

COGNITIVE PORTFOLIOS AND REFLECTIVE RUBRICS: A METACOGNITIVE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL TESTING IN EFL CONTEXTS

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Abstract: The prevailing reliance on traditional standardized testing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context predominantly measures linguistic products while neglecting the cognitive processes of language acquisition. This article proposes and empirically validates a novel methodological framework: “Metacognitive Assessment,” which integrates Cognitive portfolios and Reflective rubrics to replace or supplement traditional summative tests. The study employs a quasi-experimental design involving 60 EFL university students divided into control (traditional testing) and experimental (metacognitive assessment) groups over a 12-week period. Data were collected using pre- and post-language proficiency tests, the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI), and semi-structured interviews. Results indicate that the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher gains in self-regulated learning, reduced foreign language anxiety, and comparable or superior linguistic proficiency compared to the control group. The study concludes that shifting the assessment paradigm from mere evaluation to metacognitive reflection fosters deeper cognitive engagement and autonomous learning.

Keywords: metacognitive assessment, cognitive portfolio, reflective rubric, EFL, alternative assessment, self-regulated learning, formative evaluation

Introduction. The assessment of English language proficiency has traditionally been dominated by summative, standardized testing. While traditional tests provide quantifiable data on linguistic accuracy, they often fail to capture the dynamic, non-linear nature of language acquisition (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2018). Furthermore, an overreliance on high-stakes testing can induce foreign language anxiety, thereby activating the “affective filter” and hindering actual language acquisition (Krashen, 1982).

In recent years, the pedagogical paradigm has shifted towards formative and alternative assessment methods. However, a significant gap remains in the operationalization of *metacognitive assessment*-evaluating not just what the student knows, but how the student monitors, regulates, and reflects on their own learning processes (Flavell, 1979; Oxford, 2017).

This article introduces a comprehensive methodological framework combining Cognitive Portfolios and Reflective Rubrics. Unlike traditional portfolios that merely

collect final artifacts, a *Cognitive Portfolio* documents the learner's mental processes, strategy use, and error analysis. Coupled with a *Reflective Rubric*, which assesses self-awareness and critical reflection rather than just grammatical correctness, this framework aims to transform assessment from a terminal judgment into a continuous cognitive tool. The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the efficacy of this metacognitive assessment methodology in enhancing both linguistic proficiency and learner autonomy in an EFL context.

Materials and Methods

Research design and participants. The study utilized a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design. The participants were 60 first-year EFL students (B1 level) at Namangan state technical university, Uzbekistan. They were randomly assigned to two groups: the Control Group (CG, n=30), which underwent traditional testing essay writing and the experimental group (EG, n=30), which implemented the metacognitive assessment framework. The intervention lasted for 12 weeks.

Instruments of the metacognitive assessment framework

The EG utilized two primary instruments:

1. The cognitive portfolio: Students were required to maintain a digital or physical portfolio structured into three cognitive phases:

Planning Phase: Learning goals and selected strategies.

Monitoring Phase: Drafts of writing tasks with peer and self-correction notes.

Evaluating Phase: "Error logs" where students categorized their mistakes (e.g., L1 interference, overgeneralization) and wrote brief reflections on how to avoid them.

2. The reflective rubric: A customized grading tool used by the instructor and for peer-assessment. Unlike analytic rubrics that grade vocabulary or grammar, this rubric assessed:

Depth of reflection: Ability to identify the root cause of linguistic errors.

Strategy adaptation: Evidence of modifying learning strategies based on past performance.

Metacognitive awareness: Clarity in articulating personal learning styles and challenges.

Data collection and analysis

Data were triangulated from three sources:

1. Language proficiency: Pre- and post-intervention standardized tests (IELTS mock tests).

2. Metacognitive awareness: The metacognitive awareness inventory (MAI) (Schraw and Dennison, 1994), administered before and after the intervention.

3. Qualitative Feedback: Semi-structured interviews with 10 randomly selected students from the EG to explore their perceptions of the new assessment method.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (independent and paired sample t-tests), while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

Linguistic proficiency outcomes. An independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference in language proficiency between the CG and EG at the pre-test stage ($p > 0.05$). However, at the post-test stage, the EG outperformed the CG, particularly in writing tasks ($p < 0.05$). While the CG showed marginal gains in grammar (due to targeted test preparation), the EG demonstrated superior performance in communicative competence and lexical resource. This suggests that focusing on the *process* of learning (via the cognitive portfolio) indirectly but effectively enhances the *product* (language proficiency).

Metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy. The MAI results indicated a statistically significant increase in metacognitive awareness for the EG ($p < 0.01$), specifically in the sub-scales of "Planning," "Monitoring," and "Evaluation." The CG showed no significant change.

Qualitative insights and affective factors

Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed three major themes:

1. Reduction of assessment anxiety: EG students reported that the reflective rubric removed the "ear of being wrong." As one student noted, *"I was no longer penalized for making a mistake, but rather rewarded for understanding why I made it."*

2. Shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation: The continuous feedback loop of the cognitive portfolio shifted students' focus from chasing grades to achieving personal mastery.

3. Enhanced error analysis: Students developed a more analytical approach to their interlanguage, viewing errors not as failures, but as cognitive data.

Discussion. The findings align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, where assessment acts as a mediating tool within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). By using the Reflective Rubric, the assessment itself becomes a scaffolding mechanism. Furthermore, the results support Hattie's (2009) assertion that self-reported grades and metacognitive self-reflection have some of the highest effect sizes in educational achievement. The traditional testing model treats errors as deficits to be penalized; the proposed metacognitive framework treats errors as vital cognitive milestones to be analyzed.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that replacing or supplementing traditional tests with a Metacognitive Assessment Framework-comprising Cognitive Portfolios and Reflective Rubrics-significantly enhances EFL students' self-regulated learning, reduces language anxiety, and fosters communicative competence.

Practical Significance: The proposed methodology provides EFL teachers and curriculum designers with a practical, theoretically grounded alternative to high-stakes

testing. It is highly recommended to integrate cognitive portfolios and reflective rubrics into the national English language curricula at both secondary and higher education levels in Uzbekistan.

Limitations and future research: The study was limited to a 12-week period with a specific demographic. Future research should explore the long-term retention of metacognitive skills and the adaptation of this framework for younger learners or specific purposes (ESP) contexts.

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