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LITERACY: BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE IN ESL
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DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1057003**This work is licensed under** [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

The study of language assessment literacy (LAL) has gained considerable momentum in recent years. As an integral component of teaching and learning, LAL plays an important role in fostering students' academic success. However, despite its importance, research highlight that many English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers feel ill-prepared and face significant challenges in applying LAL principles effectively in their practices. This inadequacy contributes to persistent gaps in the quality of language learning and underscores the pressing need for stronger alignment between theoretical frameworks and practical applications. Therefore, this article aims to explore the conceptual foundations of LAL, tracing its evolutions, and delving into its practical applications in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching context. Its identifies and addresses critical challenges, including cultural diversity, assessment overload, and inadequate teacher training, which impede effective language assessment practices. To bridge these gaps, the article proposes a comprehensive framework to support ESL teachers in integrating LAL principles into their teaching practices. The discussion concludes with actionable recommendations for educators, practical implications for researchers, and strategic policy suggestions to enhance LAL in ESL education. By addressing the complexities of assessment literacy, this article contributes to the ongoing efforts to improve language assessment practices, and ultimately, elevate the quality of ESL education.

Keywords:

Challenges, Diversity, ESL Teachers, Language Assessment Literacy, Strategies

Introduction

The need for language assessment literacy (LAL) among ESL teachers has become increasingly significant due to the evolving educational landscape. This transformation requires teachers' roles and responsibilities to go beyond traditional teaching and learning practice, where teachers should focus on both interactive instructional strategies and evaluating students' language skills. Assessment literacy allows teachers to create a meaningful educational environment to elevate students' performance. Therefore, teachers must robustly understand assessment practices to navigate the complexities of evaluating students' language abilities, continuous formative and summative assessment, and curriculum alignment (Coombe et al., 2020). Given that assessment literacy is the core of effective teaching and learning, Popham (2004) has highlighted the significance of assessment literacy by referring to illiteracy as professional suicide for teachers. Studies have shown a significant interest in assessment literacy (AL), which has expanded to language assessment literacy (LAL) in the educational landscape. Moreover, advanced LAL teachers can exhibit effective assessment practices and make educated decisions about their instructional strategies, modify their teaching methods, and provide significant feedback to students. Constructive feedback is essential in promoting a student-centered approach to language instruction, where students engage actively in their classroom learning. This effective method fosters student motivation and improves comprehension of the taught language (Brookhart, 2007). Therefore, teacher proficiency in conducting language assessments necessitates their possession of assessment expertise. This empowerment can enhance student advancement and teachers' instructional practices, ensuring that assessment fosters significant learning instead of merely functioning as performance indicators.

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is undeniably challenging as teachers need to adapt to current changes in the curriculum. The landscape of student assessment has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from traditional centralized examinations to a more dynamic, classroom-based approach. Amid this transition, teachers adapt to new assessment methods and are expected to refine their ability to evaluate students' performance effectively. This includes being familiar with formative and summative assessments and effectively evaluating students' progress and language proficiency. Furthermore, with the rapidly changing educational landscape, teachers must have the necessary skills to design culturally responsive assessments tailored to diverse students' needs. Research has consistently shown that assessment literacy is beyond the technical skills of test design and administration (Scarino, 2013; Xu & Brown, 2016). Instead, it emphasized a broader understanding of how assessments guide instruction, facilitate learning, and improve educational achievements. This shift in perspective is critical in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, where rigid, standardized assessments often fail to capture the complexities of language acquisition (Fulcher, 2012; Harding & Kremmel, 2016).

Many studies have explored the LAL concepts and components to understand the LAL principles. Kremmel and Harding (2019) propose a comprehensive model that outlines nine LAL components, including developing and administering language assessment which is closely aligned with Taylor (2013). Taylor suggested that LAL should encompass eight dimensions that consist of 1) knowledge of theory, 2) technical skills, 3) principles, and concepts, 4) language pedagogy, 5) sociocultural values, 6) local practices, 7) personal beliefs/attitudes, and 8) score and decision making. In a comprehensive analysis of LAL, Weng & Shen (2022) provide various conceptualizations of LAL that have been developed and identify five major themes that reflect LAL development. The key themes include Language Teachers' LAL level, factors influencing LAL, training needs, language assessment training courses, and the role of reflection in LAL development. The empirical studies on teachers' LAL reveal that many teachers have insufficient LAL, both theoretical underpinnings of LAL, and best language assessment practices. Most educators possess limited proficiency in assessment practice. (Wang & Shen, 2020). Similarly, a recent empirical study on exploring female EFL teachers' language assessment literacy by Kartikawati (2023) also highlighted the challenges female teachers face in applying assessment practice. Despite the growing recognition of language assessment literacy (LAL) as an essential competence for educators, significant challenges persist in translating theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice. Research highlights several key barriers, including limited professional development opportunities (Inbar-Lourie, 2017), heavy reliance on high-stakes standardized tests (Davison & Leung, 2009), and time and resource constraints that hinder the implementation of more dynamic, formative, and authentic assessment approaches (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014).

