

Developing Language Assessment Literacy of Teachers: needs, effective factors, and constraints

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Abstract:

In recent years, developing language assessment literacy (LAL) has become crucial for teachers in enhancing their teaching practices and improving students' learning outcomes. Empirical research reported that there was a training need for formal education and professional development programs in assessment (Berry et al., 2017; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Therefore, this paper reports a systematic review of teachers' language assessment literacy development: training needs, training effective factors, and language assessment practice constraints. The purpose of the review is to provide an updated overview of the empirical research on language assessment development. I utilized systematic review for social studies using the following steps: forming research questions, choosing the appropriate search terms and strategy, starting the literature search, developing inclusion criteria, determining relevant studies, and extracting data (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The search was limited to the 12 years' publications because there was an increase in attention on developing teacher's language assessment literacy in these years. The selected studies were analyzed using the content analysis approach. The results suggested that teachers needed in-service training in different LAL content areas that varied according to the educational context needs in their countries. The results also revealed that teachers' experience and self-reflection needed to be considered in development programs and teachers should be involved in collaborative learning communities. The collaborative learning communities provided the needed professional support and give the chance for teachers to share their experience. Furthermore, the reality and constraints needed to be recognized as they influenced teachers' assessment practices. Finally, research implications and future research directions on teachers' language assessment literacy are discussed.

Keywords: assessment, assessment literacy, assessment practice, assessment training needs, language assessment literacy, teacher's training, and professional development.

تطوير معرفة المعلمين في مجال تقييم اللغة: الاحتياجات والعوامل الفعالة والمعوقات

الملخص:

في السنوات الأخيرة، أصبح تطوير معرفة ومهارة التقييم اللغوي أو ما يسمى language assessment literacy (LAL) أمراً بالغ الأهمية للمعلمين في تعزيز ممارساتهم التعليمية وتحسين نتائج تعلم الطلاب للغات الأجنبية. أفادت الأبحاث التجريبية أن هناك حاجة لبرامج تدريب المعلمين والتطوير المهني في مجال التقييم. ولذلك، تقدم هذه الورقة مراجعة منهجية لتطوير معرفة ومهارة تقييم اللغة لدى المعلمين من حيث الاحتياجات التدريبية، والعوامل مؤثرة في تفعيل التدريب، ومعوقات ممارسة التقييم اللغوي داخل الصف. الغرض من هذه المراجعة هو تقديم نظرة عامة محدثة للبحوث التجريبية حول تطوير التقييم اللغوي. لقد استخدم الباحث المراجعة المنهجية للدراسات الاجتماعية باستخدام الخطوات التالية: تشكيل أسئلة البحث، واختيار مصطلحات واستراتيجيات البحث المناسبة، وبدء البحث في الأدبيات، وتطوير معايير الاشتمال، وتحديد الدراسات ذات الصلة، واستخراج البيانات. اقتصر البحث على أبحاث تجريبية من آخر 12 عاماً (العدد = 38) نظراً لوجود اهتمام متزايد بتطوير معرفة القراءة والكتابة لدى المعلمين في هذه السنوات. وقد تم تحليل الدراسات المختارة باستخدام منهج تحليل المحتوى. أشارت النتائج إلى أن المعلمين بحاجة إلى التدريب أثناء الخدمة في مختلف مجالات محتوى تعلم اللغة والتي تختلف وفقاً لاحتياجات السياق التعليمي في بلدانهم. وكشفت النتائج أيضاً أن خبرة المعلمين والتأمل الذاتي يجب أخذهما في الاعتبار في برامج التطوير ويجب إشراك المعلمين في مجتمعات تعلم تعاوني. تقدم مجتمعات التعلم التعاوني الدعم المهني اللازم وتتيح الفرصة للمعلمين لتبادل خبراتهم. علاوة على ذلك، يجب الاعتراف بالواقع والمعوقات لأنها تؤثر على ممارسات تقييم لدى المعلمين. في نهاية المراجعة، تتم مناقشة آثار هذا المراجعة العملية واتجاهاتها المستقبلية بشأن معرفة ومهارة التقييم لدى المعلمين.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: التقييم، المعرفة والمهارة التقييمية، ممارسة التقييم، احتياجات التدريب في التقييم، المعرفة والمهارة في تقييم اللغوي، تدريب المعلمين والتطوير المهني.

