



ENHANCING ENGLISH ASSESSMENTS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GRADE 7 ENGLISH TEACHERS ON TEST CONSTRUCTION PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aimed to examine the test construction practices of Grade 7 English teachers in public secondary schools in the Loreto District, Division of Agusan del Sur during the School Year 2025–2026. Grounded in the principles of educational measurement and assessment literacy, the study explored how teachers design and develop classroom assessments, focusing on the alignment of test items with learning competencies, clarity and quality of test items, distribution of difficulty levels, and integration of higher-order thinking skills. The study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to gather data from fourteen (14) public secondary Grade 7 English teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using validated interview guide questions and analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, practices, and challenges in teachers' test construction processes. Findings revealed that while teachers demonstrated general awareness of fundamental test construction principles, several challenges were evident, including difficulties in aligning test items with higher-order cognitive skills, avoiding common item-writing errors, and ensuring balanced content coverage and appropriate levels of difficulty. The study highlights the need for continuous professional development, collaborative planning, and targeted support to strengthen teachers' assessment literacy and improve the quality and effectiveness of classroom assessments in measuring student learning outcomes.

Keywords: *test construction practices, qualitative study, classroom assessment, assessment literacy, public secondary teachers, Loreto District, Agusan del Sur, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Assessment plays a critical role in the teaching and learning process, particularly in English language education, where measuring learners' comprehension, language proficiency, and higher-order thinking skills is essential. Effective test construction ensures that assessment tools are valid, reliable, and aligned with intended learning competencies. According to James H. McMillan (2018), well-constructed tests contribute to meaningful evaluation of student learning and support teachers in making informed instructional decisions. Similarly, Thomas M. Haladyna (2013) emphasized that poorly written test items can lead to inaccurate measurement of student achievement and may negatively affect learners' performance outcomes. These perspectives highlight the importance of teachers' competence in applying sound test construction principles in classroom assessment.

In recent years, the shift toward competency-based education and standards-based assessment has increased the demand for teachers to design assessments that promote critical thinking and authentic learning experiences. Studies have shown that teachers often face challenges in aligning test items with learning objectives and incorporating higher-order thinking skills into classroom assessments (Ahmed, 2021; Adams, 2024). Furthermore, flexible assessment strategies have been recommended to support diverse learners and ensure fairness in evaluation processes (Ahmed et al., 2022). Despite these advancements, many teachers continue to struggle with balancing curriculum requirements and the technical aspects of test construction, particularly in resource-limited school settings (Adams, 2024).

Within the Philippine educational context, assessment practices have undergone significant changes due to curriculum reforms and the implementation of competency-based learning standards. Teachers are expected to design classroom assessments that reflect learning competencies outlined in the curriculum while ensuring clarity, fairness, and appropriate difficulty levels. However, limited professional training opportunities and heavy teaching workloads may hinder teachers from consistently applying best practices in test development. As noted in several local and international studies, insufficient assessment literacy among teachers may lead to common item-writing errors, misalignment of test content, and inconsistent distribution of cognitive difficulty levels (Ahmed, 2021; Haladyna, 2013).

Despite the availability of guidelines on test construction, there remains a noticeable gap in literature that focuses specifically on the lived experiences of Grade 7 English teachers in designing classroom assessments, particularly within district-level contexts such as the Loreto District in the Division of Agusan del Sur. Most existing studies emphasize general assessment practices rather than exploring the contextual realities faced by teachers at the classroom level. This gap underscores the need for localized research that examines how teachers interpret and apply test construction principles in real-world teaching environments.

The timeliness of this study is further supported by the increasing emphasis on improving assessment quality to enhance student learning outcomes. Observed challenges such as inconsistent alignment of test items with higher-order cognitive skills, lack of balanced test difficulty levels, and the presence of item-writing errors indicate the need for systematic investigation into teachers' test construction practices. By examining the lived experiences of Grade 7 English teachers, this study aims to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in classroom assessment practices.

Ultimately, this study sought to contribute to the advancement of assessment literacy among English teachers by providing evidence-based insights into current test construction practices. The findings were expected to inform professional development programs, promote collaborative assessment planning, and support innovations that enhance the quality and effectiveness of English language assessments in public secondary schools.