Teachers may struggle to integrate assessment effectively into their instructional practices without adequate support, resulting in missed opportunities to foster deeper student engagement and learning. Therefore, the concept of language assessment literacy needs to be reviewed with a more integrative and contextual approach to align with real ESL learning needs. Given these complexities, it is imperative to reconceptualize language assessment literacy through a more integrative and contextualized lens, ensuring that it aligns with the realities of ESL teaching and learning. Recognizing the essential of understanding theoretical foundations in assessment literacy, Xu & Brown (2016) argue that the traditional definition of assessment literacy often overlooked the relationship between teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices. Xu and Brown's (2016) reconceptualization of assessment literacy emphasizes several key dimensions: knowledge of assessment principles, practical skills, beliefs and attitudes, contextual factors, and reflective practice. Instead of treating assessment as a static, isolated component of instruction, it should be viewed as an embedded, reflective practice that informs and enhances pedagogy. By embracing a broader perspective that acknowledges the socio-cultural dimensions of assessment (Shohamy, 2001) and the role of teachers in adapting assessment to classroom realities, educators can develop a more holistic and meaningful approach to language assessment.

Therefore, a redefined framework for language assessment literacy should extend beyond theoretical discussions and focus on bridging research with classroom practice, ultimately promoting more effective and equitable assessment methods in ESL education (Weng & Shen, 2022). Aligning the foundational principles and classroom applications allows teachers to design assessments that evaluate language skills and enhance learning experiences. It is a critical tool for fostering reflective teaching practices, promoting student engagement, and addressing the broader goals of communicative competence. Furthermore, a study that focuses

on applying the LAL theory to practice can provide fruitful insight into understanding the LAL concepts and their implementations. Thus, this study aims to bridge the gap between the LAL theories and their practices to navigate the challenges teachers face in implementing the LAL.

Moreover, redefining LAL within the ESL context is crucial for fostering more meaningful and impactful assessment practices. To address this need, this article examines the foundational principles of LAL, explores the key barriers educators face, and proposes practical strategies for integrating LAL into classroom instruction. This discussion underscores the necessity of moving beyond traditional assessment frameworks toward a modern educational landscape by bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and effective classroom application. Ultimately, strengthening LAL is essential for developing a language assessment system that is holistic, effective, and responsive to the evolving demands of 21st-century language learning. Thus, this article aims to comprehensively explore:

- 1) Foundational principles of Language Assessment Literacy.
- 2) Challenges in implementing LAL in ESL education.
- 3) Strategies for enhancing the integration of LAL into practice.

Literature Review

Foundational Principles of Language Assessment Literacy

Over the years, the Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) concept has evolved, reflecting a broadening scope that incorporates theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and sociocultural considerations in language assessment (Inbar-Lourie, 2008, 2013; Taylor, 2013). Scholars have attempted to have different views on LAL's levels, components, and models. As mentioned above, LAL is defined in a broader concept based on its core definition of assessment literacy. As an extension of general assessment literacy, LAL incorporates specialized dimensions tailored to the complexities of language learning, such as the interplay of linguistic, sociocultural, and ethical factors. Understanding these foundational principles is essential for educators aiming to design and implement valid and meaningful assessments. The concept of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) encompasses several key dimensions, reflecting its multifaceted nature in language education. Scholars have identified distinct yet interrelated components that shape teachers' understanding and application of assessment principles (Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2013; Taylor, 2013). Initially conceptualized as technical expertise in test design and interpretation (Davies, 2008), LAL has expanded to encompass a critical understanding of assessment's role within educational, ethical, and policy contexts (Fulcher, 2012). Fulcher (2012), in his influential expanded definition of LAL, proposes a three-tier hierarchical model of LAL encompassing the knowledge, skills, and abilities required by teachers and the ability to practice assessment knowledge within a broader context, including historical, social, political, and philosophical frameworks, as illustrated in Figure 1. This framework allows educators to comprehensively understand the essential knowledge, skills, and principles language teachers need to evaluate students' learning outcomes effectively.

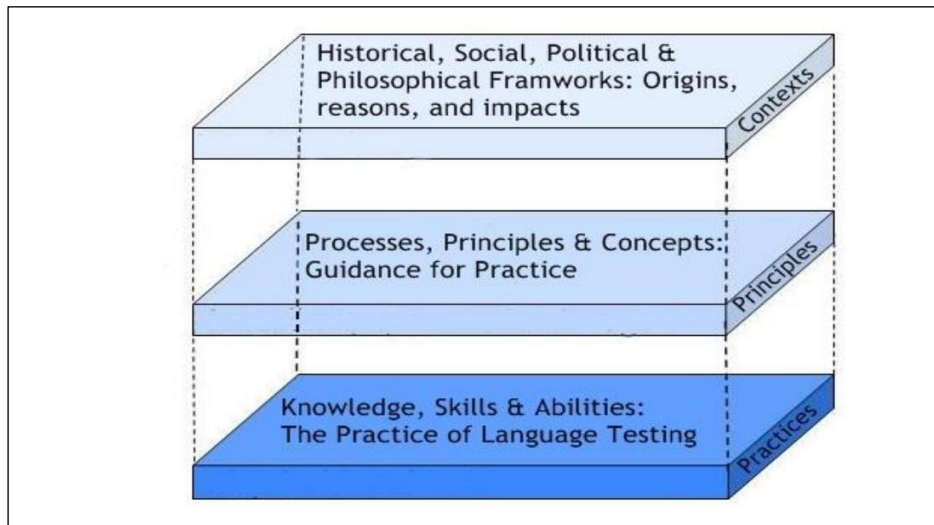


Figure 1: An Expanded Definition of LAL (Fulcher,2012)

