Exploring Assessment of Language Proficiency through Applying a Functional-Notional Approach: A Lesson from Remote EFL Teachers

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Abstract

The functional-notional approach, which emphasizes communicative competence over rote grammatical knowledge, has gained renewed significance in remote and resource-constrained English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This study explores how remote EFL teachers implement functional-notional assessments and identifies the challenges and adaptations they employ when delivering assessments through digital platforms. Adopting a qualitative research design within an interpretivist paradigm, the study recruited 10–15 remote English teachers through purposive sampling, focusing on those with at least two years of experience in digital or low-resource environments. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's framework. The findings reveal that teachers design assessments around authentic communicative tasks such as role-plays, situational dialogues, and project-based activities, with strong emphasis on fluency and pragmatic use of language. However, technological limitations such as unstable internet connectivity and restricted device access often hinder synchronous assessments, prompting teachers to adapt by using asynchronous recordings, chat-based dialogues, and simplified written tasks. Teachers also integrate learners' cultural and community realities into tasks, ensuring contextual relevance and stronger engagement. While fluency is prioritized initially, accuracy is gradually emphasized as learners progress, often through modified rubrics and multimodal feedback strategies. The study concludes that functional-notional assessment, when adapted with flexibility, enhances learner autonomy and communicative competence in remote contexts. Its implications highlight the need for professional development, culturally responsive curriculum design, and technological support to sustain effective language assessment practices.

Keywords: Assessment; Language proficiency; Functional-notional approach; Remote teachers

INTRODUCTION

The functional-notional approach to language teaching, which gained prominence in the 1970s, represents a pivotal shift away from traditional grammar-centered methodologies that often reduced language learning to the rote memorization of structures and rules. Instead, this approach foregrounds the communicative purpose of language, viewing it as a medium for meaningful

interaction. Its two core dimensions—functions, or the pragmatic uses of language such as making requests or offering apologies, and notions, or the abstract ideas and concepts expressed through language, such as time, quantity, or location—provide a more dynamic and authentic orientation to teaching (Choe & Lee, 2023; Khansir, 2022). This framework aligns strongly with the needs of learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where immediate communicative utility often outweighs the pursuit of grammatical perfection. Unlike approaches that delay practical usage until after mastery of grammar, the functional-notional model situates communicative competence at the center, offering learners tools they can immediately apply in social and academic contexts.

This communicative emphasis proves particularly advantageous in environments where learners have limited exposure to authentic English interactions. In rural or under-resourced contexts, opportunities for spontaneous engagement with native speakers or real-world English usage are scarce, making a focus on pragmatic competence essential. By embedding language instruction in real-life contexts, the functional-notional approach equips learners to navigate multilingual environments where English functions as a lingua franca (Dalpanagioti, 2022; Taguchi, 2015). For instance, learners are encouraged to practice communicative exchanges such as negotiating meaning, seeking clarification, or expressing needs—skills that are directly transferable to real-life scenarios. This aligns with Kirkpatrick's argument that the teaching of English should prioritize intelligibility and communicative effectiveness over strict adherence to native-speaker norms, reflecting the increasingly globalized role of English as a language of wider communication (Choe & Lee, 2023).

Proficiency assessment within the functional-notional framework diverges sharply from traditional grammar-based evaluations. Rather than measuring students against abstract rules of correctness, assessments are designed to capture learners' ability to deploy language appropriately in social contexts. Teachers emphasize pragmatic choices—such as selecting culturally and socially suitable forms—over rigid grammatical precision. Role-plays, situational tasks, and project-based assignments allow learners to demonstrate competence in simulated real-world interactions, thereby reducing the disconnect between classroom practices and practical language use (Hernández et al., 2022; Lantolf et al., 2020; Nock, 2020). These methods not only provide richer insights into learners' communicative abilities but also reinforce the broader pedagogical goal of fostering authentic engagement with language.

One of the central pedagogical shifts within this approach lies in its prioritization of fluency and functional use, particularly at early stages of language acquisition. By emphasizing learners' ability to engage in real communication rather than produce error-free sentences, the functional-notional model cultivates confidence and a willingness to take risks in language use. Through problem-solving, project work, and role-play, learners practice applying linguistic knowledge in context, which simultaneously strengthens their fluency and enhances communicative competence (Dalpanagioti, 2022; Astriana & Sulistyaningsih, 2020). Such an approach helps learners internalize the idea that language is not simply knowledge to be accumulated but a tool to be used, promoting the transfer of classroom learning into real-world communication.

