Viengsang and Wasanasomsithi (2022), Chongsomboon and Chinwonno (2024), Matyakhan et al. (2024), and Imsa-ard (2025) offer important insights into how LOA principles operate in real Thai EFL classrooms.

### **Reading: Viengsang and Wasanasomsithi (2022)**

The earliest of the four empirical studies implemented a Learning-Oriented Reading Assessment (LORA) model with 25 Thai university students in a foundation English course. The intervention followed LOA cycles in which students engaged in reading tasks, self- and peer assessment, end-of-unit testing, and reflective journaling. Although quantitative results showed no statistically significant improvement in reading test scores from pre-test to post-test, qualitative data revealed substantial affective and strategic gains. Students reported that LORA improved their ability to identify main ideas and supporting details, expanded their vocabulary, and helped them develop assessment skills such as identifying strengths and weaknesses in their own work. Learners also expressed increased confidence and awareness of their learning gaps. These findings indicate that LOA can foster metacognitive development and engagement, even when test-score gains are not immediately evident. However, the study also highlighted practical limitations, including time-intensive lesson preparation and constraints imposed by institutional course structures.

### **Reading: Chongsomboon and Chinwonna (2024)**

A more recent study applied a nine-week LORA intervention with 67 tenth-grade students at an urban public school. Unlike the previous study, this quasi-experimental design included a control group. While post-test comparisons showed no significant difference between the treatment and control groups, within-group analysis revealed significant improvement in the LORA group's reading ability, especially in vocabulary knowledge and main idea identification. Students also expressed positive attitudes toward all five LORA components: tasks, tests, teacher observations, feedback, and redesign. However, the study also identified a common challenge in LOA implementation: unreliable peer feedback, often inflated due to peer-support norms. This underscores the need for explicit training in evaluative judgment, echoing the importance of "developing evaluative expertise" emphasized in LOA literature.

### **Speaking: Matyakhan et al. (2024)**

In oral communication instruction, Matyakhan et al. (2024) demonstrated stronger performance-related effects. Working with 60 first-year pre-service teachers in Southern Thailand, the researchers implemented a Learning-Oriented Oral Communication Assessment

(LOOCA) model integrating CEFR-aligned rubrics, authentic speaking tasks, peer assessment, and iterative feedback cycles. The experimental group showed significant gains in all aspects of speaking - range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, coherence, and pronunciation - and significantly outperformed the control group. Students' qualitative comments indicated heightened awareness of strengths and weaknesses, improved pronunciation and grammar, and increased confidence. Teacher feedback was rated the most beneficial element, suggesting that even in LOA models emphasizing learner involvement, expert guidance remains a central driver of improvement. The study provides clear evidence that LOA, when well-structured and accompanied by scaffolded support, can substantially enhance oral communication ability.

### **Writing: Imsa-ard (2025)**

The most recent study applied a Learning-Oriented Writing Assessment (LOWA) model to argumentative writing with 67 Thai undergraduates in a B1-level writing course. This study stands out for examining both performance outcomes and academic resilience, a construct rarely investigated in LOA research. The LOWA group received scaffolded peer and self-assessment training, recursive feedback cycles, and structured collaboration. Results showed significant gains in writing performance with a large effect size ( $d = 4.28$ ), surpassing improvements in the control group. Importantly, LOWA also strengthened all dimensions of learners' academic resilience, particularly self-regulation and perseverance. Learners valued the clarity of feedback cycles but expressed concerns about uneven peer-feedback quality and difficulty in understanding technical assessment terms - challenges common in LOA adoption internationally.

### **Benefits of LOA for English Teachers and Learners**

Learning-Oriented Assessment offers practical value for English language classrooms by strengthening the connection between instruction, assessment, and learner development. Rather than treating assessment as a separate event, LOA creates continuous learning opportunities for both teachers and students. The following subsections highlight four key benefits particularly relevant to English language teaching.

### **(1) Enhancing Coherence Between Teaching, Learning, and Assessment**

In many EFL contexts, assessment tasks often test skills that are not emphasized in class, leading to a gap between instructional practice and what is ultimately evaluated. LOA helps bridge this gap by aligning learning tasks, assessment tasks, and instructional goals. For example, when teachers integrate draft–feedback–revision cycles into writing classes, learners practice the exact skills – organization, clarity, and accuracy – that will later be assessed. This alignment enables teachers to monitor progress over time and adjust instruction based on evidence rather than intuition. As shown in Thai studies such as Imsa-ard (2025) and Matyakhan et al. (2024), structured LOA cycles provide teachers with clearer insight into learners’ development, supporting more purposeful teaching decisions.