In addition to that, Taylor (2013) profiles LAL into four stakeholder groups: 1) test writers, 2) classroom teachers, 3) university administrators, and 4) professional language testers. Taylor suggested that understanding LAL according to their profiles can help improve LAL according to their needs. Xu and Brown (2016) proposed a comprehensive framework that represents a significant advancement in understanding LAL's multidimensional and contextual dynamic nature. From another perspective, Butler et al. (2021) focused more on the learners' approach, which provides a balanced understanding of LAL discourse. By engaging students in assessment practices, teachers can gain effectiveness and fairness in evaluating their overall performance.

Consequently, the theoretical perspectives on the language assessment literacy concept can be systematically categorized into several fundamental dimensions. These dimensions include:

Technical Dimension

The technical dimension of LAL comprises the knowledge and skills required to create psychometrically sound assessments. This refers to the fundamental skills required to design, administer, and interpret language assessments, including test construction, scoring, validation, and statistical analysis (Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012). This includes understanding key concepts of validity, where teachers must create assessments that measure what they intended to measure (Fulcher, 2012). Taylor (2013) suggested that assessment results should maintain consistency as they involve distinct LAL profiles. A strong technical foundation enables teachers to develop reliable and valid assessments that accurately measure students' language proficiency. These technical principles form the foundation of LAL, guiding teachers in creating robust and equitable assessments.

Theoretical Dimension

The theoretical dimension encompasses knowledge of language assessment theories, measurement principles, and testing models (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Taylor, 2013). Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of assessment helps educators align their practices with validity, reliability, and fairness while making informed decisions about assessment design and

interpretation. Language assessment literacy encompasses several critical components that inform effective assessment design. Language constructs, such as grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and discourse competence, serve as the foundation for evaluating learners' proficiency and shaping assessment tasks (Malone, 2013). Additionally, the integration of language skills plays a vital role, as reading, writing, speaking, and listening are interdependent and should be assessed in ways that reflect their natural use in communication (Taylor, 2013). Furthermore, ensuring alignment with international standards is essential for maintaining consistency and validity in assessment practices. Frameworks like the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) provide global benchmarks that guide proficiency levels and enable standardized interpretations of language competence across diverse educational contexts (Vogt et al., 2024). Educators can design comprehensive, equitable, and pedagogically meaningful assessments by incorporating these elements. By grounding their practices in these theoretical principles, educators can ensure that their assessments align with the broader language learning goals.

Cultural and Ethical Dimension

Language assessment does not operate in isolation; it is embedded within sociocultural, political, and ethical frameworks (Fulcher, 2012; Taylor, 2013). Teachers must consider issues of test fairness, bias, social consequences, and ethical responsibilities in assessment practices, particularly in multilingual and diverse learning contexts (Shohamy, 2001). Language assessments are not isolated practices; rather, they are deeply embedded within the social, cultural, and ethical contexts in which they are administered. The sociocultural dimension of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) emphasizes the importance of designing assessments that are inclusive, ethical, and responsive to diverse learners' needs. One key aspect is the need to account for diversity by creating culturally and linguistically inclusive assessments, ensuring that test content is relevant and engaging for students from different backgrounds (Sheehan & Munro, 2019). Additionally, ethical considerations play a crucial role in assessment practices. This includes ensuring transparency in assessment procedures, minimizing test anxiety, and preventing discriminatory practices. Ethical LAL ensures that assessments function as instruments for learning and progress rather than as barriers that hinder student development (Taylor, 2013). By integrating these principles, educators can foster fair, equitable, and meaningful assessment experiences that support student learning and success.

Practical Dimension

Finally, the practical dimension bridges theory and application, equipping teachers with the skills to implement assessments effectively. Language assessments are deeply embedded within the social, cultural, and ethical contexts in which they are implemented, emphasizing the need for a sociocultural perspective in Language Assessment Literacy (LAL). A key consideration in this dimension is accounting for diversity, ensuring that assessments are inclusive of learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Assessments should incorporate culturally relevant content to enhance engagement and mitigate potential biases that could disadvantage certain learner groups (Sheehan & Munro, 2019). Furthermore, ethical considerations are integral to assessment design and administration, necessitating practices that promote transparency, fairness, and test validity. This includes addressing issues such as minimizing test anxiety, ensuring accessibility, and avoiding discriminatory practices that may disproportionately affect marginalized students (Taylor, 2013). Ethical LAL underscores the importance of positioning assessments as learning and development tools rather than mere gatekeeping mechanisms. By integrating sociocultural and ethical principles into assessment

practices, educators can foster fair, equitable, and contextually appropriate assessments that support both student achievement and educational inclusivity. Beyond theoretical and technical aspects, teachers must be able to apply assessment principles in real classroom settings (Davison & Leung, 2009). This dimension includes skills such as providing formative feedback, implementing alternative assessments, and integrating assessment with instruction to enhance student learning (Scarino, 2013). Understanding these foundational principles of LAL provides a theoretical framework for teachers by offering a comprehensive overview of the LAL concept. However, practical implementation often presents significant challenges, particularly in ESL contexts. The next section explores the barriers that educators face in applying LAL principles in their teaching practices, highlighting the gap between theory and practice.

