

LANGUAGE TEACHER ASSESSMENT LITERACY: A CURRENT REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Half of the language teachers' time is spent on assessing students' performance. Therefore, they should be literate to language assessment in terms of how to make a good test or knowing which method appropriate to assess their students' learning. Without having assessment literacy, they may not be able to help their students achieve the best results of their performance. For this reason, the present study attempts to examine language teacher assessment literacy and how it has been measured. Besides, suggestions and recommendations for language teachers regarding assessment literacy are discussed in this study. A literature review was employed to conduct this research. Findings suggest that language teachers need more training on language assessment due to their lack of knowledge of language assessment. Although some of them are assessment literate, they do not practice the knowledge in their classroom. This implies that the training they need could be on how to select appropriate assessments for their students, how to design a test, alternative assessments, and test specifications.

Keywords: assessment literacy, language teacher assessment literacy

ABSTRAK

Sebagian waktu pengajar bahasa digunakan untuk menilai kinerja siswa. Oleh karena itu, mereka harus paham tentang penilaian bahasa seperti bagaimana membuat tes yang baik atau mengetahui metode mana yang tepat untuk menilai pembelajaran. Tanpa literasi asesmen, mereka mungkin tidak dapat membantu siswanya mencapai hasil terbaik dari kinerja mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membahas literasi asesmen pengajar bahasa dan bagaimana mengukur literasi asesmen pengajar bahasa. Selain itu, saran dan rekomendasi untuk pengajar bahasa tentang literasi asesmen dibahas dalam penelitian ini. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan metode tinjauan pustaka. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pengajar bahasa membutuhkan lebih banyak pelatihan tentang asesmen bahasa karena kurangnya pengetahuan mereka tentang asesmen bahasa. Meskipun ada pengajar bahasa yang memahami asesmen, mereka tidak mempraktikkan pengetahuannya di kelas. Ini menyiratkan bahwa mereka mungkin memerlukan pelatihan tentang bagaimana memilih bentuk asesmen yang sesuai untuk siswa mereka, bagaimana merancang tes, asesmen alternatif, dan spesifikasi tes.

Kata Kunci: literasi asesmen, literasi asesmen pengajar bahasa

INTRODUCTION

Language teacher professional development thus far has been focusing on how to teach and how to assess learners' performance. The latter deals with language teacher assessment literacy (LTAL). LTAL is derived from assessment literacy (AL) which was then developed into teacher assessment literacy (TAL) and language teacher assessment literacy (LTAL).

In general, assessment literacy (AL) is defined as being knowledgeable of assessment principles (Popham, 2004; Stiggins, 2002). Stiggins (1995) points out that assessment literacy is being assessment literate which is specifically able to differentiate between reliable and unsound assessment. According to Coombe et al. (2012), AL consists of two areas: teacher assessment knowledge and teachers' perspectives on assessment knowledge. Therefore, teacher assessment

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literacy (TAL) underlines teachers' understanding of how to assess students based on sound assessment principles and how they perceive the knowledge of assessment.

Earlier studies on TAL indicate that it plays a significant role in students' performance or academic achievement, teaching, and learning process. Coombe et al. (2012) said that teachers' low level of assessment literacy makes them unable to help their students to perform better. Plake & Impara (1997) suggested that teachers need assessment skills due to their routine involvement in assessment scoring and administration; however, half of teacher education programs do not include assessment skills in their programs (Schafer, 1993).

Research conducted by Susuwele-Banda (2005) and Al-malki & Weir (2014) supported the importance of TAL pointing out that classrooms and teaching-learning materials are no longer valuable if teachers do not have classroom assessment knowledge to foster the learning process. A substantial study on TAL was conducted by Mellati & Khademi (2018) indicating that teachers will be able to enhance their instruction, to motivate their students to learn as well as to improve their students' performance by deploying appropriate assessment practices.

Considering the importance of TAL or LTAL, however, an article written by Aditomo (2019) complaining about the quality of national examination indicated teachers' low level of assessment literacy. He said "Belum lagi jika mutu soal-soalnya buruk, misalnya instruksinya multi-tafsir atau pilihan jawabannya bisa diperdebatkan atau malah keliru." (Not to mention that the test items were inadequate, e.g. multi-interpreted test instructions or debatable answer choices or completely incorrect). Multi-interpreted test instructions is a common problem in language assessment and indeed, test instructions play an important role as it may affect test reliability. Harmer (2001) underlined that test instructions, restricting a variety of the answers of a test, and test consistency increase the test reliability. Hence, Aditomo (2019) implicitly pointed out that the test makers, who

most probably are teachers, have low skills and knowledge of assessment and fail to perform prominent assessment practices.