Research Questions

This study sought to explore the experiences of Grade 7 English teachers in constructing classroom assessments, focusing on the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges, and the professional insights they gain that can be shared with others. Understanding these aspects is crucial to enhancing the quality, fairness, and effectiveness of test construction practices in secondary English education and is anchored on these research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Grade 7 English Teachers in test construction?
2. What are the strategies employed by Grade 7 English teachers to address the challenges encountered in test construction?
3. What insights do Grade 7 English teachers gain about test construction practices that can be shared with others?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Grade 7 English teachers in test construction. Qualitative research focuses on understanding individuals' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations within their natural settings (Tong et al., 2007; Pathak et al., 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). It allows researchers to examine how participants make sense of their experiences and how these experiences influence their professional practices (Gentles et al., 2015; Hennink et al., 2020).

A phenomenological approach was selected because it emphasizes understanding the lived experiences of individuals who share a common phenomenon

(Creswell, 2014, as cited in Mohajan, 2018; Tehrani et al., 2020). In this study, the approach enabled the researcher to examine the experiences, strategies, and insights of Grade 7 English teachers in constructing classroom assessments. Data were collected through interviews using purposive sampling, and thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring themes. Ethical standards and trustworthiness procedures were observed throughout the research process to ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Research Participants

The study involved fourteen (14) public secondary Grade 7 English teachers from selected schools in the Loreto District, Division of Agusan del Sur. Seven participants were involved in in-depth interviews, while the remaining seven participated in a focus group discussion. This number of participants is consistent with phenomenological research recommendations, which suggest including a small group of individuals who share similar experiences relevant to the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who possessed the necessary qualifications and experiences related to test construction (Scribbr, 2022; Palinkas, 2015). Participants included teachers currently handling Grade 7 English who had at least three years of teaching experience and experience in constructing classroom assessments. Teachers who did not meet these criteria or who were unwilling to participate voluntarily were excluded from the study. The selected participants were considered capable of providing meaningful insights into the practices and challenges associated with test construction.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in selected public secondary schools within the Loreto District, Division of Agusan del Sur, during the School Year 2025–2026. The district serves learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and implements competency-based assessment aligned with national curriculum standards. The locale was selected because it represents a typical public-school environment where Grade 7 English teachers actively engage in classroom assessment and test construction. To maintain confidentiality and adhere to ethical standards, the names of specific schools were not disclosed.

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative study, the researcher served as the primary instrument responsible for collecting, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data. Prior to conducting the study, ethical approval was secured from the SMCTI Research Ethics Committee (SMCTI-REC) to ensure that all procedures complied with ethical research standards. The researcher identified and selected participants based on predetermined inclusion criteria and obtained voluntary consent before data collection began.

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews and facilitated focus group discussions to gather participants' responses regarding their experiences in test construction. Audio recordings and written notes were used to document the discussions accurately. After each session, the researcher transcribed the recorded responses and reviewed them carefully to ensure accuracy and completeness. When necessary, responses were translated into standard English while preserving the original meaning of the participants' statements. Member checking was conducted by returning the transcripts to participants for verification, ensuring that their responses were accurately represented. The researcher also organized and coded the data systematically and worked closely with the research adviser to ensure accurate interpretation of themes and findings.

Data Sources

The primary data for this study were obtained from the responses of the selected Grade 7 English teachers regarding their lived experiences in test construction. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which allowed participants to describe their experiences, strategies, and insights related to assessment practices. These methods were selected because they provide rich, detailed descriptions of participants' perspectives and allow the researcher to capture shared meanings and patterns among participants. Supporting data were also derived from field notes taken during interviews and discussions, which helped document non-verbal cues and contextual observations relevant to the study.