Challenges and Barriers to Implementing Language Assessment Literacy

While the foundational principles of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) offer a robust framework for designing and implementing effective assessments, the practical application of these principles in ESL contexts often presents significant challenges. Numerous studies have investigated the level of LAL among teachers (Alkharusi et.al., 2011; Mohammadkhah et.al., 2020; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017; Kartikawati, 2023). The findings of the study found that most of the educators had insufficient LAL. For instance, a study by Sultana (2019) indicates that EFL teachers experienced limited proficiency in language assessment. This finding reported that teachers have limited academic knowledge, professional training, and expertise in designing language tests. These barriers hindered their performance in performing language assessments. Consequently, the barriers teachers face are categorized into several key aspects from limitations in teacher preparation, resource constraints, cultural complexities, and institutional pressures, which collectively hinder educators' ability to fully integrate LAL into their practice.

Insufficient Teacher Training and Professional Development

One of the most challenging barriers to LAL implementation is the lack of adequate training for educators. Many teacher preparation programs prioritize general pedagogical skills over specialized competencies such as assessment literacy (Sheehan & Munro, 2019). Consequently, teachers often feel unprepared and experience weak assessment knowledge during the teaching and learning process. According to Ng et al. (2018), assessment literacy is the key component to assist teachers in designing valid, reliable, and fair assessments by highlighting that failure to know about assessment literacy may impede students' performance. Furthermore, Volante and Fazio (2007), in their research on exploring the levels of teacher assessment literacy, showed that teachers still feel unconfident in performing assessments as they are more familiar with the traditional assessment method. This finding shows that teachers received inadequate assessment training and insufficient professional development opportunities focusing on LAL, particularly in resource-constrained regions. This gap leaves teachers ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of language assessment in diverse classrooms.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

ESL classrooms are inherently diverse, with learners bringing a wide range of linguistic backgrounds, cultural experiences, and prior educational exposures. While this diversity enriches the learning environment by fostering multilingual competencies and cross-cultural exchanges, it also presents significant challenges in assessment design and implementation (Shohamy, 2001; McNamara & Roever, 2006). One of the primary concerns is that

standardized assessments often fail to account for the cultural and linguistic nuances that shape students' language use and comprehension. For instance, certain language constructs, idiomatic expressions, or test formats may privilege learners from specific cultural backgrounds while disadvantaging others, thereby affecting test fairness and validity (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Fulcher, 2012). Additionally, many assessments assume homogeneous linguistic proficiency development, disregarding how multilingual learners acquire and apply language skills differently depending on their first language (L1) influence, literacy exposure, and social interactions (Davies, 2008). This misalignment between assessment frameworks and learner diversity can lead to inequitable outcomes, particularly for students whose linguistic repertoires do not conform to the standardized norms set by traditional assessment models. As a result, scholars advocate for more dynamic, formative, and culturally responsive assessment approaches that acknowledge linguistic variation and integrate alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, peer assessments, and task-based assessments (Scarino, 2013; Shohamy, 2018). By adopting inclusive assessment practices, educators can ensure that language assessments accurately measure learners' abilities while promoting fairness, equity, and meaningful learning experiences in diverse ESL contexts.

Overemphasis on Summative Assessments

Institutional pressures to prioritize summative assessments, such as standardized exams, often overshadow the role of formative assessments in supporting learning. In many educational systems, high-stakes testing drives instructional practices, leaving little room for the iterative feedback and self-regulation that formative assessments provide (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This imbalance limits opportunities for meaningful learning and undermines the principles of LAL, which advocate for a holistic approach to assessment.

Institutional pressures to prioritize summative assessments, such as standardized exams, often overshadow the role of formative assessments in supporting student learning and development. In many educational systems, particularly those with exam-oriented cultures, high-stakes testing serves as the primary determinant of academic success, driving instructional practices and shaping curriculum design in ways that prioritize test-taking skills over deeper cognitive engagement (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Stiggins, 2002). This heavy reliance on summative assessments leaves little room for iterative feedback, self-regulated learning, and formative assessment strategies that are essential for monitoring progress and fostering learner autonomy (Carless, 2011).

The imbalance between summative and formative assessments is evident in various local and international educational contexts. Studies have highlighted that teachers often struggle to implement formative assessment due to policy-driven expectations emphasizing high-stakes national exams (Sultana, 2019 & Box et.al., 2015). Teachers report time constraints, lack of professional training, and pressure to meet examination targets as barriers to integrating formative assessment effectively (Rauf et al., 2020). Similarly, in China and Hong Kong, the emphasis on public examinations in secondary and tertiary education has created a teaching-to-the-test culture, limiting the adoption of formative practices that encourage self-assessment, peer assessment, and process-oriented learning (Davison & Leung, 2009; Lam, 2019). This overemphasis on summative assessments limits opportunities for meaningful learning and undermines the principles of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL), which advocate for a balanced and holistic approach to assessment (Fulcher, 2012). Effective LAL requires teachers to be competent in both summative and formative assessment strategies, ensuring that

assessments inform instruction, support student growth, and promote equitable learning experiences (Inbar-Lourie, 2013). Without proper institutional support and policy alignment, formative assessment will remain underutilized, depriving students of the immediate feedback and metacognitive skills necessary for long-term academic success. Therefore, educational policymakers must reconsider assessment priorities, ensuring that assessment for learning (AfL) is recognized, valued, and systematically embedded within teaching and learning frameworks at both local and global levels.

