

Redesigning Assessment Cultures in Saudi Higher Education

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to explore Saudi learners' perspectives on grading practices in Saudi higher education. Numerical scores and letter grades to assess students' academic performance is a common practice in most institutions. However, recent concerns among educators and researchers indicate that traditional one-and-done grading practices often fail to assess student engagement in learning. This increases competition rather than collaboration. In light of the changes emerging in the current global education landscape, reflective educators feel there is an urgent need to reflect on assessment practices in Saudi higher education. As Mesny et al. (2026) assert, "In reimagining assessment, the guiding vision should be assessment for learning (AfL), particularly learning that endures over time and provides students with the competencies and dispositions needed for the twenty-first century" (p. 2). In this study, the researchers examined 45 EFL students enrolled in an Intensive English Program at a public university in Saudi Arabia. A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, was employed. The findings indicate that participants preferred assessments that were either ungraded or allowed for resubmission. Based on these results, the researchers propose recommendations for future educators to ensure that assessments provide students with opportunities to learn from feedback and improve their work.

KEYWORDS - alternative grading practice, assessment, growth, learning, Saudi higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the perspectives of Saudi learners at a public university regarding alternative grading practices. Although the concept of alternative grading, or ungrading, is well established in tertiary education, traditional grading practices often lead to stress and disappointment for learners. Alternative grading, or ungrading, refers to assessment approaches that move beyond traditional letter or percentage-based grading systems (A–F, 0–100) and instead emphasize student growth through meaningful feedback. Clark and Talbert (2023), in their book *Grading for Growth*, extensively discuss the benefits of alternative grading and ungrading practices, emphasizing that such approaches promote growth rather than restrict students' skills and abilities. They also share experiences highlighting the problems and limitations of traditional grading. When students anticipate receiving grades at the end of a course, their focus often shifts from learning to earning grades. Even when learning occurs, the process can be stressful and exhausting, as students' efforts are directed primarily toward achieving high scores.

As reflective educators, the researchers have observed that when students know that any mock tests or practice quizzes will not be graded, their attitude toward the tests changes. They feel more relaxed and confident and are willing to take risks. They are willing to experiment with their abilities and put it on paper without worrying about scores or grades. In some cases, they even enjoy the process of failing and trying again. At any institution, learning is based on assessments/ grades and scores. Studies have shown that gradeless learning has positive effects on

students' performance because it promotes concentration on learning rather than performance (Kjærgaard et al., 2024). In the current era, with the changes in assessment practices worldwide, there is a dire need to revise the type of assessments in higher education.

Joe Feldman's work, *Grading for Equity* (2018), has raised significant awareness among institutions and instructors regarding grading practices. In traditional grading systems, teachers evaluate nearly every student action throughout the learning process, which can inhibit students from revealing their weaknesses or taking risks, ultimately resulting in more stressful classroom environments (Feldman, 2018, p. 39). While some argue that grades are necessary to motivate students, traditional grading often conveys that mistakes are undesirable and subject to penalty. In contrast, Ginsberg (2015, p. 12) contends that "Using only extrinsic incentives to inspire learning is a form of educational engineering that implicitly views students as inferior, inert, and in need of motivation."

II. Theoretical Background

The researchers have formulated this study based on David Clark and Robert Talbert's alternative grading practices and Jesse Stommel's concept of ungrading. Both the concepts of ungrading or alternative grading emphasize students' growth, feedback, opportunities for revision and resubmission without penalty, and clarity and transparency about expectations and criteria. In the book *Grading for Growth* (2023), authors David Clark and Robert Talbert have critiqued traditional grading practices in which students' work is 'one -and -done'. There are no re-attempts or revisions of work. Students' work typically does not receive helpful feedback. Even if the instructor gives feedback, if no reattempt chances are provided, there are fewer ways to put it to use. They detail how traditional grading practices originated, dating back to before the eighteenth century. In the European tradition, students attended lectures and engaged in discussions. They had one examination in their entire college careers, a public oral exam at the very end of their education. A group of instructors or third parties designated by the university, 'graded' the exam simply by approving or disapproving of the students' performance.

However, during the nineteenth century, professors were dissatisfied because these exams did not provide a comprehensive picture of students' learning. Degrees were awarded on the basis of a student's social standing — or in spite of their performance in examinations. Yet, around the turn of the 19th century, universities began to become more systematic in the way students were evaluated. Advances in technology enabled more written than oral examinations. At the end of the 19th century, two events shaped the current 'traditional' grading system. Harvard in 1884 instituted the first recorded use of a letter grade, in a correspondence referring to a student earning a B. In 1896, at Mount Holyoke College, a grading system was introduced that combined letter grades, percentages, and descriptive adjectives. The letter grades were A, B, C, D, and F.