### **(2) Supporting Continuous Learning in Exam-Driven Contexts**

In many Asian EFL settings, including Thailand, exam-oriented cultures often push students toward memorization and surface learning. LOA counters this tendency by emphasizing regular practice, immediate application, and reflective engagement. Tools such as portfolios, learning journals, and cyclical assessment tasks encourage learners to monitor their own development across time rather than relying solely on high-stakes tests. Research in Thai classrooms (e.g., Viengsang & Wasanasomsithi, 2022; Chongsomboon & Chinwonno, 2024) shows that although LOA does not always result in statistically significant gains on short-term test scores, it cultivates deeper engagement with texts, vocabulary, and reading strategies. For teachers, such tools provide ongoing diagnostic information, allowing them to intervene earlier and more effectively.

### **(3) Preparing Learners for Real-World Communication**

Traditional assessments often isolate language skills, but real-world communication requires integration – listening while speaking, reading to complete tasks, or writing to convey ideas clearly. LOA emphasizes authentic, meaningful tasks that mirror these communicative demands. Classroom activities such as collaborative presentations, surveys, poster creation, or simulated interactions enable learners to use language for genuine purposes rather than simply producing correct forms. Evidence from Matyakhan et al. (2024) demonstrates that LOA-based oral tasks significantly enhance fluency, interaction, coherence, and pronunciation

among Thai pre-service teachers. Authentic tasks not only build communicative competence but also help learners apply classroom learning to academic, professional, and everyday contexts.

#### **(4) Promoting Learner Autonomy and Responsibility**

Learner autonomy, the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate one's own learning (Benson, 2011; Little, 1991), is essential for sustained language development. LOA strengthens learner autonomy by involving learners in self-assessment, peer assessment, and reflection, enabling them to develop evaluative judgment and to apply performance criteria independently.

In practical terms, tools such as checklists and rubrics support learners in reviewing their own work before submission, while peer evaluation activities, such as reviewing presentations or drafts, give learners multiple perspectives on quality and performance expectations. Digital tools also extend this autonomy: electronic portfolios allow learners to set goals, track progress, and revisit feedback over time (Chong & Reinders, 2023).

Empirical evidence also shows that LOA contributes to broader learner development. Imsa-ard (2025) found that structured peer/self assessment and recursive writing cycles enhanced not only students' argumentative writing ability but also their academic resilience, especially self-regulation. Through these processes, learners become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, make informed revisions, and take increasing responsibility for their progress. LOA thus positions learner autonomy as both a process during learning and a meaningful outcome that extends beyond the course.

### **Putting LOA into Practice in English Classrooms**

In English language classrooms where learning is iterative and communicative, LOA can be implemented through intentional teacher design, active learner participation, and supportive institutional structures.

#### **(1) What Teachers Can Do**

Teachers play a central role in transforming assessment into a driver of learning. Rather than testing imperatives through isolated sentence-completion items, learners may carry out a task in which they explore a school or community space, identify safety issues, and produce

a brief spoken or multimodal announcement for their peers. This requires them to choose appropriate imperative forms, consider audience and context, and refine their output through feedback cycles. In this way, assessment emerges through communication, planning, and revision rather than through correctness checks alone.

Teachers can also embed feedback-for-action into routine instruction. Draft-feedback-revision cycles in writing classes allow learners to act on feedback immediately, while quick oral prompts during role-plays or group tasks provide real-time assessment evidence. Such practices shift feedback from justifying grades to guiding improvement.

Finally, teachers can promote learner involvement through structured self- and peer assessment. Checklists, simplified rubrics, and guided peer review help students evaluate their work, develop evaluative judgment, and take responsibility for progress. These practices reduce reliance on teacher-led correction and foster autonomy.

## **(2) What Learners Can Do**

LOA positions learners as active agents. Engaging in self-assessment before submitting assignments encourages students to reflect on clarity, organization, and accuracy. Peer review of writing or speaking tasks exposes learners to alternative ways of expressing ideas and deepens their understanding of assessment criteria. Reflective journals, weekly progress logs, or e-portfolios further support autonomy by enabling learners to set goals, track growth, and respond to feedback over time. Such practices build evaluative judgment and support sustained self-regulation, an outcome supported by recent findings in Thai EFL contexts (e.g., Imsa-ard, 2025; Matyakhan et al., 2024).

## **(3) How Institutions Can Support**

Sustainable LOA implementation requires institutional support. Curriculum alignment, such as linking classroom tasks with CEFR descriptors or program learning outcomes, ensures coherence across levels. Professional development can strengthen teachers' assessment literacy, equipping them to design authentic tasks and manage feedback cycles. Institutions can also provide digital platforms (such as e-portfolios and LMS-based peer review tools) that enable students to document progress and receive multimodal feedback. These tools extend assessment beyond classroom boundaries and integrate learning across contexts.

## **Challenges of LOA in EFL Contexts**

Although LOA offers a compelling framework for aligning assessment with learning, its implementation in EFL contexts remains challenging. Scholars emphasize that LOA requires substantial shifts in pedagogy, classroom roles, and institutional culture (Carless, 2007; Turner & Purpura, 2016; Jones & Saville, 2016). Several constraints can limit its feasibility, particularly in exam-driven and resource-constrained educational systems.