Resource and Time Constraints

Designing and implementing high-quality assessments requires significant time and resources, which are often scarce in ESL teaching contexts. Teachers face heavy workloads, leaving limited time for reflective practices or the development of innovative assessment tools (Vogt et al., 2024). Additionally, resource constraints, such as lack of access to digital tools or professional development materials, further exacerbate these challenges, particularly in underfunded schools. Designing and implementing high-quality language assessments requires substantial time, effort, and resources, which are often limited in ESL teaching contexts. Teachers frequently juggle heavy workloads, including lesson planning, classroom instruction, administrative responsibilities, and student assessments, leaving little time for reflective practices or the development of innovative and contextualized assessment tools (Vogt et al., 2024). In many settings, particularly in underfunded schools, educators struggle with insufficient access to professional development, digital tools, and up-to-date assessment frameworks, which hinders their ability to implement effective and equitable assessments (Rahman et al., 2019).

The lack of institutional support and training opportunities further exacerbates the issue, as many pre-service and in-service ESL teachers receive minimal exposure to assessment literacy in their education programs (Fulcher, 2012; Lam, 2019). Studies in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian contexts indicate that while teachers recognize the importance of formative and alternative assessments, they often lack the technical expertise, pedagogical guidance, and resources to implement them effectively (Tengku Nor Rizan, 2016; Rauf et al., 2020). Similarly, in Hong Kong and China, research highlights how teachers' assessment literacy is constrained by rigid curricular demands and standardized testing pressures, leaving little room for creative, student-centered assessments (Davison & Leung, 2009; Lam, 2019).

Another critical issue is the digital divide, where some schools, particularly in rural or low-income areas, lack access to technological resources that could facilitate more efficient, adaptive, and formative assessment practices (Rahimi & Ebrahimi, 2015). The absence of sufficient digital infrastructure, assessment platforms, and training in technology-enhanced assessment further widens the gap between theoretical best practices and practical realities in classrooms. As a result, many ESL teachers resort to traditional, paper-based summative assessments, which may not fully capture students' language proficiency, communicative competence, or critical thinking skills (Scarino, 2013).

To address these challenges, policymakers, school administrators, and professional development providers must invest in capacity-building initiatives that equip teachers with practical strategies, technological resources, and ongoing support to enhance assessment literacy. By reducing teacher workload, providing structured professional learning, and

ensuring equitable access to assessment resources, educators can implement assessments that are meaningful, valid, and conducive to student learning in diverse ESL contexts.

Limited Support for Reflective Practices

Reflective practices are integral to the successful application of LAL, enabling teachers to evaluate and refine their assessment strategies. However, many educators lack the support structures—such as collaborative professional learning communities or mentoring programs—that facilitate these practices. Without regular opportunities for reflection and feedback, the gap between theoretical principles and classroom implementation persists.

Addressing these challenges requires a proactive approach that equips teachers with the tools, resources, and strategies to overcome barriers and enhance their assessment practices. The next section explores actionable strategies for bridging the gap between theory and practice, focusing on professional development, contextual relevance, and reflective practices.

Reflective practices are fundamental to the successful application of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL), enabling teachers to critically evaluate and refine their assessment strategies. However, many educators face structural and institutional barriers that hinder their ability to engage in systematic reflection. One of the key challenges is the lack of support structures, such as collaborative professional learning communities, mentoring programs, and dedicated time for reflection. Without structured opportunities for feedback and collegial discussion, teachers may struggle to bridge the gap between theoretical principles and practical classroom implementation (Lam, 2019). A growing body of research emphasizes that effective professional development is critical for fostering teachers' assessment literacy and enhancing their ability to apply assessment knowledge in real-world teaching contexts (Koh, 2011; Popham, 2011). In many ESL/EFL teaching environments, professional learning is often fragmentary, with assessment literacy training offered as short-term workshops rather than being integrated into teacher education programs (Inbar-Lourie, 2013). Consequently, teachers may not receive the sustained support necessary to develop confidence and expertise in assessment. This issue is further compounded by examination-driven education systems, where teachers prioritize test preparation over formative assessment practices, limiting opportunities for self-reflection and iterative improvement (Davison & Hamp-Lyons, 2010).

The disconnection between assessment theory and practice has also been identified as a critical challenge in language assessment training. Studies in Hong Kong and China, for instance, have found that pre-service teachers often struggle to apply assessment principles during their practicum, as they are expected to conform to institutional norms that emphasize summative testing over formative strategies (Gu, 2014). Similarly, in Malaysia, research indicates that teachers frequently lack the autonomy or institutional support to experiment with alternative assessment techniques, such as peer assessment, self-assessment, and portfolio-based assessment (Rauf et al., 2020). To address these challenges, a proactive and multi-dimensional approach is required. First, teacher education programs must integrate reflective assessment practices into their curricula, ensuring that assessment literacy training includes opportunities for experiential learning, guided reflections, and classroom-based assessment projects (Fulcher, 2012). Second, ongoing professional development and mentorship programs should be established to support both pre-service and in-service teachers in applying LAL concepts in authentic teaching settings. Collaborative communities of practice can provide a structured platform for teachers to share experiences, exchange strategies, and receive constructive

feedback (Lee & Coniam, 2013). Finally, policymakers and school administrators must restructure assessment policies to promote a balanced approach between formative and summative assessment, ensuring that teachers have the time, resources, and institutional backing to engage in meaningful reflective practices (Berry, 2011).