Introduction:

Language assessment literacy (LAL) refers to the knowledge, skills, and principles required for language teachers to develop quality assessments (Giraldo, 2021). There has been a growing trend for research to focus on the development of teachers' LAL (Arias et al., 2012; Baker & Riches, 2017; Giraldo & Murcia, 2018; González, 2021; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2019; Nier et al., 2009; Saputra et al., 2020). The importance of language assessment literacy (LAL) for language teachers has been widely recognized in empirical studies (Firoozi et al., 2019; Lan & Fan, 2019; Ölmezer-Öztürk & Aydın, 2019; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017; Vogt et al., 2020). In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in developing teachers' LAL through formal education programs and professional development activities (Djoub, 2017; Giraldo, 2021; Zulaiha & Mulyono, 2020). However, developing teachers' LAL may face challenges. Teachers' LAL development requires a comprehensive understanding of the training needs, training effective factors, and language assessment practice constraints. Therefore, this literature review aims to provide an updated overview of empirical research on teachers' LAL development shedding light on identifying the training needs, effective training strategies, and constraints that impact language teachers' development of LAL. In the present study, a systematic review of the current literature on developing LAL is presented focusing on the research published from 2010 to 2022. The research questions guiding the study were:

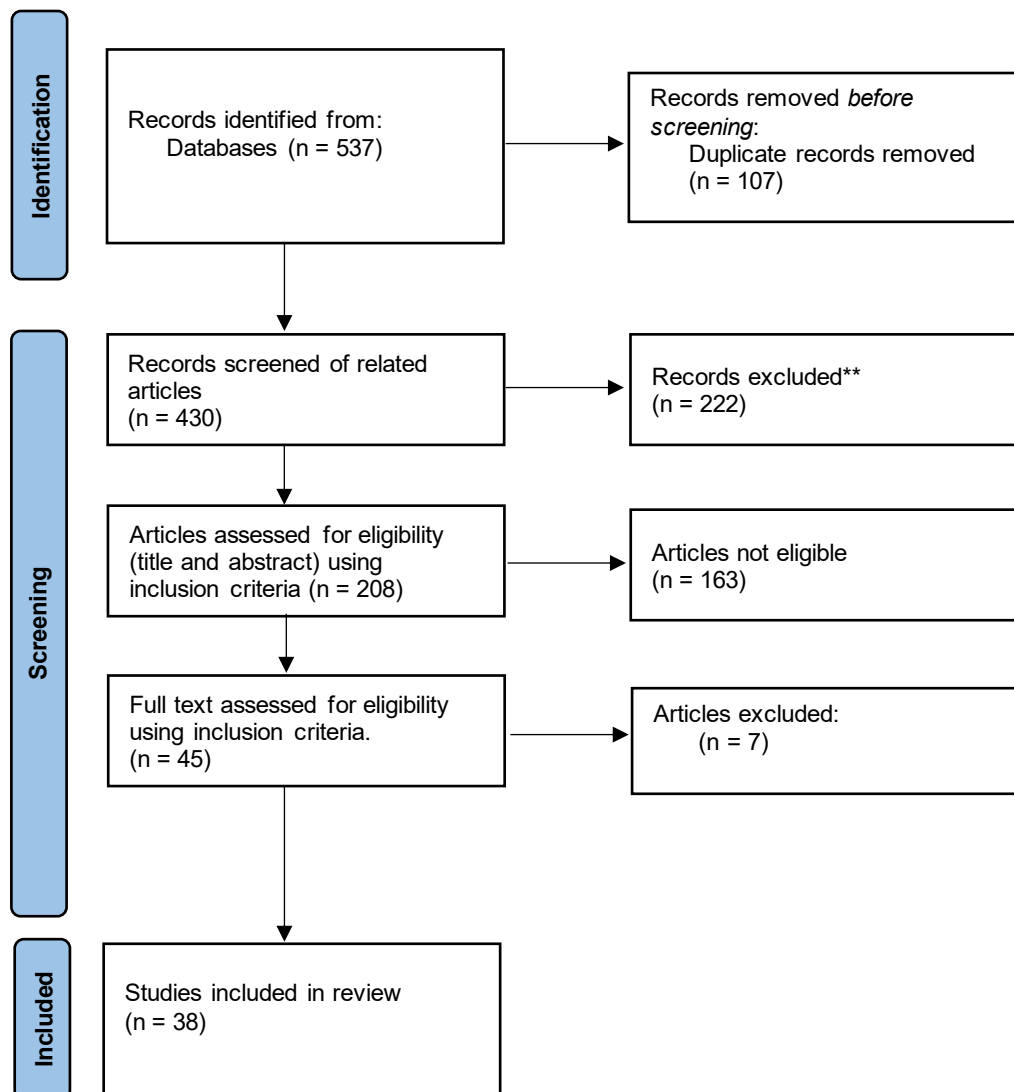
1. What are the training needs for LAL development among language teachers?
2. What factors influence LAL development?
3. What are the constraints that impact language teachers' assessment practices?

