

Literacy assessment of English teachers: Need analysis for higher education contexts

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT						
<p>Keywords: Assessment; Literacy</p>	<p><i>This paper is aimed to describe what knowledge and skills an English teacher should have to be assessment literate. The paper focuses on the following four basic knowledge areas of assessment literacy. First, English teachers should know what assessment is in general and what classroom assessment is. Second, the teachers should know the purposes of assessment. This knowledge will guide the teachers to create general learning goals, construct clear learning targets, and formulate clear rubrics. Third, the teachers should be aware of various assessment methods in ELT. Last, the teachers should comprehend assessment's positive influences in teaching and learning. To have a positive washback of assessment, the teachers should know how to create effective classroom assessments, how to make constructive feedback, how to support the role of students in assessment, and how to modify instruction based on assessments' results. Assessment literacy is an individual's understanding of the basic concepts and procedures of assessment which will be used as a basis for educational decisions (Popham, 2009). To be assessment literate, a teacher should have the knowledge and skills in relation to basic principles of quality assessment. This essay will discuss four basic knowledge areas of assessment literacy: definition of assessment, purposes of assessment, methods of assessment and keys for creating positive washback of assessment that can improve instruction and students' learning.</i></p>						
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1. Introduction

Nitko and Brookhart (2011, p. 3) define assessment as "a process for obtaining information that is used for making decision about students; curricula, programs, and schools; and educational policy". In this definition, they include the definition of an assessment as well as broader function of assessment which is not only to measure student's achievement but also to make decisions that relate to students' learning such as curriculum, program, schools and educational policy. How is this definition applied in classroom context? Airasian (2005, p. 2) mentions that "classroom assessment is the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid in classroom decision making". For example, whenever teachers gather evidence about students by observing, monitoring, or reviewing students' performances and use the evidence for making classroom decisions, such as success of

instruction and students' progress, teachers are utilizing the process of classroom assessment.

Purposes of assessment

Pellegrino, Chudowsky & Glaser (2001, p. 38-40) succinctly describe the purpose of an assessment by formulating three functions of assessment: "assessment to assist learning or formative assessment, assessment of individual achievement or summative assessment and assessment to evaluate program". It is interesting to note that the second and the third purposes are similar because they are both assessments that are completed at the end of the program. In short, they are both summative assessments. Earl (2003, p. 21) expresses the purposes of assessments in a slightly different way: "assessment for learning, assessment of learning, and assessment as learning". The first purpose is clearly a formative assessment while the second purpose is summative. The third purpose, however, introduces a new concept into assessment purpose. An 'assessment as learning' extends the purpose of formative assessment to include opportunities for students to connect current learning with their prior knowledge, to be their own assessors and to gain the skills involved. This type of assessment is important because it involves the development of students' metacognitive knowledge (Earl, 2003).

In line with the purpose of assessment, when teachers conduct an assessment in the classroom, they should have goals. Goals are broad learning outcomes that students should accomplish (Airasian, 2005). As goals are very general, it is difficult for teachers to use them in the planning of classroom instruction. Airasian (2005) believes that teachers must use these goals to determine more narrow objectives called educational objectives or learning targets. Both Airasian (2005) and Stiggins (1997) agree that learning targets function as guides for teachers in planning, instruction and assessment and that clear learning targets enable teachers to meet one of requirements to have a high-quality assessment (Stiggins, 1997).

To assist teachers, construct clear and specific learning targets, Gronlund & Brookhart (2009, as cited in Nitko & Brookhart, 2011, p. 30) have developed three criteria of specific learning targets: "student centered, performance centered and content centered". Hopkins & Antes (1990) suggest that teachers should focus on students' expected behaviours and classify them according to the categories of cognitive domain, affective domain and psychomotor domain. Teachers can also use lists of terms to enable them to construct clear learning targets. Airasian's (2005) and Hopkins and Antes' (1990) books detail the lists of terms that teachers can use. These lists of words also help teachers categorize the level of complexity and difficulty of their learning targets in Bloom's taxonomy of thinking process (Airasian, 2005; Hopkins and Antes, 1990).