Similarly Jesse Stommel in the journal "Pedagogy : Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition and Culture" argues in his essay "Ungrading: An Introduction" (2024) by detailing his perspectives about grading when it is stated, " Grades are not good incentives, grades are not good feedback, grades encourage competitiveness over collaboration, grades are not good markers of learning, grades don't reflect the idiosyncratic, subjective, emotional character of learning, grades are not fair." Hence, he questions whether assessments can be conducted differently to support greater inclusion, improve learning outcomes, and enhance the teaching and learning experience. He clearly opines that grades do not promote learning. It only distracts the learners from feedback and assessments. Furthermore, he writes, "Learning is not linear, and meaningful learning resists being quantified. Our assessment approaches should create space for learning, not arbitrarily delimit it" (p.331).

Drawing on these theoretical frameworks, the researchers designed their study around an Intensive English course offered at a Saudi university. The participants were first-year (Level 1) students who were required to complete this course as a prerequisite for enrollment in their core academic programs, including Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Radiology, Business Administration, Engineering, Tourism and Law.

III. Rationale of the Study

Test anxiety is a common phenomenon among students at the tertiary level all over the world. Research shows that stress and anxiety, even causing panic attacks, are frequently seen among students whose whole career depends on getting high grades in their academic tests. Moreover, until now, most institutions have relied on letter grades ranging from A to F to assess students. The letter grades determine how students will use them in their further studies or professional careers. In some job markets, interviewers focus not only on the interviewee's performance but also on the grades. Hence, at the tertiary level, students who plan to face the job market are constantly under pressure to secure high grades, which determine their future. As a result, more than focusing on learning, students in most cases get tense about their grades and results.

The Saudi universities are no exception. The assessment practices mostly focus on letter grades. The assessments are mostly 'one-and-done,' and since students have no second chance to revise and resubmit their work, their grades are final. Therefore, the researchers, who have worked in the Saudi context for almost two decades, were interested in conducting a study on how Saudi students enrolled in the first semester view the concept of alternative grading or ungrading practices. The participants were undergraduate students studying in Level 1. Their majors were Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Radiology, Business Administration, Law, Tourism and Engineering. All these students were required to take the one-semester Intensive English Program, taught at one of the universities in Saudi Arabia. English is a prerequisite course that must be completed to enroll in their respective departments. But the condition is that they must get high scores (score a certain percentage to get the department of their choice). If they score less or cannot fulfil the target, the university will choose the departments for them. It should be noted that at the researchers' institution, the assessments comprise Quizzes, Assignments, Midterm, and Final Exams. The distribution of the marks is 60 (semester work) and 40 (final exam). The learners are required to be efficient in Listening/ Speaking/ Reading/ Writing/ Grammar and Vocabulary. All these assessments are mostly summative, with no chance to retake after thoughtful feedback is given. If there were options for Formative Assessments that gave students more opportunities to resubmit, perhaps they would have focused more on learning rather than just on getting high scores.

Therefore, the investigators have formulated the research questions based on students' experiences in the Intensive English course and their apprehension/anxiety about their scores/grades.

Research Questions

1. How do students perceive alternative grading practices compared to traditional letter or percentage-based grading systems?
2. How do students view the impact of alternative grading on academic stress and performance anxiety?
3. How do students perceive the impact of alternative grading on their motivation to learn?
4. Does the practice of ungrading/ re-submission of tasks help students to take more risks and enjoy the learning experience?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

What Are Alternative Grading Practices?

In the book *Grading for Growth* (2023), Clark and Talbert have extensively discussed the concept of alternative grading, a practice that emphasizes growth rather than learning. The authors have critiqued traditional grading practices in which students' work is 'one -and -done'. There are no reattempts or revisions of work. Students' work typically does not receive helpful feedback. Even if the instructor gives feedback, if no reattempt chances are provided, there are fewer ways to put it to use. They promoted three models of assessment and grading: 'Standards-based grading', 'Specifications grading, and 'Ungrading'. 'Standards-based grading' is an assessment practice in which the instructor creates a list of clear standards that describe specific things a student will learn to do. Each assignment is aligned with

one or more of these standards, and each standard is assessed multiple times, offering multiple attempts to meet the standards without penalty' (p.27). Students have the opportunity to receive feedback and retake exams.