Method:

The present study utilized a systematic review approach to investigate the existing literature on teachers' LAL development. Following the work of Petticrew and Roberts (2006), the study used the following steps: 1) Forming research question to determine which aspects of developing LAL this study limited attention to. 2) Choosing

appropriate search terms and strategy: The search terms were identified based on the research questions and included "language assessment literacy", "teacher training", "teachers' language assessment literacy development", and "language assessment practices" as well as Boolean operators to combine these terms. The search strategy included searching in the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, which are a comprehensive multidisciplinary database. 3) Starting the literature search: To identify relevant studies, the literature search was conducted using the identified search terms in the three databases, 4) Developing inclusion criteria: The inclusion criteria were studies that: (a) focused on language assessment literacy development of teachers, (b) published between 2011 and 2023, and written in English, (c) reported empirical research, and (d) provided insights into the training needs of in-service teachers, effective factors, and constraints of language assessment literacy development. 5) Determining relevant studies: The relevant studies were determined by analyzing the titles and abstracts of the retrieved articles, and selecting those that met the inclusion criteria. 6) Extracting data from the chosen studies based on predefined categories. The selected studies were analyzed using the content analysis approach to answer the research questions, and the extracted data were organized into the three major themes identified in the study. Figure 1 describes the systematic review process.

Figure 1: A Flowchart of Study Selection



Note. Adapted from Page et al. (2021).

Results:

The result of the systematic review was divided into three categories: (1) teachers' language assessment literacy training needs, (2) factors influencing language assessment literacy development, and (3) language teachers' assessment constraints.

Teachers' Language Assessment Literacy Training Needs

The literature reveals that teachers require training in many areas to develop their LAL. Different types of training are needed to develop specific areas of LAL, depending on the context, cultural background, and prior education of teachers. Furthermore, academic and professional training programs should be designed and provided to teach

edify and reinforce the design, development, and validation of assessment tools, the administration of assessment tests, the scoring of results, and the interpretation of test results to meet specific learning objectives.

The theoretical body recommended certain areas and topics for LAL education and development, but empirical works in language assessment offered suggestions and recommendations for particular content that teachers might need for their LAL professional development. These works noted some elements that might influence teachers' LAL development. There was consensus in the literature bodies that teachers required further training in assessment practice rather than theories (Berry et al., 2019; Jeong, 2013; Giraldo & Murcia, 2018; Ölmezer-Öztürk & Aydın, 2018; Yan et al., 2018). Kremmel and Harding (2020) investigated the LAL needs profiles for different stakeholder groups. They developed a survey to provide a comprehensive perception of stakeholders LAL developmental components they needed. Different stakeholders from different countries around the world were recruited using an online electronic system. The findings revealed that teachers showed a balanced need to know about the suggested components, including developing and administering language assessments, assessment principles, washback and preparation, personal beliefs and attitudes, etc. They also rated assessment in language pedagogy, washback and preparation, language theory (language structure, use and development), and assessment principles (validity, reliability, etc.) and interpretation as more important for them than all other components of LAL. As for personal beliefs and attitudes and scoring and rating, teachers thought they were moderately important to know about these components. It can be concluded that teachers need to master LAL that they use in their every-day teaching and assessment activities rather than theoretical knowledge. The importance of teachers' assessment literacy in practice was also emphasized in the empirical research results of Berry, Sheehan and Munro (2019) and Xu (2019).