Not only have teachers been reported to be assessment illiterate, but language teachers' assessment literacy (LTAL) has also been investigated, e.g. by Djoub (2017). His research has documented that teachers all around the world lacked assessment literacy evidenced by their classroom practices. They mostly assessed their students because of mark giving purposes instead of improving their learning. The complaint below taken from *kompasiana.com* (2015) may indicate a low level of language teacher assessment literacy.

"Penulis soal-soal bahasa Inggris kadang juga lupa fokus isi ujian. Orangtua siswa bahasa Inggris di kursusan saya kemarin datang untuk curhat pada saya. Ibu itu bilang, "Saya sedih, Pak. Si Kevin ini kan pintar bahasa Inggris. Selalu dapat 100. Nah, pada UAS kemarin Kevin dapat nilai 98. Bukan karena ia tidak paham bahasa Inggrisnya, tapi karena ia tidak tahu jawaban atas pertanyaannya. Masak pertanyaan bahasa Inggris seperti ini: What is the capital city of Denmark? Itu bukan menguji kemampuan berbahasa Inggris, tapi menguji pelajaran IPS!" (English test makers sometimes overlook the content of the test. One of the students' parents came to the language centre in which he took an English course and talked to me. She said, "I'm sad, sir. Kevin is very good at English. He has always got 100. Last summative test, he got 98. It's not because he didn't understand the English, but it's because he didn't know the answer to the question. Can you imagine the question was 'What is the capital city of Denmark?' That was not testing his English language, but it examined social studies!")

The two articles above might represent teachers and language teachers who are illiterate to assessment. Therefore, it is paramount to have always investigated

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TAL/LTAL. Besides research on LTAL is quite rare (Zulaiha et al., 2020a), the significance of assessment literacy has made this study possible to further review TAL, particularly LTAL, and the measurement of LTA. Moreover, suggestions and recommendations for language teachers regarding assessment literacy are discussed in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment, Language Assessment, and Literacy

Relevant literature review of language teacher assessment literacy (LTAL) may consist of assessment literacy (AL), language assessment literacy (LAL), teacher assessment literacy (TAL), and language teacher assessment literacy (LTAL). AL, according to Paterno (2001, as cited in Mertler, 2003, pp.10-11), is defined as:

“the possession of knowledge about the basic principles of assessment and evaluation practice which are the terminology of assessment concepts such as test, measurement, assessment, and evaluation, the development, and use of assessment methodologies and techniques in the classroom, familiarity with different tools and apparatus of language assessment, familiarity with standards of quality in classroom assessment...and familiarity with an alternative to traditional measurements of learning.”

AL also deals with abilities and familiarities of planning, administering, understanding, and applying the results of the assessment (Boyles, 2005; Stiggins, 1999; Stoyhoff & Chapelle, 2005, as cited in Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018). Concerning English language assessment, Popham (2009) underlined that AL includes knowledge on test reliability and validity, testing design of open-ended and closed-ended tasks, alternative assessments, including having the know-how of assessing English language learners.

Regarding LAL, Inbar-Lourie (2008), Pill & Harding (2013), and Stiggins (1999) (as cited in Coombe et al., 2020) define LAL as “a repertoire of competences, knowledge of using assessment methods, and applying suitable tools in an appropriate time that enables an individual to understand, assess, construct language tests, and analyze test data.” Inbar-Lourie (2013) explained that LAL constitutes teachers’ tools and procedures literacy to evaluate students’ language performance. Moreover, it examines teachers’ ability to give effective feedback to help students to set up their learning targets in the future. A description of LAL was also discussed in Inbar-Lourie’s study (2013b, as cited in Giraldo, 2018, pp.183-184). She suggests eight aspects of LAL:

1. Understanding of the social role of assessment and the responsibility of the language tester. Understanding the political (and) social forces involved, test power, and consequences.
2. Knowledge on how to write, administer, and analyze tests; report test results, and ensure test quality.
3. Understanding of large scale test data.
4. Proficiency in Language Classroom assessment.
5. Mastering language acquisition and learning theories and relating to them in the assessment process.
6. Matching assessment with language teaching approaches. Knowledge about current language teaching approaches and pedagogies.
7. Awareness of the dilemmas that underlie assessment: formative vs. summative; internal-external; validity and reliability issues particularly with reference to authentic language use.
8. LAL is individualized, the product of knowledge, experience, perceptions, and beliefs that language teachers bring to the teaching and assessment process (based on Scarino, 2013, as cited in Giraldo, 2018).

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Any teacher is expected to be assessment literate or to have assessment literacy called teacher assessment literacy (TAL). TAL includes teachers' knowledge and skills of basic principles of performing assessment practice and related activities such as testing, measurement, and evaluation (Stiggins, 1991; Webb, 2002; Mertler, 2003). TAL is also defined as teachers' ability to design and to conduct/to administer tests and assessments, to measure and to evaluate students' performance, and to make decisions regarding the assessment results (Mellati & Khademi, 2018). Concerning LTAL, Fulcher (2012, p.125) underlined that LTAL deals with:

“the knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardised and/or classroom based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice. The ability to place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order understand why practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals.”