Research Instrument

The main instrument used in this study was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide designed to explore the lived experiences of Grade 7 English teachers in test construction. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely while ensuring that the discussion remained aligned with the objectives of the study. The questions focused on teachers' experiences, strategies used to address challenges, and insights gained in constructing classroom assessments.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the interview guide underwent expert validation by specialists in educational research and assessment. Their suggestions were incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. The revised instrument was pilot-tested with teachers who were not part of the actual participants to ensure that the questions were understandable and capable of eliciting meaningful responses. Necessary revisions were made based on the pilot testing results before the instrument was used in the actual data collection.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection began after securing approval from the appropriate authorities and obtaining informed consent from the participants. The researcher coordinated with school heads to schedule interviews and focus group discussions at convenient times for the

participants. In-depth interviews were conducted individually to allow participants to share personal experiences in a comfortable and private setting. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was recorded using an audio recording device with the participants' permission.

Focus group discussions were conducted to gather collective insights and encourage interaction among participants, allowing them to share ideas and reflect on common experiences. During the discussions, the researcher facilitated the conversation, ensured that all participants had the opportunity to speak, and maintained focus on the research objectives. Field notes were taken throughout the sessions to capture important observations and contextual details. After each session, the recordings were transcribed, reviewed for accuracy, and organized systematically for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved organizing the data into meaningful patterns and identifying recurring themes related to teachers' experiences in test construction. The process began with familiarization, during which the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to gain a clear understanding of the responses. Initial codes were then generated to categorize significant statements and ideas expressed by the participants.

After coding, related codes were grouped into categories, and themes were developed to represent common patterns found across participants' responses. The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure clarity, accuracy, and alignment with the research objectives. The researcher consulted with the research adviser throughout the analysis process to ensure consistency and accuracy in interpreting the data. Thematic analysis was selected because it allows researchers to systematically interpret qualitative data and generate meaningful insights from participants' lived experiences.

Scope and Limitations

This study focused on examining the lived experiences of Grade 7 English teachers in test construction within selected public secondary schools in the Loreto District, Division of Agusan del Sur, during the School Year 2025–2026. The investigation specifically explored teachers' experiences, strategies used to address challenges, and insights gained in developing classroom assessments. The participants were limited to fourteen Grade 7 English teachers who met the inclusion criteria, and the findings were based on their shared experiences.

While the study provided valuable insights into test construction practices, its findings were limited to the selected participants and may not represent the experiences of teachers in other grade levels, subject areas, or districts. Additionally, the data relied on self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by personal perceptions and

recall. Despite these limitations, careful selection of participants and systematic data analysis were undertaken to ensure credible and meaningful results.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the test construction practices of Grade 7 English teachers in public secondary schools in the Loreto District, Agusan del Sur. It is grounded in the lived experiences shared by the participants during in-depth interviews, which were carefully transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted. Through a systematic qualitative analysis, core ideas and recurring patterns were identified and validated with the guidance of experts.

The chapter captures the teachers' experiences in designing assessments, the strategies they employ to address challenges in test construction, and the insights they have gained in ensuring aligned, valid, and learner-centered English assessments.

Table 1

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of Grade 7 English Teachers in Test Construction

Major Themes	Core Ideas
<p>Using Test Outcomes as Mirrors of Teaching Effectiveness and Reflective Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interpreting student scores as indicators of instructional success • engaging in self-evaluation through assessment results • identifying instructional gaps through learner performance • reviewing lesson objectives while constructing assessments • revisiting teaching decisions through item alignment • adjusting future instruction based on assessment insights • viewing assessment as a tool for professional growth
<p>Struggling with Cognitive and Emotional Demands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experiencing mental strain during item construction • experiencing fear of committing assessment errors • investing emotional labor to protect learner welfare

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustaining pressure intensified by deadlines and reviews
<p>Practicing Ethical and Fair Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring fairness by avoiding misleading or biased items • safeguarding students from construct-irrelevant difficulty • designing assessments sensitive to learner context • prioritizing accurate representation of learned competencies
<p>Encountering Constraints Imposed by Curriculum and Institutional Policies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aligning test content with de-cluttered curriculum demands • dealing issues on creativity with policy-mandated structures • experiencing limited time for item analysis due to administrative load • adapting assessment practices under time and resource limitations
<p>Struggling with Practical and Contextual Challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confronting limitations in assessing 21st-century skills with traditional tools • encountering vocabulary difficulty overshadowing skill mastery • struggling with scarcity of instructional and testing resources • handling large class sizes affecting assessment
<p>Experiencing Test Construction as High-Stakes Professional Responsibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying professional accountability to curriculum standards • viewing test construction beyond routine compliance • treating each test item as consequential to learner outcomes