Many studies pointed out what EFL teachers would like to learn as they expressed their needs and desires to have more training and development in specific areas related to language assessment literacy. Vogt and Tzagari (2014) reported teachers needed training in assessing receptive skills, productive skills, and micro linguistic aspects of

language. A study by Bahtiar and Purnawarman (2020) indicated that EFL teacher expressed their desire to have training in developing valid and reliable assessment items. In a different study, Benzehaf (2017) stated grade giving, differentiation of instruction based on assessment outcomes, test design, feedback, and general formative assessment procedures should all be covered in teachers' professional development programs. He added that educational policy-makers and teacher educators should make long-term investments in teacher professional development for effective teaching and assessment. Hence, it was their duty to train teachers for their work and educate them about the assessment alignment with curriculum and instruction in practice.

Djoub (2017) suggested training content to support teachers in developing EFL teachers' LAL by introducing them to the main principles of EFL/ESL assessment, equipping them with the important language assessment methods, and encouraging them to self-evaluate their assessment practices with the necessary support. Tsagari and Vogt (2017) recommended that teachers' experience and procedures and the results of assessment needs analysis studies needed to be considered in development programs, and the reality and constraints needed to be recognized as they influenced teachers' assessment practices.

Ölmezer-Öztürk and Aydın (2018) sought to investigate Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions of their knowledge about language assessment and to identify these teachers needs in this domain. The findings showed that the teachers preferred practical training that focused on how to assess each skill separately. They also mentioned some of the factors that negatively influence in-service education, including inadequate professional development programs, demotivated teachers, and lack of language assessment sources. They recommended combining theories and practice to make training more meaningful and to encourage and support EFL teachers to participate in conferences and professional development programs on LAL.

Designing an effective LAL training program requires an understanding of teachers' LAL needs to develop their assessment practice. The literature reveals that teachers require different types of training to develop specific areas of LAL, depending on the context, cultural background, and prior education of teachers. Studies suggested that

teachers needed in-service training in different LAL content areas that varied according to the educational context needs in their countries. For example, in China, teachers need training in developing effective scoring criteria and using assessment results for decision-making (Cui et al., 2022). In Mexico, need training in using of technology in assessment, unfamiliar non-traditional assessment activities, and program-level decision-making (Bustamante, 2022). In Saudi Arabia, teachers reported their needs for further training in developing better online assessment methods, (Latif & Alhamad, 2023).

Factors Influencing Language Assessment Literacy Development

The literature highlights that teachers' experience (Berry et al., 2019; Işık, 2021; Liu & Li, 2020; Puspawati 2019; Vogt & Tzagari, 2014; Xu, 2019; Yan et al., 2021), self-reflection (Babaii & Asadnia, 2019; Berry et al., 2019) should be considered in the development of LAL programs. Additionally, a collaborative learning community provides necessary professional support and the opportunity for teachers to share their experiences (Saputra et al., 2020; Xu, 2019; Yamtim & Wongwanich, 2014). Experience can mediate the development of assessment literacy (Xu & Brown, 2016; Yan et al., 2021). Berry et al. (2019) stated that there was evidence that teachers developed their assessment practices while involving in various teaching and learning experiences, including experiences as a student and a teacher. Xu (2019) in her research about teachers' LAL perceptions, argued that teachers' own experience with assessment as students contributed to forming their perception towards assessment. Such perception may build an obstacle to one's assessment literacy development, mainly if they had negative assessment experiences within one's schooling experience. She also proved that experiences shaped the assessment beliefs of these teachers rather than the assessment theories or policy they had learned. This result proved that teaching experience also influenced teachers' LAL.