'Specifications Grading' or 'Specs grading' is another way to assess students. Instructors create a list of specifications that describe the qualities and characteristics of a successful submission for an assignment. Student work is graded holistically against those specifications, earning a single mark: 'Satisfactory' or 'Not Yet' (p. 27). Students can revise and resubmit their work until they meet the acceptance criteria. 'Specification grading' is useful for portfolios, projects, and other assessments completed over a certain time period. In these assessments, the process of getting them completed is important.

The next type of assessment discussed is 'Ungrading'. Ungrading practices mainly focus on feedback. This reduces the trauma and anxiety students go through when they try to learn something. In an ungraded class, teachers focus on two things: first, asking students to write reflective essays that give a detailed account of the process of their work; and second, meeting with students periodically to understand their current level of progress. The second is to instruct students to prepare a final portfolio that shows how far they have progressed, documenting their learning experiences or if they have met the course objectives.

Why Alternative Grading/ Ungrading?

There are several studies on ungrading and alternative grading, which critique traditional, grade-centered assessment practices and advocate for learning that focuses on student reflection and intrinsic motivation. At a conceptual level, Cowan (2025) discusses ungrading in terms of "liberated learning." He argues that conventional grading systems encourage competition and surface-level engagement. Students are more concerned with the score than with the learning experience. As a result, they are unwilling to take risks. On the other hand, ungrading advocates authority over learning, inviting students to become active participants in evaluating their own progress. Cowan emphasizes feedback, self-assessment, and trust through which ungrading can lead to learner autonomy and more authentic educational relationships.

Stenson's (2025) study of ungrading in an undergraduate exercise physiology course shows that, based on student perceptions, ungrading can positively influence how students understand learning itself. The results showed that students felt less anxious, focused more on mastery than performance, and engaged more with feedback when grades were not the primary target of learning. Importantly, the study shows that ungrading can be effective even in traditionally assessment-heavy, science-based disciplines, challenging the assumption that alternative grading is only suitable for humanities or reflective fields. Stenson's data show that ungrading encourages students to shift from concentrating on their scores to being more reflective and responsible learners.

While Cowan and Stenson emphasize the pedagogical benefits of ungrading, Almy (2025) extends the discussion by framing alternative grading as an act of critical resistance to dominant structures in higher education. Through a doctoral-level inquiry, Almy situates grading within systems of power, normalization, and institutional control. Grades, she argues, influence not only student behavior but also identities, reinforcing hierarchies and limiting possibilities for individual development. Ungrading, in this account, becomes a process of (un)learning—a deliberate dismantling of inherited assumptions about merit, success, and authority.

Concern with Student Stress Regarding Tests and Grades

Students' test anxiety and stress have been a constant topic of discussion among many researchers. A study by Halim et al. (2025) investigates the apprehension and anxiety level of Saudi students regarding tests and scores. Their study shows that the causes of test anxiety among Saudi learners include knowledge retrieval during exams, fear of failure, low self-confidence, inadequate preparation,

expectations from family members, poor study habits, and poor test-taking skills. Moreover, due to test anxiety, students perform poorly on tests; they experience distractions while preparing, some are unable to recall information they know before a test, and they worry about the consequences of their failure (Halim et al., 2025). Also, “test anxiety, characterized by worries about potential failure or negative outcomes in evaluative situations (Zeidner, 2007), often leads to lower performance among test-anxious students across several assessments, including classroom exams, the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and intelligence tests” (Von der Embse et al., 2018). In another study by Mohamed and Halim (2021), it is argued that a first-year undergraduate student definitely struggles more with study skills/ habits because s/he experiences various types of pressure, not to mention anxiety related to tests.

Assessment Practices in Saudi Higher Education

In a study by Al-Dosari (2025), “Assessment practices are a central part of, if not indispensable, practical work in higher education systems; they provide the means to evaluate student learning, guide instructional practices, and ensure that academic programs are aligned with institutional aims” (p.17). Educators use assessments to determine the effectiveness of their instructional techniques, identify areas where students are struggling, and change their approach to meet the needs of quality learners. However, McTighe and Ferrara (2021) state in their book *Assessing Student Learning by Design: Principles and Practices for Teachers and School Leaders* that “the primary purpose of classroom assessment is to inform teaching and advance learning” (p. 2). Throughout the semester, several assessments are given to evaluate students' progress in the course. As McTighe and Ferrara state, “Since teachers typically direct their instructions toward different types of goals, we need an associated variety of assessments to gather the appropriate evidence for all targeted goals.”