Teachers view test construction as a reflective and high-stakes professional practice that mirrors teaching effectiveness and guides instructional improvement. While assessments serve as tools for self-evaluation and professional growth, teachers also experience significant cognitive, emotional, and ethical pressures in ensuring fairness, clarity, and alignment with learning competencies. They strive to create valid, culturally relevant, and unbiased assessments, despite facing curriculum constraints, institutional policies, limited resources, and heavy workloads. Overall, test construction is perceived not as a routine

task but as a serious professional responsibility that directly influences student learning and teacher accountability.

Strategies of Grade 7 English Teachers to Address Challenges Encountered in Test Construction Practices

The data analysis evidenced six major themes that illustrate how educators navigate the complexities of assessment design to maintain accuracy, fairness, and personal well-being. These findings highlight the proactive strategies taken to bridge the gap between curriculum requirements and the practical realities of the classroom. These themes include: a.) Systematizing alignment to prevent errors and ensuring accessibility; b.) Collaborating with peers to reduce technical mistakes; c.) Revising test items through evidence-based reflection; d.) Diversifying assessment formats to address engagement and skill depth; e.) Optimizing time and energy to prevent burnout; and f.) Integrating digital tools to increase precision and efficiency.

Table 2

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Strategies of Grade 7 English Teachers to Address Challenges Encountered in Test Construction Practices

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Systematizing Alignment to Prevent Errors and Ensuring Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using TOS as structural blueprint for item distribution • matching cognitive demand to curriculum action verbs • limiting test coverage to actually taught competencies • simplifying instructional language to prevent confusion • avoiding culturally distant examples to ensure contextual fairness • incorporating visual aids to supporting struggling readers • providing alternative response modes to honoring diverse talents
Collaborating to Reduce Errors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeking peer review to detect confusing wording • conducting LAC-based curriculum validation • sharing item banks to ease deadline pressure

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consulting specialized teachers for improvement
<p>Revising Through Evidence-Based Reflection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> performing item analysis to identify flawed items revising weak questions based on student performance trends using collective results to diagnose instructional gaps recording recurring student confusion for future modification
<p>Diversifying Formats to Address Engagement and Skill Depth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> integrating real-life scenarios to promote authentic assessment mixing item formats to capture varied skill expressions progressing questions toward higher-order thinking demands constructing tiered questions to accommodating proficiency differences
<p>Optimizing Time and Energy to Prevent Burnout</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> allocating preparation time strategically to avoiding rushing using templates to minimize clerical workload starting test construction early to reduce deadline pressure leveraging digital storage to streamline workflow
<p>Integrating Digital Tools to Increase Precision and Efficiency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> using automated TOS generators to balance item distribution employing item analysis software to expediting revision applying AI readability tools to refine linguistic clarity designing multimodal items through digital platforms to modernize presentation utilizing competency-tracking applications to preserve curriculum integrity

Teachers continuously improve test construction by reviewing past results, student feedback, and item performance to refine both assessments and teaching practices. They diversify test formats, including performance tasks and real-life scenarios, to enhance

engagement and develop higher-order thinking skills. To manage heavy workloads and prevent burnout, teachers adopt strategies such as early preparation, standardized templates, and collaborative planning. The integration of digital tools, such as automated TOS, item analysis software, and online platforms, increases efficiency, accuracy, and fairness in assessment while allowing teachers to focus on meaningful and curriculum-aligned test items.

Insights of Grade 7 English Teachers on Test Construction Practices that Can Be Shared With Others

Table 3 illustrates the identified six major themes that represent the technical insights, professional standards, and ethical considerations developed by the teachers through the process of assessment design. These themes highlight how educators transitioned from routine test-making to a more intentional, data-driven, and collaborative practice, thereby ensuring the integrity of student evaluations and the continuous improvement of instructional quality. These themes include: a.) recognizing test construction as a technical and evolving craft, b.) valuing collaboration as a safeguard against bias and error, c.) using reflection and data as a mirror for improvement, d.) ensuring fairness and clarity as an ethical responsibility, e.) managing time and priorities to maintain quality, and f.) leveraging technology and standards for efficiency and alignment.