### **(1) Misalignment with High-Stakes Assessment Systems**

A major challenge in EFL settings is the tension between LOA and high-stakes assessment systems. When institutional priorities emphasize summative outcomes, formative cycles receive limited space (Carless, 2007). In Thailand, CEFR-aligned proficiency tests exert strong washback and financial burdens, encouraging teaching to the test and restricting teachers' ability to foreground classroom-based assessment for learning (Wudthayagorn, 2025).

### **(2) Teacher Workload and Assessment Literacy**

Implementing LOA substantially increases the demands placed on teachers. Designing authentic tasks, managing self- and peer-assessment, and providing timely, targeted feedback require significant preparation and pedagogical skill. In large classes, these responsibilities become even more challenging. Thai studies highlight similar concerns: Viengsang and Wasanasomsithi (2022) and Matyakhan et al. (2024) report heavy planning and material development, while Imsa-ard (2025) notes that teachers must explicitly scaffold peer assessment for it to function effectively. Without adequate assessment literacy and institutional support, teachers may revert to traditional testing practices.

### **(3) Learner Readiness and Cultural Expectations**

LOA assumes a level of agency that may not align with learners' educational backgrounds. Learners accustomed to teacher-led instruction may hesitate to critique peers or may inflate scores to preserve social harmony. Chongsomboon & Chinwonna (2024) reported concerns about unreliable peer evaluations, while Imsa-ard (2025) found that learners struggled with technical assessment terminology, requiring explicit guidance before engaging in peer review.

#### **(4) Limited Visibility into Learners' Engagement**

A further challenge concerns teachers' limited visibility into how learners actually engage with feedback. Much of the revision and decision-making process occurs privately, making it difficult to determine which comments students attend to or how self-regulation develops. Imsa-ard (2025) shows that the absence of digital tracking tools restricts insight into learners' moment-by-moment revision behaviors, constraining understanding of feedback uptake. Developing digital systems capable of capturing revision logs or interaction patterns would strengthen LOA by making learners' engagement processes more transparent and instructional support more targeted.

### **Conclusion**

This article has examined Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) as a framework that aligns assessment with the central purpose of supporting learning. Rather than viewing assessment exclusively as a summative endpoint, LOA conceptualizes it as a continuous process that can contribute to learning when carefully designed. Foundational contributions by Carless (2007), Jones and Saville (2016), Turner and Purpura (2016), Saville (2021), and Chong and Reinders (2023) converge on four principles: tasks as learning opportunities, active learner agency, feedback-for-action, and ecological integration across classroom, institutional, and technological contexts.

Synthesizing these principles illustrates how assessment can be structured to create learning opportunities, promote purposeful engagement with feedback, and encourage learner responsibility while remaining attentive to contextual realities. Empirical evidence from Thai EFL studies demonstrates that LOA can support improvements in reading, writing, and oral communication, alongside gains in confidence, self-regulation, and evaluative judgment. However, these outcomes often depend on factors such as teacher expertise, instructional time, and the degree of scaffolding built into assessment cycles.

At the same time, adopting LOA presents identifiable challenges. Constraints such as large class sizes, heavy curricular demands, and varying levels of assessment literacy influence how LOA principles can be enacted. High-stakes policy environments add further complexity. As Wudthayagorn (2025) notes, Thai higher education increasingly relies on CEFR-aligned proficiency tests for graduation benchmarks, creating pressure on learners and educators and encouraging test-focused preparation. While these policies aim to standardize proficiency expectations, they can limit the space teachers have to foreground classroom-based

assessment for learning. LOA must therefore be understood not as a simple alternative to high-stakes testing but as an approach that requires systemic alignment, institutional support, and realistic expectations.

Recent LOA studies also highlight the need for stronger digital support systems. Imsa-ard (2025) observes that the absence of digital tracking tools restricts teachers' and researchers' ability to understand learners' real-time engagement with feedback. More broadly, without features such as revision logs, feedback histories, or engagement analytics, much of the learning process remains invisible. Developing digital tools that capture these processes represents a direction for advancing LOA practice, particularly in contexts prioritizing transparency, personalization, and learner autonomy.

In conclusion, LOA provides a coherent lens for rethinking the relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment. Its value lies not in replacing existing assessment practices but in offering principles that guide more learning-focused design. Continued research, especially in technology integration, feedback engagement, and context-sensitive implementation, will be essential for understanding how LOA can best support sustainable improvements in English language learning.

### **The Author**

**Gangullaya Chimpleewanasom** is a PhD candidate in English as an International Language at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. She holds an MA (Merit) in TESOL from King's College London and a BEd (First-Class Honors) in Secondary Education, majoring in English and Thai, from Chulalongkorn University. Her research interests include language teaching methodology, learning-oriented assessment (LOA), learner autonomy, digital pedagogy, and English as a lingua franca (ELF).

### **AI Declaration Statement**

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT and Grammarly to support the structuring and language editing of this manuscript. After using these tools/services, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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