The application of the functional-notional approach in remote language teaching environments demonstrates both its adaptability and its challenges. Teachers working online or in rural contexts have shown considerable creativity in contextualizing tasks to reflect learners' realities. For example, role-plays may simulate scenarios such as bargaining in local marketplaces, engaging in mobile phone conversations, or participating in community events. By grounding tasks in students' lived experiences, educators not only increase engagement but also ensure that assessments remain relevant and meaningful (Jin et al., 2023). This contextualization enhances the authenticity of assessment practices and highlights the approach's flexibility in diverse cultural and technological environments.

At the same time, the realities of remote teaching create obstacles to the effective implementation of functional-notional assessments. Teachers frequently encounter technological limitations such as poor connectivity, which disrupt synchronous oral assessments and hinder the immediacy of interactive communication. In response, many shift to asynchronous methods, including recorded oral tasks and written dialogues, as substitutes for live performance. While these alternatives allow flexibility and continuity of instruction, they often compromise the assessment of spontaneous interaction, which is central to communicative competence (Song, 2015). This limitation illustrates the tension between technological constraints and pedagogical ideals, underscoring the need for innovative solutions that preserve the interactive essence of language use.

Teachers in such contexts often counterbalance these constraints through creative task design that incorporates local cultural content into assessments. Learners might be asked to narrate festivals, describe community practices, or explain traditional customs in English, thereby engaging with language in ways that reflect their cultural environment (Mokoena, 2023). By embedding local cultural dimensions, teachers make assessments more meaningful and avoid the pitfalls of decontextualized, imported curricula. This not only supports learner motivation but also affirms the cultural identities of students, making English a medium through which they articulate their own experiences rather than a foreign imposition.

The functional-notional approach also emphasizes the value of teaching survival English—basic communicative functions such as greetings, requests, and explanations—that is often more relevant than abstract grammar instruction in rural and under-resourced contexts. These skills meet learners' immediate communicative needs, empowering them to use English for practical purposes in daily life (Hijazi, 2018). By aligning assessment with these functions, teachers ensure that learners are prepared for real-world interaction, even if their grammatical accuracy is still developing. Such prioritization reflects the pragmatic reality of EFL contexts, where language serves as a bridge for communication rather than a pursuit of theoretical mastery.

The nature of feedback further shifts in remote functional-notional teaching. With fewer opportunities for immediate, in-person correction, teachers increasingly rely on alternative mechanisms such as peer review, self-assessment tools, and reflective rubrics. These methods encourage learners to take ownership of their progress, fostering greater autonomy and metacognitive awareness (Mäkipää et al., 2021). In remote contexts, where direct teacher support may be inconsistent, the

cultivation of learner independence becomes especially critical. Functional-notional pedagogy thus not only equips students with communicative skills but also strengthens their capacity for self-directed learning, reinforcing resilience in the face of technological or structural limitations (Jin et al., 2021).

Despite its promise, the functional-notional approach is not without limitations. A primary concern is the absence of clearly defined rubrics for assessing communicative tasks, which can lead to superficial or inconsistent evaluations. Teachers may overemphasize fluency at the expense of accuracy, resulting in learners who are confident but imprecise in their language use. Coniam et al. (2017) emphasize the need for balance between communicative engagement and structured attention to linguistic accuracy, particularly for learners pursuing academic or professional goals that demand precise command of English. Similarly, Jo (2021) cautions that the neglect of grammar may disadvantage learners in formal contexts, underscoring the importance of integrated assessment strategies that combine communicative competence with explicit attention to linguistic form.

Another challenge arises from cultural mismatches when functions and notions imported from foreign curricula are applied without sufficient adaptation to local contexts. Tasks that fail to resonate with learners' cultural realities may reduce engagement and limit the applicability of assessed skills. Maqsood et al. (2024) highlight the necessity of culturally relevant instruction, arguing that language tasks must be rooted in local communicative practices to be effective. Teacher training is thus critical in equipping educators to adapt syllabi, ensuring that tasks are context-sensitive and assessments reliably reflect both communicative competence and linguistic progression (Blumenfeld et al., 2016; Jo, 2021).