Table 3

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of Grade 7 English Teachers on Test Construction Practices that Can Be Shared with Others

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Recognize Test Construction as a Technical and Evolving Craft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize test construction as specialized skill • study technical rules in crafting stems and distractors • follow expert guidelines to ensure validity • embrace higher-order thinking in grade 7 assessment • commit to continuous professional growth
Value Collaboration as Safeguard Against Bias and Error	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek peer review to uncover blind spots • engage in departmental validation to strengthen items • exchange feedback to enhance clarity and fairness

<p>Use Reflection and Data as Mirror for Improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • treat student scores as feedback for teaching effectiveness • review past outcomes to refine future assessments • accept mistakes as pathway to improvement • revise weak items based on evidence
<p>Ensure Fairness and Clarity as Ethical Responsibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure clarity to protect assessment validity • avoid vague and wordy stems • localize contextual examples to fit learners • represent learning accurately rather than trick students
<p>Manage Time and Priorities to Maintain Quality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • start test construction early to prevent rushed errors • prioritize essential competencies over filler items • balance teaching and assessment planning • allocate preparation time efficiently
<p>Leverage Technology and Standards for Efficiency and Alignment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use curriculum-aligned templates to improve focus • utilize digital generators to reduce clerical burden • access standardized models as reference framework • implement data-based indicators to identify effective items

Teachers recognize test construction as a technical and evolving craft that requires mastery of item-writing rules, higher-order thinking skills, and alignment with current curricula. Collaboration is essential to reduce bias, catch errors, and maintain professional standards. Educators use reflection and assessment data to improve both teaching and test quality, ensuring fairness and clarity for all learners. Time management and early planning help prevent burnout and focus on meaningful, thought-provoking items. Digital tools and standardized templates increase efficiency, maintain alignment with national and international standards, and allow teachers to concentrate on crafting high-quality, relevant, and engaging assessments.

This results discusses the lived experiences of Grade 7 English teachers in test construction, highlighting the challenges, strategies, and insights that emerged within the MATATAG curriculum. Teachers view assessment results as mirrors of their teaching effectiveness, using student performance data to reflect on instructional practices and refine lessons. They face significant cognitive and emotional demands, balancing the fear of errors, high-stakes accountability, and administrative pressures while striving to ensure ethical, fair, and culturally relevant assessments. Constraints from rigid curriculum frameworks, institutional policies, large class sizes, and limited resources further complicate the process, requiring teachers to adapt creatively. To navigate these challenges, educators employ strategies such as systematizing item alignment through Tables of Specifications, collaborating with peers, revising items based on evidence, diversifying assessment formats, managing time to prevent burnout, and integrating digital tools for efficiency and precision. From these experiences, teachers gained insights recognizing test construction as a technical and evolving craft, valuing collaboration to prevent bias, using reflection and data for instructional improvement, prioritizing fairness and clarity, managing time strategically, and leveraging technology and curriculum standards to enhance professional practice. Overall, the chapter underscores that high-quality assessment design is both a professional responsibility and an ethical commitment, requiring reflective practice, collaboration, and strategic use of resources.

DISCUSSION

Using Assessment for Instructional Improvement

Teachers viewed assessment results as valuable tools for evaluating the effectiveness of their instruction. Rather than treating scores as final outcomes, participants interpreted student performance as indicators of instructional gaps and used these insights to refine lesson planning and improve alignment between teaching and assessment. This reflective approach demonstrates how assessment supports continuous improvement in instructional practices.

This finding aligns with literature emphasizing the role of feedback loops in strengthening teaching effectiveness. Assessment results serve as bridges between intended learning outcomes and actual classroom performance, allowing educators to revise instructional strategies based on evidence (Thompson, 2022; Garcia & Martinez, 2023). Reflective use of assessment data is also recognized as a key feature of assessment-literate teachers who assume responsibility for improving student learning (Hargreaves, 2023). Ultimately, data-driven reflection enables teachers to address instructional gaps systematically and sustain professional growth (Sullivan, 2024).