Assessment Literacy Inventory (ALI)

Most of assessment literacy studies have involved quantitative method. It is due to the instruments or the inventory employing statistical data and psychometrics (Coombe et al., 2020). Since 1990s, there have been eight inventories developed to measure teacher assessment literacy or competency: Assessment Literacy Inventory, Assessment Practices Inventory, Assessment Self-Confidence Survey, Assessment in Vocational Classroom Questionnaire, Coombe et al. Language Testing in Asia, Measurement Literacy, the revised Assessment Literacy Inventory, and the Teacher Assessment Literacy Questionnaire (Coombe et al., 2020).

In this paper, only two inventories are slightly discussed.

Assessment Literacy Inventory (ALI) was initially developed in 1990 by The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Association (NEA), and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME). This inventory aimed to measure seven areas of assessment competency embedded in “Standards for Teacher Competence in the Educational Assessment of Students” (Plake & Impara, 1997; DeLuca et al., 2016). The seven competencies are:

1. Choosing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
2. Developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
3. Administering, scoring, interpreting the results of both externally produced and teacher-produced assessment methods.
4. Using assessment results when making decisions about individual students, planning instruction, developing curriculum, and improving schools.
5. Developing valid pupil grading procedures.
6. Communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators.
7. Recognizing unethical, illegal, and other appropriate methods and uses of assessment information.

Based on these seven competencies, Plake, Impara, and Fager (Deluca et al. 2016) developed a questionnaire called the Teacher Competencies Assessment Questionnaire (TCAQ). Each competency area consists of five multiple-choice test questions; thus, there are 35 multiple-choice test questions in this instrument. The first study employing TCAQ reported that 70 participants involved were less competent in particular skills of assessment namely interpreting, integrating, and communicating assessment results.

Stiggins (1999b, as cited in Mertler & Campbell, 2005) argued the standards

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developed by these three institutions (AFT, NEA, and NCME) did not represent real-life classroom situations which teachers and students experienced. He then proposed a list of competencies to measure assessment literacy covering:

1. Connecting assessments to clear purposes
2. Clarifying achievement expectations
3. Applying proper assessment methods
4. Developing quality assessment exercises and scoring criteria and sampling appropriately
5. Avoiding bias in assessment
6. Communicating effectively about student achievement
7. Using an assessment as an instructional intervention

In 2003, another inventory was drafted by Mertler and Campbell (Mertler & Campbell, 2005) to investigate undergraduate pre-service teachers' assessment literacy. The inventory was called Assessment Literacy Inventory (ALI). It consisted of 35 items and included five classroom-based scenarios describing teachers doing assessment practices.

Another inventory, Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment (COA) questionnaire was employed by Brown (2004) and his colleague to examine teachers' priority of four assessment objectives; teaching and learning improvement, school responsibility, student accountability, and assessment is immaterial.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study employed secondary or library research as it was conducted by reviewing relevant literature and collecting the data taken from related studies (Tavakoli, 2012). Previous studies on AL, TAL, and LTAL, for example, by Plake & Impara (1997), Stiggins (1999, as cited in Mertler & Campbell, 2005), Mertler (2003), Stiggins (2007), Popham (2009), Fulcher

(2012), Inbar-Lourie (2013), and DeLuca et al., (2016) were used as theoretical framework in this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Having reviewed relevant studies regarding assessment, language assessment, and language teacher assessment literacy, findings reveal that many language teachers need to have more training on language assessment because they have the knowledge but they do not practice it in the classroom. Some other teachers are indeed illiterate to assessment indicating they are less knowledgeable about how to assess their students' language performance.

Presumably, an example of assessment illiterate teachers was supported by a study conducted by Nurdiana (2019). It examined unreliable test instructions (as seen below) found in English tests.

Sample 1

Part 1. Agreements

- 1.....
- 2.....

Sample 2

Use wh-questions

Sample 3

Fill in the blanks with Present Simple or Present Continuous

Sample one, two, and three show unclear instructions. The test instruction in sample one was used in a grammar test. What might the test takers (learners) thought of was what they had to do with 'agreements' although they might have experienced that kind of instruction. Likewise, the test instruction in sample two and three could yield 'questions' instead of 'answers' to the test. In sample two, what the teacher expected the learners to do with the test was simply to make questions using what, how, why, who, where, or when. However, some words were missing in the instructions which could have affected the test

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reliability. It is a common test (instruction), yet we cannot assume that learners or test takers know what they have to do through the test instruction. Similarly, the test instruction of sample three was multi-interpreted. Consequently, we cannot blame the students if they fill in the blanks with 'present simple' or 'present continuous' as the test instruction told them to do so instead of 'changing the verbs in brackets with the present simple or present continuous'.