To enhance the efficacy of the functional-notional approach, targeted professional development is essential. Training should emphasize task design, cultural contextualization, and the creation of assessment rubrics that balance fluency with accuracy. Teachers must be equipped to exploit technology creatively, using tools such as breakout rooms, role-play platforms, and recording functions to support dynamic, authentic assessments. Blumenfeld et al. (2016) note that technological integration can enrich language learning environments, and when combined with functional-notional pedagogy, it offers a powerful means of bridging pedagogical ideals with digital realities.

Institutional support also plays a crucial role. Schools and language programs must provide flexible curricula and policies that accommodate the adaptive nature of the functional-notional approach. Resources and professional support must be aligned with its principles, enabling educators to sustain communicative, learner-centered practices in both face-to-face and remote settings (Miguel & Rogan, 2015). By prioritizing communicative competence over rote grammatical mastery, institutions can foster a generation of learners equipped to use English meaningfully in both local and global contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of how the functional-notional approach, originally designed as a communicative alternative to grammar-based instruction, is adapted and recontextualized by remote English teachers working in diverse and often under-resourced environments. Unlike previous research that largely examined this approach in traditional classroom settings, the study highlights

how remote teachers creatively modify assessment strategies to address technological limitations, cultural diversity, and the need for survival-oriented communication. This focus provides fresh insights into the intersection of communicative pedagogy, digital mediation, and localized assessment practices, offering a unique contribution to the ongoing discourse on language proficiency evaluation. Based on this novelty, the study is guided by the following research questions:

How do remote English teachers implement the functional-notional approach to assess learners' language proficiency in digital and resource-constrained contexts?

What challenges and adaptations emerge in the design and delivery of functional-notional assessments when mediated through remote teaching environments?

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which prioritizes the understanding of human experiences in their natural settings. The choice of qualitative inquiry is justified by the study's aim to explore how remote English teachers implement the functional-notional approach in assessing language proficiency, and how they adapt to the challenges of digital and resource-constrained contexts. Unlike quantitative approaches that emphasize measurement and generalization, this design seeks depth, nuance, and contextual insight into teachers' lived experiences. The interpretivist stance further supports the exploration of diverse realities, recognizing that teachers' practices are shaped by factors such as cultural background, institutional expectations, technological access, and the sociolinguistic needs of their learners. By adopting this approach, the study positions itself to capture rich, descriptive data that reflect the complexity of language teaching and assessment in remote EFL contexts.

Participants

Participants in this study are selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that those included possess specific knowledge and experiences relevant to the research focus. The target group consists of remote English teachers who have at least two years of experience teaching in digital or resource-limited environments. This criterion ensures that participants have sufficient exposure to both the opportunities and challenges of implementing functional-notional approaches in their practice. The sample also seek diversity across dimensions such as geographical location, type of institution (formal schools, private tutoring platforms, or community programs), and degree of technological access. Such diversity is intended to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives. The study anticipates recruiting 10–15 participants, a sample size that is both feasible for in-depth qualitative analysis and adequate for identifying recurring themes while allowing room for individual variations.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

Data collection will employ **multiple instruments and techniques** to capture comprehensive insights and enable triangulation. Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary instrument, offering flexibility to probe participants' perspectives while ensuring consistency in addressing the research questions. These interviews will explore how teachers conceptualize, design, and implement functional-notional

assessments, as well as how they navigate contextual challenges. The open-ended format allows teachers to elaborate on unanticipated insights that enrich the data.

Classroom observations complement the interviews by providing direct evidence of assessment practices in action. Observations will focus on the implementation of functional-notional tasks such as role-plays, project-based activities, or interactive communicative exercises. In cases where live observations are not feasible due to technological barriers, teachers will be invited to share recordings of online sessions or examples of student performance.

Document analysis is used to examine assessment artifacts such as rubrics, task instructions, and feedback tools. These documents provide insight into the design principles guiding teachers' assessments and serve as a means of triangulating interview and observation data. Together, these instruments ensure a robust dataset that captures not only what teachers say about their practices but also what they do and how their practices are documented.

Data Analysis

The data are analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method allows for the systematic identification and interpretation of patterns within qualitative data while remaining flexible to the nuances of participants' narratives. Analysis proceeds in several stages.