Navigating Cognitive and Emotional Demands in Assessment

Participants described test construction as mentally demanding and emotionally taxing. Many teachers expressed anxiety about making errors that could negatively affect student performance, especially when working under strict deadlines and review procedures. This

combination of cognitive complexity and emotional responsibility contributed to fatigue and stress among educators.

These experiences are supported by research linking assessment design to cognitive workload and emotional labor. The need to align competencies, maintain fairness, and ensure clarity simultaneously increases mental strain (Nguyen & Chen, 2023). Fear of professional errors and the high-stakes nature of assessment further intensify emotional pressure (Roberts, 2022; Lee, 2025). When combined with administrative deadlines, these demands may lead to exhaustion and burnout, particularly when teachers recognize the direct impact of their assessments on student outcomes (Zhao et al., 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Ensuring Ethical and Fair Assessment

Teachers emphasized fairness as a fundamental responsibility in test construction. Participants ensured that test items were clearly written, free from bias, and aligned with students' learning experiences. Many teachers intentionally avoided culturally unfamiliar examples and focused on competencies that were explicitly taught to prevent unfair disadvantages among learners.

This commitment to fairness reflects the principles of ethical assessment described in the literature. Removing unnecessary language difficulty and ensuring clarity help maintain the validity of assessment results (Gomez, 2022; Adams, 2024). Localizing test content has also been identified as an effective strategy for promoting equity in diverse learning environments (O'Neil, 2022). Ethical assessment, therefore, serves as a mechanism for protecting learners' opportunities to demonstrate their true abilities (Garcia & Martinez, 2023; Sullivan, 2024).

Managing Curriculum and Institutional Constraints

Participants reported that rigid curriculum requirements and administrative responsibilities significantly influenced their assessment practices. Strict alignment with curriculum standards often limited flexibility in designing creative test items, while heavy workloads reduced the time available for thorough test preparation. As a result, teachers frequently prioritized compliance with institutional expectations over instructional innovation.

These findings align with studies showing that policy-driven requirements may narrow instructional practices and reduce opportunities for creative assessment design (Carter, 2024). Administrative responsibilities have also been identified as barriers to effective assessment planning, particularly in resource-limited settings (Brooks, 2024; Carter, 2024). When expectations exceed available resources, teachers may experience fatigue and reduced motivation to innovate (Brooks, 2024; Hargreaves, 2023).

Experiencing Practical and Contextual Assessment Challenges

Teachers encountered multiple contextual challenges, including large class sizes, limited instructional materials, and students' vocabulary difficulties. Many participants observed that learners struggled to understand test language, making it difficult to determine whether incorrect answers reflected skill gaps or language barriers. These realities required teachers to adjust their test design to maintain fairness and accessibility.

Research supports these findings by showing that vocabulary limitations significantly affect student performance in language-based assessments (Fisher & Frey, 2022). Resource shortages and large class sizes further restrict teachers' ability to implement diverse and individualized assessment methods (Gomez, 2022; Patel & Smith, 2024). Traditional test formats may also limit the measurement of complex skills, particularly in resource-constrained classrooms (Davis & Lu, 2023; Adams, 2024). These factors collectively shape teachers' decisions in designing practical and equitable assessments.

Test Construction as Professional Responsibility

Participants viewed test construction as a professional responsibility rather than a routine task. Many teachers expressed a strong sense of accountability, recognizing that each test item could influence student confidence and academic success. This mindset encouraged them to approach test development with care, precision, and commitment to fairness.

This perception aligns with literature describing assessment as a moral and professional obligation. Teachers who view assessment as a reflection of professional integrity are more likely to produce valid and meaningful evaluation tools (Hargreaves, 2023; Nguyen & Chen, 2023). Professional responsibility also strengthens commitment to curriculum standards and supports consistent improvement in assessment quality (Wong & Peters, 2023; Sullivan, 2024).

Strategies of Grade 7 English Teachers to Address Challenges in Test Construction Systematizing Alignment to Prevent Errors and Ensuring Accessibility

Teachers structured assessments to match curriculum goals and student readiness. They used the TOS to guide item distribution, simplified language, incorporated familiar examples, added visual aids, and offered varied response modes. These strategies ensured students were assessed only on taught skills and could access instructions clearly.