By implementing these reforms, educators can bridge the gap between assessment theory and practice, fostering a culture of continuous improvement that enhances both teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Strengthening reflective assessment practices within LAL frameworks will ensure that teachers are not only assessment literate but also empowered to use assessments as transformative tools for learning.

Strategies for Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice in Language Assessment Literacy

To address the challenges associated with implementing Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) in ESL contexts, it is essential to adopt strategies that bridge the gap between theoretical principles and practical applications. These strategies should empower educators by providing professional development opportunities, fostering contextually relevant practices, and encouraging reflective approaches to assessment. Below are three key strategies for enhancing LAL and ensuring its effective implementation.

Professional Development and Training

Professional development plays a critical role in equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, and principles necessary for effective language assessment practices. Given the increasing emphasis on assessment-driven education systems, teachers must be adequately prepared to design, implement, and interpret assessments that align with pedagogical objectives, fairness, and reliability (Fulcher, 2012; Taylor, 2013). One essential aspect of professional development is the integration of LAL into teacher education programs, ensuring that pre-service teachers receive comprehensive training in foundational concepts such as validity, reliability, fairness, and ethical considerations in assessment (Inbar-Lourie, 2013). Research suggests that many teacher training programs provide minimal exposure to assessment literacy, often treating it as an optional or peripheral component, which leaves educators underprepared to implement effective assessment strategies in real classrooms (Koh, 2011; Lam, 2019). Therefore, embedding LAL as a core element of teacher education curricula is crucial in developing teachers' assessment competence and confidence. Beyond initial teacher education, ongoing professional learning opportunities are essential to keep teachers informed about emerging assessment challenges, technological advancements, and evolving best practices. In-service teachers benefit from access to workshops, webinars, and collaborative learning communities, where they can engage in peer discussions, hands-on training, and reflective practices (Sheehan & Munro, 2019). In Malaysia, for instance, studies have shown that teachers often feel unprepared to implement alternative assessments, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and performance-based evaluations, due to a lack of continuous professional training and institutional support (Tengku Nor Rizan, 2016; Rauf et al., 2020). Similarly, research in Hong Kong and China highlights that teachers struggle with the practical application of assessment theories due to the exam-oriented nature of the education system, which prioritizes standardized testing over formative assessment approaches (Davison & Leung, 2009; Lam, 2019). Therefore, providing structured and ongoing professional development programs is essential in fostering assessment literacy and ensuring that teachers are equipped to adapt to contemporary assessment demands.

Another important aspect of professional development is the contextualization of training content to ensure its relevance to teachers' daily practices. Research suggests that professional learning programs should include real-world scenarios, case studies, and classroom simulations, allowing teachers to apply theoretical knowledge to authentic assessment challenges (Scarino, 2013). For example, in settings where digital tools are increasingly integrated into classroom assessment, training should focus on technology-enhanced assessments, automated feedback tools, and adaptive learning platforms (Rahimi & Ebrahimi, 2015; Vogt et al., 2024). Without practical and context-specific training, teachers may struggle to implement innovative assessment practices effectively, particularly in under-resourced schools or regions with limited access to technology (Rahman et al., 2019). By ensuring that professional development programs are theoretically grounded, practically relevant, and contextually adaptable, educators can develop the necessary expertise to implement high-quality, equitable, and meaningful assessments in diverse learning environments.

In summary, professional development in LAL must be structured, continuous, and relevant to teachers' practical needs. Integrating LAL into teacher education, providing ongoing professional learning opportunities, and contextualizing training content will enable teachers to become more proficient in assessment design, interpretation, and implementation. This, in turn, enhances student learning outcomes, promotes fair assessment practices, and bridges the gap between assessment theory and classroom realities. Therefore, policymakers, school leaders, and professional development providers must collaborate to ensure that teachers receive the necessary support to enhance their LAL competencies, fostering a more reflective, informed, and assessment-literate teaching workforce.

Ensuring Contextual Relevance

Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) practices must align with the specific needs of ESL learners and the diverse educational environments in which they are taught. Given the linguistic and cultural diversity in ESL classrooms, assessments should be contextually relevant to ensure fairness, validity, and engagement. One essential strategy is the development of culturally responsive assessments, where teachers design assessment tasks that reflect the backgrounds, experiences, and linguistic repertoires of their students. This involves selecting materials that are meaningful and relatable to learners while ensuring that cultural biases are minimized in test content and scoring criteria (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Vogt et al., 2024). In Malaysia, for example, studies have shown that learners from multilingual backgrounds perform better on language assessments when test items are contextually appropriate and align with their linguistic experiences (Rauf et al., 2020). Another key strategy is adapting assessments to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which provides standardized descriptors for language proficiency levels. The CEFR framework ensures alignment between assessments and learning objectives, facilitating comparability across different instructional contexts (Taylor, 2013). In countries like Hong Kong and Malaysia, the integration of CEFR-aligned assessments has been shown to enhance transparency in language learning progression and support curriculum consistency (Rahman et al., 2019; Lam, 2019). However, implementing CEFR-based assessments requires teachers to develop strong assessment literacy to interpret proficiency descriptors accurately and apply them effectively in classroom-based assessments (Fulcher, 2012).