Studies show that educators use assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional methods, identify areas where students are struggling, and adjust their approach to better meet the needs of quality learners. Assessments serve as markers of the level of academic accomplishment students are achieving, as a period for reflection, and as a motivator to investigate course material in depth (Harris et al., 2022). Other studies show that conventional assessment methods, which rely on standardized tests and essay scores, have increasingly been deemed inadequate to meet ever-increasing educational requirements. The developing understanding is that examinations need to change to accommodate the changing knowledge and skills of the twenty-first century. It refers to including Formative Assessments that provide continuous feedback, integrating technology-enhanced assessments, or designing tasks that emulate real-world regulation (Zhai, 2021; Sale, 2020).

However, the concept of *Alternative Grading Practices, or Ungrading Practices*, remains unfamiliar at most institutions in Saudi higher education. As Clark & Talbert (2023) strongly recommend in their book, *Grading for Growth*, that “Students can reexamine their work without penalty, using the feedback they receive, until the standards are met or exceeded” (p. 29). The researchers can relate this to their students at their institution because the assessments practiced there are ‘one-and-done’.

Alternative grading practices are frequently criticized for encouraging competition, extrinsic motivation, and achievement over learning. Asaale’s (2025) comprehensive review positions ungrading as a pedagogical philosophy rather than a single technique, highlighting trust, dialogue, formative feedback, and mutual responsibility for learning. Similarly, Mesny et al. (2026) conceptualize creative assessment as a means to resist neoliberal and managerial logics in higher education, chiefly within management education, where grading often reinforces instrumental views of learning.

Together, these works situate alternative grading within wider discussions on power, authority, and the purpose of higher education, framing assessment as a socially and ethically consequential practice rather than a neutral measurement tool.

Hence, these studies have discussed test anxiety, and common assessment practices in Saudi higher education. These studies do not discuss the effects of introducing alternative/ ungrading practices in

Saudi higher education. Therefore, to fill in the research gap, the researchers were prompted to conduct a study on how Saudi first-year students view the practice of alternative grading or ungrading at their institution.

V. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

For this study, the researchers have used a Mixed-Method Approach. As Creswell writes, “Mixed methods involve combining or integrating qualitative and quantitative research and data in a research study. Qualitative data tends to be open-ended without predetermined responses, whereas quantitative data usually includes closed-ended responses such as found on questionnaires or psychological instruments” (Creswell, 2018, p.14). The researchers conducted a quantitative study by distributing a questionnaire prepared on a 3-point Likert Scale, ranging from ‘Agree to Disagree’, to avoid researcher bias. Moreover, to support the study, the researchers have also interviewed the participants and taken notes on their responses, which correspond to their questionnaire responses.

Table 1: Overview of the Participants

No. of Participants	Gender	Age	Pre-requisite	L1	Years of Learning English	Program	Core Courses
45	Female	18-19 years	High-School	Arabic	6-7 years	Intensive English Program	Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Radiology, Business Administration, Tourism, Law and Engineering

The participants were 45 female students enrolled in Level 1. Their ages ranged from 18 to 19 years, and their L1 was Arabic. They had been studying English for 6-7 years. They were high school graduates enrolled in the first year of the Intensive English Program (a requirement for enrollment in their respective departments).

Ethical consideration: Participants' responses were recorded, and they were assured that the data would be used only for research purposes. There was no pressure, and no incentives were offered. They could withdraw from the survey at any time.

5.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 2: Participants' Responses

No	Variables	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	I feel stressed out when I think of grades before exam.	66.66%	20%	13.3%
2	I feel tests / assessments without grades would be less stressful.	55.55%	24.44%	20%
3	I would feel more motivated to learn if there were no grades.	42.22%	28.88%	28.88%

4	I feel getting low grades affects my learning.	86.66%	4.44%	8.88%
5	When I study, my only thought is about my grades.	60%	20%	20%
6	I think removing grading practices from assessments will allow me to take more risks in learning.	31.11%	37.77%	31.11%
7	I feel if tests were re-taken, it would help me in my academic career.	77.77%	17.77%	4.44%
8	I think tests should be replaced with only feedback and students should be allowed to resubmit their work.	53.33%	31.11%	15.55%
9	To me, getting feedback is more important than receiving a grade.	64.44%	20%	15.55%
10	I think grades do not show how much I have learned.	68.88%	11.11%	20%
11	I can improve a lot if I am allowed to resubmit my work without penalty.	64.44%	28.88%	6.66%

The above analysis provides an overview of participants' responses regarding alternative grading, ungrading, and test anxiety. To support the quantitative study, the researchers also conducted a qualitative study using open-ended questions. The responses have been categorized under certain dominant themes. While discussing the principles of thematic analysis, Opler (1945, as cited in Ryan & Bernard, 2003) observed that themes are only visible (and thus discoverable) through the manifestation of expressions in data. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), themes come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (a priori approach).

