

Rethinking Assessment: How Understanding Executive Functions Empowers English Language Teachers

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Abstract

In English language classrooms, assessment plays a central role in shaping instruction, identifying learner needs, and supporting progress. This presentation explores how a deeper understanding of executive functions (EFs)—including working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility—can enrich the way teachers assess language development. These cognitive processes are key to how learners focus, retain new language, switch between tasks, and regulate behaviour. When educators recognise how EFs influence classroom performance, they are better equipped to interpret pupil responses, identify potential barriers, and design more inclusive and developmentally appropriate assessments. The session will offer research-informed strategies for aligning assessment practices with both cognitive and linguistic development, highlighting how formative and dynamic approaches can not only measure learning but actively support it. By incorporating executive function awareness into their assessment practices, teachers gain deeper insight into learner performance and are empowered to offer more targeted support. This leads to more equitable, effective, and learner-centred classrooms where assessment becomes a tool not only for evaluation but for meaningful learning enhancement.

Keywords: assessment; cognition; inhibition; learning; memory