A study on the quality of an English test conducted by Akmal (2008) reported that it did not meet the criteria of a reliable test. It did not fulfill standardized test validity, reliability, level of difficulty nor discrimination power. Pramawati & Wardana (2016) carried out a community service on how to construct English tests due to their investigation on how English teachers wrote a test. They said that the test construction was not in line with language assessment theories and therefore, the teachers needed some training to improve their language assessment literacy.

Another research supporting language teacher assessment literacy was done by Sumaningsih (2015). This quantitative research aimed to investigate the quality of English test items administered for the Leaving Exam at SMP Samarinda. The quality of the test was indicated by item difficulty (p), discrimination (D), distracter effectiveness, validity, and reliability. Results showed that of 45 items, 19 (42.2%) must be dropped due to the poor p and 17 (37.8%) receive the low D. Analysis of p and D reveal that of 45 items, only 5 (11.1%) items are applicable, 21 (46.7%) need revision, and 19 (42.2%) should be dropped. The distracters are also poor, as 25 (55.6%) items have very poor distracters. Validity testing under the Product Moment formula achieved a low value (0.346) and reliability testing under KR-21 shows a fair value (0.650).

A broader investigation on language assessment literacy was carried out by Hakim & Saputra (2020) reporting that the English National Exam has more negative washback than positive impact. Pedagogically, the results

of the study recommended Indonesian education stakeholders to keep redesigning the existing English National Exam model to measure students' competence effectively and objectively. This may imply that teachers' and administrators' assessment illiteracy caused inaccurate results of student assessment and consequently, it hindered the students toward their maximum potential (Stiggins, 2001).

These studies show language teachers' or test makers' lack of assessment knowledge in terms of how to construct reliable and valid tests based on language assessment theories and theoretical frameworks of language assessment literacy. It has proven prior research indicating the significance of assessment literacy such as the one conducted by Yamtim & Wongwanich (2014) which documented that teachers had a low level of assessment literacy. Another supporting study was done by Trisanti (2018) whose research findings suggested that the teachers involved in her study had less knowledge of how to make test specifications and how to design appropriate test types.

Other previous studies confirming language teacher assessment illiteracy were carried out by Coombe et al. (2019) underlining that English teachers in the Middle East and North Africa are mostly illiterate to assessment and the level of assessment literacy of teachers all over the world should be the main concern of language assessment specialist. In China, a study on university English teachers' assessment literacy, conducted by Xu and Brown (2017), revealed that the university teachers lacked LAL.

Due to the results of previous research indicating language teacher assessment illiteracy, studies by Janatifar & Marandi (2018) and Zulaiha & Mulyono (2020b) have confirmed that language teachers require more training on language assessment, particularly on hands-on skills-based instruction in language assessment, the ability to select tests for use, the ability to develop test specifications, and the ability to develop test tasks and items.

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Coombe et al. (2020) offer some suggestions and recommendation for language teacher assessment literacy improvement:

1. A periodical training on language assessment should be given to help teachers improve further.
2. Training on language assessment literacy should be part of teachers' qualifications and requirements.
3. The content of the training should be up-to-date based on the latest studies on language assessment.
4. LTAL should be enhanced by taking into account various teaching and learning context.

In line with previous studies on assessment literacy, particularly English language teacher assessment literacy, and Coombe et al.'s suggestions/recommendations (2020), the following indicators might represent what should be improved and therefore what should be covered on language assessment training in order to be more literate to language assessment.

1. Language teachers should be able to choose or to select an appropriate assessment based on the students' learning needs.
2. They should be able to design assessment which can measure students' language performance accurately.
3. They should be able to conduct or to administer the assessment well.
4. They should be able to interpret assessment results to improve the students' learning.
5. They should have the ability to make decisions based on assessment results to help the students to set their future learning.
6. They should have the ability to give valuable feedback based on assessment results.
7. When designing an assessment, they should be able to develop test/assessment specifications.

8. They should have knowledge of test or assessment reliability and validity.
9. They should have knowledge of alternative assessments and are able to select the appropriate one(s) based on the objectives of the assessment.
10. They should have the ability to develop a scoring rubric for assessment tasks.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, although assessment literacy plays a significant role in language teachers' assessment practices, some language teachers have been reported to be less knowledgeable of language assessment. Some others are assessment literate, yet they do not practice language assessment knowledge in their classrooms. Consequently, they should be given more training on language assessment to maximize their performance of assessing their students so that they can reach their full potential in language learning. Further research on language teacher assessment literacy, particularly on Indonesian foreign language teachers are very much needed to examine how literate or illiterate they are to language assessment.

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