Table 3: Qualitative Data Analysis

Benefits of not having grades as a student	How does ungrading influence your willingness to take risks, ask questions or learn new learning strategies?	If you could change one thing about the assessment practice in your classroom, what would that be?
Responses	Responses	Responses
Grades should be used only when needed.	Without grades, it is more comfortable to go through the learning experience.	Assessments related to grades should be reduced.
I feel more stress free when there are no grades.	I can get a chance to correct my mistakes.	Students should be allowed to re-submit their work because real learning happens through mistakes.
It will allow students to engage in critical thinking activities more.	I don't think it's a big deal to lose marks. It helps to improve the students' performance.	I would clarify the questions more (especially the confusing questions).

Grades motivate the students to study harder.	Feedback will help me to try new strategies to learn.	Teachers should keep in mind the students' level.
Without grades, students feel less anxious and learn from their mistakes.	When there are grades, I don't take risks.	All assessments should be ungraded.

VI. FINDINGS

The results of the quantitative study show that the majority of participants preferred ungraded assessments. For variable no. 1, among the 45 participants, 66.66% agreed that they feel stressed about grades before the exam, 20% were neutral, and 13.3% disagreed. In variable 2, 55.55% agreed that assessments without grades would be less stressful. 24.44% were neutral, while 20% disagreed. In variable 3, 42.22% agreed that assessments without grades would motivate them to learn more. On the other hand, 28.88% were neutral, whereas 28.88% disagreed with the statement. In variable 4, 86.66% of participants agreed that low grades affect learning, 4.44% were neutral, and 8.88% disagreed. In variable 5, 60% of the participants agreed that, while studying, their only thoughts are about grades; 20% were neutral; and the other 20% disagreed.

Moreover, for variable 6, 31.11% of participants agreed that removing grading practices from assessments would allow them to take more risks in learning, 37.77% were neutral, and 31.11% disagreed. For variable 7, 77.77% agreed that retaking tests would help their academic career; 17.77% were neutral, whereas 4.44% disagreed. For variable 8, 53.33% agreed that tests should be replaced with only feedback and that students should be allowed to resubmit their work, 31.11% were neutral, and 15.55% disagreed with the statement. For variable 9, 64.44% agreed that getting feedback is more important than receiving a grade; 64.44% were neutral, whereas 15.55% disagreed. For variable 10, 68.88% agreed that grades do not reflect how much students have actually learned, 11.11% were neutral, and 20% disagreed. For variable 10, 64.44% agreed that opportunities to resubmit the work can improve grades, 28.88% were neutral, and 6.66% disagreed.

The results show that most learners were keen to adopt ungrading practices or to work on feedback to resubmit their work, which would make them feel less stressed and motivate them to learn rather than focus on grades.

The second stage of the study, which involved a qualitative study, was analyzed through categorizing the students' responses under certain themes such as "Benefits of not having grades," "Willingness to take risks, ask questions, or learn new learning strategies when there are no grades," and "The desire/ wish to change one thing about the current assessment practices."

The responses clearly showed that learners preferred to have grades only when needed. Gradeless learning and assessments engage them in more critical thinking tasks. They can enjoy the learning experiences, get opportunities to work on feedback and resubmit their work and be motivated to try new strategies. In the question asking them about one practice they would like to see changed in their assessment, the responses centred on less grading and more opportunities to focus on learning and growth.

VII. DISCUSSION

The students' responses, as analyzed in the findings, indicate that, in today's era, where learning promotes growth and prepares students for 21st-century job markets, there is a dire need for institutions to rethink their grading and assessment practices. Students no longer want to feel anxious or stressed about tests and exams. They prefer assessments that support their learning and growth. This corresponds with what Clark & Talbert (2023) promote in their book discussing extensive feedback. Feedback will help students address their errors, which in turn will motivate them to resubmit their work. Also, under the practice of 'Specs grading', students' work will be graded

holistically against certain specifications, earning a single mark: 'Satisfactory' or 'Not Yet' (*Grading for Growth*, p. 27). This suggests that removing grades from assessments makes learners more willing to take risks and try new strategies. This is supported by Cowan's (2025) study, which found that grades function as extrinsic motivators that often displace curiosity, risk-taking, and deep reflection. Ungrading, by contrast, is presented as a practice that redistributes authority over learning, inviting students to become active participants in evaluating their progress. This addresses research question 4.