Additionally, incorporating real-world tasks in assessment design enhances the practical applicability of language skills, ensuring that students can demonstrate proficiency in meaningful communicative contexts. Authentic assessments, such as role plays, collaborative problem-solving tasks, and project-based evaluations, provide students with opportunities to use language in interactive, functional, and task-based settings (Carless, 2011). Studies in Singapore and China have found that task-based assessments improve students' engagement and motivation, as they mirror real-life language use rather than relying solely on standardized written exams (Davison & Leung, 2009). Similarly, in Malaysian secondary schools, research suggests that performance-based assessments foster higher-order thinking skills and communicative competence, making them more effective in measuring actual language use compared to traditional summative tests (Rauf et al., 2020).

To ensure effective implementation of contextually relevant LAL practices, teacher training programs and professional development initiatives should emphasize the importance of culturally responsive assessments, CEFR alignment, and authentic assessment techniques. By incorporating these strategies, educators can create equitable, engaging, and meaningful assessments for ESL learners, ultimately enhancing their language learning experience and overall proficiency development.

Promoting Reflective Practices

Reflection plays a crucial role in ensuring that assessment practices remain adaptive, effective, and responsive to learners' needs. Engaging in systematic reflective practices allows teachers to evaluate the success of their assessments, identify areas for improvement, and refine their approaches to align with best practices in Language Assessment Literacy (LAL). One important strategy is encouraging self-assessment, where teachers critically reflect on their understanding of LAL principles and assess how effectively they apply them in their classrooms (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Research suggests that self-assessment strengthens teachers' metacognitive awareness of their assessment practices and helps them identify gaps in their knowledge and skills, enabling continuous professional growth (Fulcher, 2012). In Malaysia, studies have shown that teachers who engage in reflective self-assessment develop a greater awareness of the alignment between their assessment methods and student learning outcomes (Rauf et al., 2020).

Another key approach to enhancing reflective assessment practices is fostering peer collaboration. Engaging in collaborative discussions, peer observations, and structured feedback sessions allows teachers to gain fresh perspectives on their assessment strategies while identifying best practices that can be adapted to their own teaching contexts (Inbar-Lourie, 2008). Collaborative professional learning communities promote knowledge-sharing and provide teachers with a support system, helping them navigate assessment challenges in diverse classroom settings (Scarino, 2013). Research in Hong Kong and Singapore highlights that teachers who engage in peer discussions develop greater confidence in designing formative and summative assessments, leading to more effective classroom assessment strategies (Davison & Leung, 2009; Lam, 2019). Beyond teacher reflection, supporting student reflection in assessment processes is equally important. Encouraging students to engage in self- and peer-assessment activities helps them develop critical metacognitive skills, enabling them to take ownership of their learning and actively monitor their progress (Malone, 2013). Student-led reflection also provides teachers valuable insights into learner needs, misconceptions, and progress, allowing for more targeted instruction and assessment modifications (Taylor, 2013).

In Malaysian secondary schools, research has shown that students who engage in self-reflective assessment practices demonstrate higher levels of engagement and deeper learning, reinforcing the role of reflective assessment in fostering learner autonomy (Rauf et al., 2020).

To ensure that reflective assessment practices become integral to teaching, educational institutions should provide structured support, professional development opportunities, and collaborative platforms where teachers can continuously engage in reflective dialogue. Educators can enhance their LAL competencies by embedding self-reflection, peer collaboration, and student-led reflection into assessment practices, leading to more effective, equitable, and student-centered assessments.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

Redefining Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) has contributed several implications for research, policy, and practice. This article highlights the importance of reconceptualizing LAL by emphasizing the concept of LAL principles, challenges, and strategies for LAL implementation. Several key implications for stakeholders, including educators, researchers, and policymakers, are proposed to establish fair and equitable language assessment practices in ESL contexts.

Implications for Research

Future research on exploring LAL draws invaluable insight into the educational landscape by focusing on a more robust understanding of LAL's concept and theoretical principles. Several key areas, for instance, examining the impact of LAL on learning outcomes, can provide empirical evidence to support how enhanced LAL among teachers influences student performance, particularly in diverse ESL classrooms. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the sustained benefits of LAL-focused professional development. Additionally, exploring technology-driven assessments that promote digital tools in assessment and supporting resources for teaching and learning enhances the effectiveness of formative and summative assessments in supporting LAL principles (Vogt et al., 2024). Given that language assessment literacy involves complexities and multicultural language, the study of how teachers effectively adapt assessments to account for linguistic and cultural diversity can offer practical strategies for promoting inclusivity in ESL contexts (Inbar-Lourie, 2008). While established frameworks offer valuable insights, new models incorporating evolving challenges such as globalization, multilingualism, and digital transformation in education appear to be significant. Conclusively, future research should rigorously examine the integration of the foundational principle of LAL and how teachers apply assessment practices in their teaching and learning process. Ultimately, this research area significantly impacts a better LAL framework.