Self-reflection needs to be incorporated into development programs as it helps teachers to refine their assessment practices and develop more effective assessment tools (Saputra et al., 2020). Teachers needed to have the opportunity to practice their assessment agency in the classrooms (Xu, 2019). Berry et al. (2019) suggested that

LAL training programs should allow teachers to reflect on their previous assessment experiences and imagine how they would assess their learners in the future. Furthermore, Babaii and Asadnia (2019) showed that teachers' reflections on research-based theories and language assessment procedures were harmonious and led their reflections on language assessment performance in the future. This study also proved that teachers could be autonomously empowered to get their agency as EFL assessors. Teachers need to get the chance to reflect on their assessment practice and improve it to promote learning (Xu, 2019). Self-reflection is a key factor in LAL development (Berry et al., 2019; Muñoz et al., 2012).

The collaborative learning communities play a critical role in influencing language teachers' development of LAL. Through these communities, teachers can gain professional support and share their experiences in assessing students. This, in turn, can enhance their knowledge and skills in developing high-quality assessments. Teachers developed their LAL by learning from their co-workers (Berry et al., 2019; Puspawati, 2019). Xu (2019) pointed out that teachers should be involved in learning communities where their assessment practices gain autonomy and professional support. In these learning communities, teachers needed to have the chance to share and discuss their decisions about assessment with other colleagues and experts in the field. Yamtim and Wongwanich (2014) also reported that EFL teachers suggested employing cooperative learning and teamwork to improve classroom assessment literacy and provide an experienced mentor or coach who could offer the needed advice. Collaborative learning communities provided the needed professional support and gave teachers the chance to share their experiences (Xu, 2019; Yamtim & Wongwanich, 2014).

Language Teachers' Assessment Constraints

Assessment constraints may significantly affect a teacher's assessment practice. Having the required LAL development did not always mean practicing LAL properly. Many barriers prevented EFL teachers from practicing their LAL, including contextual constraints, feasibility barriers, lack of training, teachers' willingness for change, teachers' belief, students' language proficiency, heavy teaching workloads, and the

education system (Muñoz et al. 2012; Van Loi, 2020). Muñoz et al. (2012) mentioned constraints such as class size, time constraints, standardized tests, job overload, experience, and a lack of training. Additionally, literature shows that there is a contradiction between teachers' LAL beliefs and their assessment practices (Muñoz et al., 2012, Xu, 2019). The language teachers' assessment competence is influenced by their perceptions of assessment (Xu, 2019). Institutional support is also crucial for the development of LAL of teachers. Schools and universities should provide sufficient professional development opportunities and allocate resources to support teachers in their LAL development (Djoub, 2017; Gan & Lam, 2020; Liu & Li, 2020; Muhammad & Bardakci, 2019). Moreover, assessment policies and practices at the institutional, local, and national levels should be aligned with the principles of LAL (Islam et al., 2021; Xu, 2019).

Teachers' assessment perceptions and practices could be influenced by the contexts where the teaching is taking place. Teachers' AL is a social practice that gets affected by the context where it employs and other surrounding sociocultural factors (Willis et al., 2013). The context might be a factor for framing teacher's positive perception and practice (Xu, 2019); it, however, could form complex barriers for teachers (Xu, 2019). For example, Moqbel (2019) studied the challenges of using alternative assessment AA in Yemeni universities. He highlighted the difficulties of using AA to assess English language learners in the Yemeni context, including large classroom, lack of administrative support, time for preparation AAs, students' language proficiency, and teacher's assessment methods. Another study conducted by Ismael (2016) was about assessment practices and alternative assessments AAs use of in-service Kurdish teachers. Ismael reported that the main challenges of using AAs' full potential, including the assessment system, time shortage, the large classes, and provision and maintenance of classroom technical facilities. In the same vein, Van Loi (2020) investigated the perspectives and practices of EFL teachers after incorporating alternative assessment into teaching English in Vietnam. The results showed that EFL teachers didn't believe in the role of these assessments to develop learners' language proficiency, and they rarely used them due to time, workload pressures and learners' proficiency. The assessment context should also be considered when planning LAL

developmental programs because it could help or hinder forming positive teacher's LAL perception and practice. Among the challenges faced by language teachers in LAL is the insufficient training and professional development opportunities for teachers (Djoub, 2017)