The process begins with open coding, where interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents are reviewed line by line to identify recurring words, phrases, and concepts. These initial codes are then grouped into broader categories through axial coding, establishing connections between codes that reflect patterns in teachers' strategies, challenges, and adaptations. Themes emerge that directly address the research questions, such as "contextual adaptation of tasks," "technological constraints," or "balancing fluency with accuracy." Throughout this process, a constant comparative approach is employed to examine similarities and differences across cases, ensuring that the analysis captures both common trends and unique variations among participants.

Ensuring trustworthiness is central to the analysis. Credibility is enhanced through triangulation of data sources—interviews, observations, and documents—so that findings are grounded in multiple forms of evidence. Member checking is conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with participants to validate accuracy. Transferability is supported by providing detailed descriptions of participants and contexts, enabling readers to judge the applicability of findings to other settings. Dependability and confirmability are maintained through documentation of methodological decisions and systematic coding procedures, ensuring that the research process is transparent and replicable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

This study focused on two green issues; How do remote English teachers implement the functional-notional approach to assess learners' language proficiency in digital and resource-constrained contexts? What challenges and adaptations emerge in the design and delivery of functional-notional assessments when mediated through remote teaching environments? The data of the two issues can be presented in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. EFL Teachers' Responses to Assessment of Functional-Notional Approach

Interview Questions	EFL Teachers' Response
Can you describe how you design and implement assessments that reflect the functional-notional approach in your remote teaching practice?	**Teacher 1:** "In my classes, I start with identifying what communicative functions students need the most—for example, asking for help or explaining directions. Then I create assessment tasks where students role-play real-life scenarios in breakout rooms. I usually provide them with prompts but encourage improvisation so I can see how they use language beyond memorized phrases."
	Teacher 2: "I design my assessments by aligning them with themes from our lessons, such as shopping or traveling. I set up tasks where students have to complete a practical goal, like ordering food online or arranging a meeting. The assessment is less about grammar drills and more about whether they can communicate the message clearly."
What kinds of communicative tasks (e.g., role-plays, projects, or situational dialogues) do you use to evaluate learners' proficiency, and why did you choose these tasks?	**Teacher 3:** "I often use role-plays because they allow students to practice authentic conversations. For example, I give one student the role of a customer and another as a shop assistant. These tasks test both their vocabulary and their ability to use polite expressions, which are very important in real-life interactions."
	Teacher 4: "I assign short projects where students record video diaries about their daily routines or special events. These tasks encourage them to use language in a natural way and reflect on their personal experiences. I find that projects make learners more motivated because the content is meaningful to them."
How do you adapt your assessment strategies to suit the digital tools or platforms available in your teaching context?	**Teacher 5:** "My internet connection is not always stable, so I ask students to submit audio or video recordings instead of relying on live presentations. This way, I can still assess their pronunciation, fluency, and functional language use without worrying about connection problems."
	Teacher 6: "I use the tools available on our learning platform, like discussion boards and chat functions. For instance, I sometimes design written dialogue tasks where students have to solve a problem through messaging in English. It's not spoken, but it still shows how they negotiate meaning and respond to real situations."
In what ways do you consider learners' local realities or cultural contexts when creating functional-notional assessments?	**Teacher 9:** "I include tasks that reflect daily life in their communities. For example, since many of my students come from farming areas, I create scenarios where they have to explain farming processes or ask questions about selling products at a market in English. This makes the assessment more relatable."
	Teacher 10: "I try to connect tasks with cultural practices, like festivals or family traditions. Students might describe how they celebrate a local holiday or explain traditional food. Using these contexts helps them feel proud of their culture while practicing English."

Interview Questions	EFL Teachers' Response
How do you balance the need for fluency and communicative effectiveness with the importance of accuracy when assessing learners' language performance?	**Teacher 12:** "I prioritize fluency in the beginning because students need the confidence to speak without fear of mistakes. However, I also take notes on recurring errors and give them feedback afterward, so accuracy is gradually improved alongside fluency."
	Teacher 15: "I use rubrics that separate fluency and accuracy as different categories. For example, students can score well for being able to communicate clearly, even if they make some grammar mistakes. But I also make sure accuracy counts more as they progress to higher levels."