Research supports that structured alignment enhances curriculum coverage and cognitive validity (Wang et al., 2022; Alvarado, 2021). Simplifying language and contextualizing examples improve comprehension and engagement (Lee & Tan, 2022; Morgan et al., 2021), while multimodal formats foster fairness and allow learners to demonstrate their strengths (Smith et al., 2022; Patel & Li, 2022).

Working with Peers and Experts to Improve Test Accuracy, Fairness, and Efficiency

Collaboration was emphasized to reduce errors and enhance test quality. Teachers reviewed drafts with colleagues, conducted informal meetings, shared item banks, and consulted specialists for higher-order thinking questions. Peer feedback helped refine clarity and maintain fairness across classes.

This practice aligns with research highlighting the benefits of collaboration for assessment quality (Martinez et al., 2022; Singh, 2021). Sharing resources reduces workload while improving consistency and alignment with standards (Adams, 2024; Choi & Park, 2021). Collaborative review also strengthens professional skills and shared accountability (Hernandez, 2022; Torres et al., 2023).

Revising Through Evidence-Based Reflection

Teachers revised assessments based on evidence from item analysis, student feedback, and reflection on results. Weak items were improved, and instructional gaps were addressed. This evidence-based reflection ensured clearer, fairer, and more effective assessments.

Literature confirms that data-driven revision improves assessment validity and instructional alignment (Kim et al., 2022; Ochoa, 2021). Reflecting on student performance supports fairness and accommodates diverse learners (Li & Wong, 2022; Ahmed, 2021).

Diversifying Formats to Address Engagement and Skill Depth

Participants used varied formats, such as real-life scenarios, multimodal tasks, tiered questions, and higher-order thinking items. This approach allowed students to demonstrate understanding according to their abilities and interests.

Research shows that diverse formats increase engagement, support meaningful skill application, and measure higher-order thinking (Ramirez et al., 2022; Chen, 2021; Patel, 2022; Kumar & Lee, 2021). Offering multiple response modes promotes inclusivity and authentic demonstration of competencies (Ahmed et al., 2022; Garcia et al., 2023).

Optimizing Time and Energy Through Planning and Technology

Teachers emphasized early preparation, prioritizing essential items, storing digital item banks, using templates, and embracing technology. Strategic planning and digital tools allowed teachers to focus on test quality while reducing workload and burnout.

Evidence supports that early preparation and time management improve assessment quality and reduce stress (Nguyen et al., 2022; Lee, 2021). Digital platforms and templates streamline workflow and enhance precision (Chen, 2021; Patel et al., 2022).

Technology-assisted processes further improve fairness and efficiency (Silva et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2023).

Insights Gained by Grade 7 English Teachers in Test Construction

Recognizing Test Construction as a Technical Skill

Teachers realized that test construction is a specialized skill that requires continuous development and understanding of assessment principles. Many shifted from recall-based questions to designing items that measure higher-order thinking skills, recognizing assessment as an evolving professional practice rather than a routine task.

This aligns with literature emphasizing the need for technical competence in competency-based assessment (Fullan, 2023; Popham, 2022). Assessment literacy enables teachers to design aligned and meaningful tasks while reducing reliance on guesswork (Guskey, 2023). Continuous professional learning and collaboration further strengthen teachers' ability to refine assessment practices and adapt to diverse classroom contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2024; Brookhart, 2023).

Engaging in Peer Validation

Teachers recognized that collaboration improves assessment quality and reduces individual bias. Peer validation helped identify unclear or flawed items while distributing the workload and emotional pressure of test construction. This fostered a sense of shared responsibility and improved overall test reliability.

Research supports the role of collaborative professionalism in enhancing assessment practices (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2022). Peer review minimizes bias and improves clarity, while professional learning communities strengthen consistency and fairness (Datnow, 2025; Little, 2023). Collaboration also promotes collective efficacy and supports teachers in managing cognitive demands (Vangrieken, 2023; Mehta, 2022).