One of the critical constraints is a shortage of time (Ismael, 2016; Moqbel, 2019), which includes demands on teachers' classroom instruction and administrative duties. This lack of time can affect proper assessment design and result in haphazard assessment practices. Additionally, lack of access to appropriate resources and inadequate infrastructure, such as test banks, models, and evaluation instruments, can limit teachers' assessment practices. This can compromise the quality of the assessment tools developed by teachers, leading to poor test validity and reliability. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards assessment need to be investigated before implementing any developmental program. Additionally, teachers' lack of academic and professional testing background prevented them from performing assessment tasks properly and limited their ability to use assessment to improve teaching (Sultana, 2019). Teachers also may resist change in their assessment practice. For instance, Kim et al. (2020) investigated Korean EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of teacher-based assessment. The results of their study highlighted discrepancies between how EFL teachers perceived assessment and how they practiced it as they were aware of the importance of teacher-based assessment, but most of them did not prefer using it in their classrooms.

Finally, language teachers are subject to constraints arising from external agencies, including the standard assessment criteria, curriculum objectives, and methodologies set by their institutions. The lack of alignment between assessment and curriculum objectives was also identified as a constraint. The inconsistent English language assessment policy with the goals and objectives of curriculum creates a gap between the assessment principles incorporated in the curriculum and the assessment practices in the classroom (Islam et al., 2021). These constraints may sometimes prevent teachers from developing the ideal assessment practices that align with their students' needs. Research suggests that reality and constraints need to be recognized, as they influence teachers' assessment practices (Tsgari and Vogt (2017).

Discussion :

The systematic review of empirical research highlights the need for teachers to develop language assessment literacy and the factors influencing this development. The reviewed studies suggest that different educational contexts require different LAL content areas, and teachers need in-service training to develop their LAL (Firoozi et al., 2019; Işık, 2021; Vogt et al., 2020; Zulaiha & Mulyono, 2020). The study findings also emphasize the importance of collaborative learning, where teachers share their experiences and receive professional support (Saputra et al., 2020; Xu, 2019; Yamtim & Wongwanich, 2014). However, the challenges and constraints in teachers' assessment practices need recognition, as they impact the assessment process (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). The study's findings provide crucial insights into developing language assessment literacy of teachers in different contexts. The training content should support teachers in developing EFL teachers' LAL by introducing them to the main principles of EFL/ESL assessment, equipping them with the important language assessment methods, and encouraging them to self-evaluate their assessment practices with the necessary support (Djoub, 2017). Additionally, teachers' experience and the results of assessment needs analysis studies needed to be considered in development programs (Tsagari and Vogt, 2017).

The reviewed studies' findings and the systematic review's methodology can inform policymakers and researchers about the training needs and methods for developing LAL. The studies provide evidence that different cultural and educational contexts require tailored needs and training that are contextually relevant (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). The systematic review methodology and findings can inform the development of training programs that target LAL development in different contexts using an evidence-based approach. Additionally, the findings encourage future research on the impact of LAL development on student learning outcomes.

Overall, the reviewed studies underscore the importance of developing language assessment literacy of teachers and highlight the factors and constraints impacting LAL development. Policymakers, researchers, and educators need to consider the context-specific needs, collaborative learning, and the challenges and constraints involved in assessment practices.

Conclusion :

Developing language assessment literacy of teachers is crucial to ensuring the quality of language assessment practices. This literature review highlighted the need for language teacher's LAL development, factors that impact their learning process, and constraints that affect their assessment practices. Results showed that in-service teacher training should address different areas of LAL. Teachers' experience, self-reflection, and involvement in collaborative learning communities were the effective factors in LAL development. However, limited time, resources, and inadequate institutional support can hinder the development of LAL of teachers. These findings have implications for developing effective LAL development programs and have opened opportunities for further research in this area. Future research should investigate the most effective ways to develop LAL of teachers in different teaching contexts and investigate the impact of teachers' LAL development on students' learning. This study is limited to my investigation and review, in addition to the online databases I surveyed and the keywords that I used in my search.

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