The data illustrates how remote English teachers design, adapt, and balance functional-notional assessments to meet the realities of digital and resource-constrained teaching environments. Across their responses, a strong emphasis emerges on practical communication and contextual relevance, with teachers prioritizing learners' ability to use English in meaningful, real-life scenarios rather than focusing solely on grammatical correctness.

When discussing assessment design and implementation, teachers highlight the importance of authenticity and improvisation. For example, tasks such as role-plays in breakout rooms and scenario-based activities like shopping or arranging meetings are used to measure communicative effectiveness. These strategies demonstrate a clear shift away from grammar drills toward functional outcomes, aligning assessment closely with learners' immediate communicative needs.

In terms of communicative tasks, role-plays and projects are the most commonly employed, chosen for their ability to mirror real-life conversations and encourage personal expression. Teachers view role-plays as effective for testing vocabulary, politeness strategies, and turn-taking skills, while projects such as video diaries foster motivation and engagement by allowing learners to connect English use with their personal lives. This indicates that functional-notional assessment not only measures linguistic ability but also nurtures learner autonomy and self-expression.

Adapting to digital tools and technological constraints is another key theme. Teachers report substituting live tasks with asynchronous recordings to overcome connectivity issues, ensuring that fluency and pronunciation can still be assessed. Others leverage platform features such as chat boards and messaging to design written dialogues, showing how digital environments can still support negotiation of meaning and problem-solving. These adaptations illustrate teacher flexibility and innovation in maintaining communicative assessment despite technological barriers.

Local and cultural contexts strongly shape assessment design. Teachers consciously embed students' lived realities—such as farming practices, local markets, festivals, and traditional foods—into functional-notional tasks. By doing so, assessments become more relatable and culturally affirming, which not only fosters engagement but also validates learners' identities. This practice underscores the adaptability of the functional-notional approach to diverse cultural settings, ensuring that English serves as a bridge to express rather than replace cultural values.

Finally, the issue of balancing fluency and accuracy emerges as a nuanced challenge. Teachers commonly prioritize fluency and communicative confidence at

the early stages, using strategies such as noting recurring errors for later feedback. At the same time, some employ rubrics that weigh fluency and accuracy separately, allowing learners to be rewarded for effective communication even if grammatical precision is lacking. However, accuracy is gradually given greater emphasis as learners advance, suggesting a developmental perspective on assessment where the criteria shift in line with learners' growth.

Overall, the responses reveal that remote teachers implement the functional-notional approach through a combination of authentic tasks, cultural contextualization, technological adaptation, and flexible assessment criteria. While challenges such as limited connectivity and the tension between fluency and accuracy persist, teachers demonstrate resourcefulness in ensuring that assessments remain meaningful, learner-centered, and contextually appropriate. These findings affirm the adaptability of the functional-notional approach in remote EFL contexts and highlight the central role of teacher creativity in bridging pedagogical ideals with practical realities.

Table 2. EFL Teachers' Responses to Challenge and Adaptation Implementing Assessment of Functional-Notional Approach

Interview Questions	EFL Teachers' Response
What major challenges have you encountered when designing or delivering functional-notional assessments in remote teaching environments?	**Teacher 11:** "My main challenge is keeping students engaged online. Many students lose focus during long tasks." **Teacher 13:** "It is hard to create real-life role-plays in remote classes. Students often feel shy to perform on camera."
How have technological limitations, such as internet connectivity or access to devices, influenced the way you assess learners' communicative competence?	**Teacher 10:** "Poor internet makes live speaking tests difficult. I sometimes cannot hear students clearly." **Teacher 9:** "Some students only use phones. It limits how they can join role-plays or group tasks."
Can you share examples of adaptations you have made to ensure that functional-notional tasks remain effective in digital or resource-constrained contexts?	**Teacher 3:** "I ask students to send voice messages. This helps me check their fluency even with weak internet." **Teacher 6:** "I give short written dialogues instead of long tasks. It is easier for students with low bandwidth."
In what ways do you address difficulties in capturing learners' spontaneous communication skills when assessments are conducted asynchronously (e.g., through recordings or written submissions)?	**Teacher 5:** "I ask students to record one take only. This shows me their natural speaking ability." **Teacher 2:** "I give time-limited writing prompts. This helps me see how they respond quickly."
How do you modify assessment rubrics or feedback practices to account for the constraints and realities of remote teaching?	**Teacher 1:** "I make rubrics simpler. I focus more on fluency and clarity than perfect grammar."