Integrating Reflection and Feedback for Improvement

Teachers learned that analyzing student performance and revising flawed test items are essential for improving both instruction and assessment. Reflection allowed them to identify learning gaps, adjust strategies, and ensure that assessments accurately measure competencies.

This is supported by research emphasizing data-driven reflection as a tool for improving teaching effectiveness (Hattie, 2023). Using assessment data as feedback enables continuous refinement of instructional practices and enhances alignment with learning goals (Heritage, 2025; Brookhart, 2022). Clear and fair test items also reflect ethical responsibility, ensuring that assessments measure ability rather than confusion (Shohamy, 2022; Linn, 2024).

Managing Time and Priorities to Maintain Quality

Teachers realized that effective time management is essential for producing high-quality assessments. Starting early, prioritizing key competencies, and avoiding rushed work helped reduce errors and maintain professional standards.

Literature supports that proper time management improves both assessment quality and teacher well-being (Covey, 2023; Day, 2025). Allocating sufficient time allows for reflection and revision, which are critical for accurate and aligned test construction (Eisner, 2022; Hargreaves, 2023). Managing priorities also serves as a form of professional self-care, helping prevent burnout (Kelchtermans, 2024).

Leveraging Technology and Standards for Efficiency and Alignment

Teachers discovered that integrating technology and adhering to curriculum standards improves both efficiency and accuracy in test construction. Digital tools, templates, and automated systems helped streamline processes, reduce errors, and maintain alignment with curriculum requirements.

This finding is supported by research highlighting the role of technology in enhancing assessment precision and reducing workload (Siemens, 2023; Koehler & Mishra, 2024). Digital tools allow teachers to focus more on content quality rather than clerical tasks (Prensky, 2022). Technology-enhanced assessment design has also been shown to improve alignment and reliability (Reeves, 2025).

Conclusions

This study concludes that Grade 7 English teachers in public secondary schools demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility in constructing classroom assessments, yet they encounter several challenges related to aligning test items with learning competencies, integrating higher-order thinking skills, managing time constraints, and avoiding common item-writing errors. Despite these difficulties, teachers employ practical and collaborative strategies such as using Tables of Specifications, consulting peers, revising test items based on feedback, and utilizing technology to enhance accuracy and efficiency in test development. The findings also reveal that teachers gain meaningful insights from their experiences, particularly recognizing test construction as a technical and reflective process that requires continuous professional learning, collaboration, and adherence to assessment standards. Overall, the study highlights that strengthening teachers' assessment literacy through sustained professional development and institutional support is essential to improving the quality, fairness, and effectiveness of classroom assessments in measuring student learning outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several actions are recommended to improve test construction practices and strengthen assessment quality among Grade 7 English

teachers. The findings may be applied through the implementation of targeted professional development programs that focus on improving teachers' assessment literacy, particularly on factors affecting test fairness such as unclear wording, language bias, and improper alignment of test items with learning competencies. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in structured training sessions that emphasize the integration of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) through the consistent use of a Table of Specifications (TOS), ensuring that assessments accurately measure students' language proficiency and cognitive development. In addition, the localization of reading passages and test examples should be promoted to help learners connect with the content, thereby enhancing comprehension, confidence, and motivation. Providing item-based feedback is also recommended to help students identify learning gaps and support the development of a more transparent and equitable assessment environment.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researcher hereby declare that this study was conducted in full compliance with established ethical research standards. Informed consent was properly obtained from all respondents prior to their participation, and they were clearly informed of the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of their involvement in the study. The respondents were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without any form of penalty or consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained by using codes or pseudonyms instead of real names, and all collected data were handled in accordance with Data Privacy regulations to ensure the protection of participants' personal information. The well-being, dignity, and rights of the respondents were safeguarded throughout the research process. The researcher further declare that no conflict of interest existed in the conduct of this study, and all sources of information were properly acknowledged to strictly avoid plagiarism. Efforts were made to ensure objectivity, and no personal bias influenced the interpretation of the findings, as conclusions were drawn directly from the participants' responses and validated procedures. The results of this study were used solely for academic and research purposes. In the preparation and refinement of this manuscript, artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized to assist in language editing and organization; however, all ideas, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this study remain the original work and responsibility of the author.

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