Moreover, students have also opined that grades do not show how much they have learned. Drawing on student perceptions, Stenson (2025) demonstrates that ungrading can positively influence how students understand learning itself. It has been observed that the majority of students perceive learning a course as a routine task or just a way to fulfil a requirement. At the researchers' institution, the Intensive English course is taught to first-year undergraduate students whose majors include Medicine, Pharmacy, Radiology, Nursing, Business Administration, Tourism, Law, and Engineering. It is obvious that they might never need the lessons they learn in this program at any stage of their academic career, except for English communication. Because grades determine their performance and level, they find it daunting to enroll in their major area after completing a prerequisite English course. This addresses research question no.3

Scholarly articles on test anxiety cannot be ignored when students have strongly opined that they feel stress-free when the assessments do not carry points or grades. This is supported in the study of Halim et al. (2025), which extensively discusses test anxiety among Saudi learners. Due to test anxiety, students perform poorly on tests; they experience distractions while preparing, some are unable to recall information they know before a test, and they worry about the consequences of their failure (Halim et al., 2025). Also, "test anxiety, characterized by worries about potential failure or negative outcomes in evaluative situations (Zeidner, 2007), often leads to lower performance among test-anxious students across several assessments, including classroom exams, the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and intelligence tests" (Von der Embse et al., 2018). In another study by Mohamed and Halim (2021), it is argued that a first-year undergraduate student definitely struggles more with study skills/ habits because s/he experiences various types of pressure. Not to mention the stress and tension related to tests and exams. This addresses research question 2.

Regarding assessment practices in higher education, McTighe and Ferrara (2021) state in their book that "the primary purpose of classroom assessment is to inform teaching and advance learning" (p. 2). When students argue that grades should be included only when needed, their views coincide with McTighe and Ferrara's argument about the primary purpose of classroom assessment. The developing understanding is that examinations need to change to accommodate the changing knowledge and skills of the twenty-first century. It refers to including formative assessments that provide continuous feedback, integrating technology-enhanced assessments, or designing tasks that emulate real-world regulation (Zhai, 2021; Sale, 2020). Random assessments designed by the instructors play no important role in measuring students' progress or performance. As Stommel clearly opines that grades do not promote learning. It only distracts learners from feedback and assessments (p. 331). This addresses research question 1.

VI. CONCLUSION

Al-Dosari's (2025) article states that "Assessment practices in Saudi higher education are vital for evaluating student learning, ensuring academic standards, and promoting student growth. Conventional methods, such as written exams, quizzes, and assignments, remain the dominant approach, especially in theory-based programs." However, Saudi higher institutions should focus more on producing a workforce for the 21st-century labour market. If institutions are open to using alternative grading practices, such as ungrading, current students will focus more on learning than on grades. In such cases, there should be more incorporation of formative appraisals rather than summative assessments.

Based on the study's findings, the researchers suggest the following recommendations.

* Alternative grading supports student-centered learning, critical thinking, and lifelong skills, which are central to Vision 2030.

*Students should be taught to shift from rote memorization and focus on formative assessments consisting of more reflective tasks, self- assessment and peer assessment tasks.

* Faculty members should be well-trained and experienced to adapt to alternative/ ungrading practices.

*Faculty members should be trained to give constructive feedback.

*Students should be taught to work on feedback and re-submit their work to meet the criteria set by the faculty/ program.

*Institutions should hire experienced curriculum experts who will work toward creating an efficient workforce.

*Programs should move toward outcome-based education.

Context and Value: This work should be valuable to future educators in the Saudi context who seek to bring about changes in the education system. The assessment practices in Saudi higher education are in need of revision. This study will guide future educators in identifying the causes related to test anxiety and failure. The study will help in taking appropriate measures to address the issues related to the current assessment practices. Ungrading/ alternative grading practices can help Saudi higher education move toward more holistic, student-centered, and innovation-oriented learning environments. It will also be valuable to the current workforce, who truly want to see students' improvement, and to decision-makers who want to produce a competent labour force in the 21st century.

Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations. The study was conducted at only one university in Saudi Arabia with 45 female students. If the study had been conducted at other universities with more participants, the results might have been different.

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