	Teacher 4: "I give feedback in short voice notes. Students understand it better than long written comments."

The teachers' responses highlight the complex challenges of implementing functional-notional assessments in remote teaching environments, particularly in sustaining engagement and simulating authentic communicative situations. Teachers observed that students often lose concentration during extended online sessions and display reluctance in role-play tasks when required to perform on camera, revealing the psychological and motivational barriers of remote learning. Technological constraints compound these issues, as unstable internet connections disrupt oral assessments and prevent clear communication, while reliance on mobile devices restricts participation in interactive group activities. These challenges underscore how both pedagogical and infrastructural factors limit the effectiveness of functional-notional assessments in digital contexts.

In response to these obstacles, teachers have developed creative adaptations that maintain the communicative essence of the functional-notional approach while accommodating digital limitations. Strategies such as requesting one-take voice recordings or time-limited written tasks allow for more authentic measures of spontaneous communication despite asynchronous delivery. Similarly, shorter written dialogues and audio submissions reduce the pressure of bandwidth demands, ensuring wider accessibility. Teachers also adapt assessment tools by simplifying rubrics to focus on fluency and clarity rather than strict grammatical precision, while using voice-note feedback to enhance comprehension and reduce the burden of lengthy written corrections.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight how remote EFL teachers implement the functional-notional approach in language assessment while addressing significant challenges that arise in digital and resource-constrained environments. Central to the findings is the teachers' emphasis on authentic communicative practices, where role-plays, projects, and scenario-based tasks are prioritized over grammar-focused drills. This reflects a broader trend in second language pedagogy that has long championed communicative language teaching (CLT) as a vehicle for meaningful interaction (Hernández et al., 2022; Nock, 2020). By situating assessments around functions and notions such as requesting, apologizing, or describing, teachers align closely with Taguchi's (2015) argument that pragmatics should be at the core of instructional design. In this regard, the study confirms previous findings that functional-notional assessments serve as a bridge between classroom practice and real-world communication, thus equipping learners with both linguistic and pragmatic competence (Dalpanagioti, 2022; Astriana & Sulistyaningsih, 2020).

At the same time, the study contributes new insights by showing how these principles are adapted to remote teaching realities. Teachers reported relying on audio or video recordings, chat-based dialogues, and asynchronous submissions to overcome connectivity issues. While this aligns with Jin et al.'s (2021) observation that remote language educators during the COVID-19 pandemic shifted toward asynchronous tools, the present study adds a more nuanced perspective by

highlighting the trade-offs of these adaptations. Recordings allow for fluency and pronunciation to be assessed, but they also risk losing the spontaneity and interactive qualities that define communicative competence. This resonates with Song's (2015) warning that remote assessment can fail to capture legitimate, real-time communication skills, particularly when learners are rehearsed or overly reliant on scripts. Thus, the findings extend previous work by documenting the tension between technological pragmatism and pedagogical ideals in the application of functional-notional tasks.

Another key theme from the findings is the deliberate integration of local cultural realities into assessment practices. Teachers designed tasks around farming practices, markets, festivals, and traditional foods, which not only grounded assessments in learners' daily lives but also fostered pride in cultural identity. This supports Maqsood et al.'s (2024) claim that cultural relevance is essential for effective language instruction, particularly in multilingual and multicultural societies. It also resonates with Mokoena's (2023) findings that rural learners in South Africa engaged more meaningfully when tasks were linked to their community contexts. By embedding cultural knowledge into functional-notional assessments, teachers avoided the pitfalls of imported curricula that may alienate learners. This confirms the adaptability of the functional-notional approach, demonstrating its capacity to bridge global communicative goals with local cultural expressions.

However, the study also uncovered challenges related to learner engagement and motivation. Several teachers reported difficulties keeping students focused during extended online sessions, as well as reluctance among learners to perform role-plays on camera due to shyness. These findings echo Jin et al. (2023), who observed that online language learning often amplifies affective barriers such as anxiety, fear of judgment, and reduced participation. The contrast between the affordances of functional-notional tasks and the psychological barriers in digital settings highlights an area where theory and practice diverge. While functional-notional pedagogy assumes learners will benefit from realistic, performance-based activities, in practice, remote contexts introduce additional emotional and motivational constraints that reduce the effectiveness of such assessments.