Implications for Policy

It is important to highlight the roles of educational policies in enhancing language assessment literacy among educators, as it plays an essential role in shaping the implementation of LAL, particularly in schools and teacher training programs. Policymakers are one of the main components in the notion of LAL profiles, as highlighted by Taylor (2013). Several key areas are highlighted to enhance LAL in teachers' professional development, encompassing prioritizing LAL in teacher certification. This includes teachers' standards tailored to LAL competencies, emphasizing technical and socio-cultural dimensions (Taylor, 2013). Teachers play an integral role in ensuring best practices of meaningful educational processes. Thus, they

need to be equipped with assessment knowledge so that they can establish fair and meaningful assessments in addressing diverse students' needs. Additionally, policies should require regular LAL-focused professional development for in-service teachers, ensuring that their assessment practices remain adaptive and effective. The existing research indicates that teachers experience insufficient assessment training, and this research area should be highlighted as it can positively influence the implementation of LAL (Jeong, 2013; Lam, 2014; Kalajahi & Abdullah, 2016). Given that limited resources can be one of the main challenges in applying LAL effectively, policymakers should take rigorous initiative by providing sufficient resources to foster the integration of LAL into schools, including aiding professional development programs, assessment tools, and collaborative learning platforms. Through incorporating these initiatives, it can promote teachers' motivation to enhance LAL in measuring the students' performance and improving strategies for teaching pedagogy. Equity in assessment should be encouraged in applying the assessment practices. Teachers should be given a comprehensive guideline for designing assessment that are culturally sensitive and responsive to address the issues of bias and inequitable education. Thus, policymakers play a critical role in ensuring that teachers are better equipped with assessment knowledge.

Implications for Practice

As the educational landscape has transform from centralized examinations to ongoing formative assessment, teachers should possess necessary skills to evaluate students' language performance. Not only teacher should familiarize with the LAL principles, but it is important for teachers to effectively applied the assessment practices. At the classroom level, LAL has transformative potential for enhancing teaching and learning outcomes. This article proposed several strategies that can help to enhance LAL principles into practice. Teachers should regularly reflect on their assessment strategies, seeking feedback from peers and students to improve alignment with LAL principles (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This reflection strategies in assessment promotes learner autonomy and can help students to actively engage during teaching and learning process. To further encourage effective assessment practice, teachers should offer constructive feedback that supports learning by integrating formative assessments into their teaching routines, while summative assessments also ensure accountability and alignment with curricular goals. This initiative provide supports for students by promoting learner- center approach. Additionally, teachers should incorporate the foundational principles and real- world educational context by encouraging role plays, collaborative projects, and real-world simulations, allowing students to demonstrate language proficiency in meaningful contexts. Apart from that, encourage collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) among teachers can support them in sharing best practices, overcome challenges, and collectively advancing their LAL competencies (Sheehan & Munro, 2019). The implications highlighted indicate the importance of reconceptualizing LAL as a multidimensional framework that align the theoretical frameworks with practical applications.

Conclusion

In a dynamic educational environment, language assessment literacy has become an important skill for teachers. As part of an effective teaching and learning process, LAL also assists teachers in evaluating student performance. With changes in teaching and learning styles, teachers should equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to face challenges and ensure that learning objectives are achieved, and students' academics can be improved. Neglecting the ability to assess students may hinder their overall performance. Thus, the present study has

aimed to contribute insights into teachers' challenges and struggles in implementing assessments into their teaching and learning process.

Studies have shown that Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) is crucial in making assessment more relevant and practical for teachers, particularly in serving the complexities of learning English as a Second Language (ESL) education (Giraldo,2021; Fulcher,2012; Taylor, 2013). This article has delved into the fundamental principles of LAL, encompassing the technical, theoretical, socio-cultural, and practical dimensions, which provide a robust framework for understanding effective language assessment. Despite its significant impact on the educational landscape, transforming these principles into practical applications is often obstructed by significant challenges, such as lack of teacher training, insufficient resources, and more focus on summative evaluation rather than formative evaluation. In conclusion, by addressing these gaps, this article helps to provide valuable information through a detailed investigation that encompasses both theoretical and practical dimensions of LAL. Additionally, this article highlights the challenges and suggests actionable strategies to enhance language assessment practices. These challenges demand initiative strategies such as tailored professional development programs, integrating cultural aspect assessment practices, and reflective teaching strategies to address the barriers to LAL implementation.

With these strategies, ESL teachers can effectively create assessments that elevate students' language proficiency and promote learning. An empirical study is recommended to refine these theoretical frameworks with practical application of LAL in the classroom to enhance the understanding of LAL and its implementation. Moreover, future research should explore LAL's innovative strategies, including integrating digital resources and inclusive assessment methods, which can significantly impact the student's performance. Additionally, LAL should be prioritized in teacher certification and professional development initiatives as it positively influences teachers' ability to implement LAL effectively. Based on the important highlights of LAL, reconceptualizing LAL has significantly impacted the educational landscape. It encourages teachers to create fair and effective assessment practices that foster positive changes for both teachers and students in an evolving educational setting.

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