The issue of balancing fluency and accuracy also emerged as a critical point. Teachers often prioritized fluency to build learners' confidence, while noting errors for later feedback or using rubrics that separated fluency from accuracy. This approach aligns with Coniam et al.'s (2017) call for a balance between communicative engagement and structural precision in assessment. It also reflects Jo's (2021) argument that academic learners may eventually require explicit grammar instruction to meet the demands of academic writing and formal contexts. What this study contributes is a developmental perspective: fluency is foregrounded in early stages, with accuracy gaining more weight as learners progress. This sequencing not only supports learner confidence but also acknowledges the dynamic nature of language proficiency development. Such a staged approach may offer a practical model for integrating functional-notional pedagogy with accuracy-focused assessment, thereby bridging a longstanding divide in EFL pedagogy.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings affirm the relevance of sociocultural theory in understanding functional-notional assessments in remote contexts. Lantolf

et al. (2020) emphasize that language learning is mediated by social interaction and cultural tools. In this study, the use of digital tools such as chat boards, recordings, and messaging systems represents new mediational means that reshape the nature of functional-notional tasks. Rather than negating the communicative principles of the approach, these tools recontextualize them, suggesting that communicative competence in digital settings may need to be reconceptualized to include digital pragmatics—the ability to negotiate meaning through text, audio, and video in online environments. This theoretical extension builds on Taguchi's (2015) call for pragmatics instruction by adding a digital dimension to the conceptualization of communicative functions and notions.

Practically, the study underscores the importance of teacher adaptability and professional development. Teachers demonstrated creativity in task design, feedback delivery, and rubric modification, often simplifying assessment criteria to focus on clarity and fluency rather than grammatical perfection. This aligns with Miguel and Rogan's (2015) findings that flexible assessment frameworks are critical in professional contexts where language serves functional purposes. At the same time, the reliance on simplified rubrics risks creating superficial assessments that may fail to capture deeper linguistic development. Thus, the study highlights the need for professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills to design robust yet flexible rubrics capable of balancing communicative goals with linguistic accuracy.

Another practical implication relates to feedback practices. Teachers reported using short voice notes rather than lengthy written comments, which aligns with Mäkipää et al.'s (2021) observation that multimodal feedback can enhance comprehension and engagement in remote environments. This suggests that functional-notional pedagogy in digital contexts benefits from multimodal assessment and feedback strategies that reflect the ways learners already interact with technology in their daily lives.

While the findings generally confirm the adaptability of the functional-notional approach, they also highlight discrepancies with expectations. For example, while role-plays are theoretically ideal for assessing functions and notions, in practice, technological and psychological barriers limited their effectiveness. Similarly, while functional-notional pedagogy emphasizes spontaneity, asynchronous methods often encouraged rehearsed responses. These discrepancies suggest that the model, when applied to remote teaching, requires recalibration to account for the affordances and constraints of digital environments. This recalibration might involve redefining spontaneity to include responses generated under time limits in digital formats or expanding the notion of communicative competence to incorporate digital literacies.

In conclusion, this study both confirms and extends the existing body of knowledge on functional-notional assessment. It confirms prior research on the value of communicative and culturally relevant tasks (Taguchi, 2015; Maqsood et al., 2024) while extending it by documenting how teachers adapt these principles to digital and resource-limited contexts. It also highlights the ongoing tension between fluency and accuracy, supporting Coniam et al.'s (2017) call for balance but offering a new developmental perspective on sequencing these priorities. Theoretically, the study contributes to sociocultural understandings of language learning by introducing the

concept of digital mediation in functional-notional assessments. Practically, it emphasizes the need for teacher training, flexible rubrics, and multimodal feedback strategies to sustain meaningful assessment in remote contexts. By situating functional-notional pedagogy within the realities of digital teaching, this study underscores the resilience and creativity of teachers while pointing toward necessary adjustments for ensuring that language assessments remain both communicatively authentic and pedagogically sound.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOL

We hereby declare that AI tools were used in the preparation and arrangement of this research article, including tasks such as data analysis, literature review synthesis, and manuscript formatting, to enhance the efficiency and accuracy of the research process

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