After creating the objectives, teachers need a rubric in order to assess each student's performance. A rubric provides descriptors for each level of a student's performance so that the judgement is more reliable and not biased (Wiggins, 1998). Hambleton & Pitonial (2006) suggest that teachers should use a score range to make classifications, such as pass or fail. Alternatively, the score range can also be used to order the performance categories, such as below basic, basic, proficient or advanced. In short, a rubric is an essential aid for teachers when they are interpreting a student's performance.

2. Research Methodology

This study aims to explore the application of classroom assessment as a process for obtaining information to make decisions about students' learning, instructional practices, and overall educational progress. Based on the definitions provided by Nitko and Brookhart (2011) and Airasian (2005), this research will focus on understanding how classroom assessments are conducted, interpreted, and utilized in the classroom context for decision-making.

A mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to capture a comprehensive view of the classroom assessment process. This approach will allow for an in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives and practices, while also providing measurable data on the frequency and effectiveness of assessment methods in influencing instructional decisions.

Instruments in this study cover the use of survey questionnaire. It was developed to gather quantitative data on the types of assessments used by teachers, how often these assessments are conducted, and how teachers use the results to inform their instructional decisions. The survey will consist of both closed and Likert-scale questions related to assessment practices, decision-making, and perceived challenges. The second instrument was semi-structured interviews with a select group of teachers. These interviews will provide qualitative insights into teachers' experiences with classroom assessment, how they interpret assessment data, and how it informs their classroom decisions. Interview questions will be designed to allow participants to share their personal experiences and perspectives in-depth. Classroom observations were used to collect data from a subset of classrooms to observe how assessments are implemented in real-time. This will include noting the types of assessments being used, how they are administered, and how teachers respond to the assessment results in their instructional practices.

Participants

The participants in this study will be teachers from elementary and secondary schools. A total of 30 teachers will be selected to participate in the study. These teachers will be chosen from a variety of educational settings (public and private schools) to ensure a diverse representation of classroom assessment practices. The teachers will have varying years of experience in the field, from novice to veteran educators, in order to capture a range of perspectives on the use of classroom assessments.

Methods of Recruitment

Teachers will be recruited through an invitation sent to school administrators, who will assist in disseminating the study information to their staff. Teachers who are interested in participating will be asked to provide their consent through an informed consent form, which outlines the objectives of the study, the methods of data collection, and confidentiality assurances. Participation in the study will be voluntary, and participants will be assured that their responses will remain anonymous.

Steps of data analysis

For quantitative data analysis, the survey responses will be analysed using descriptive statistics to summarize the frequency of various assessment practices and their reported effectiveness. Additionally, correlation analyses will be conducted to examine relationships between teachers' assessment practices and their decision-making processes. Data from interview transcripts and field notes from classroom observations will be analysed using

thematic analysis. Key themes related to teachers' use of assessment data for decision-making, challenges faced in assessment practices, and any differences in assessment strategies across experience levels will be identified. By using a combination of methods and instruments, this study will provide a comprehensive view of how classroom assessments are applied and utilized for decision-making in the classroom, offering valuable insights into the broader educational context.

3. Findings

The findings on the use of multiple-choice (MC) tests for assessing reading comprehension provide valuable insights into both the strengths and limitations of this assessment format. As outlined by Nitko and Brookhart (2011), a multiple-choice format offers a structured and objective way to assess students' comprehension skills, including understanding of vocabulary, text content, and grammatical knowledge. This is supported by Sopher (1973), who emphasizes the utility of MC tests for evaluating students' reading comprehension in English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. The clear benefit of using MC tests is their ability to assess multiple dimensions of comprehension, ranging from literal understanding to higher-order cognitive skills such as application and analysis (Hopkins & Antes, 1990).

However, several studies have pointed out the inherent limitations of multiple-choice assessments. One significant issue is the difficulty in constructing high-quality MC questions. Stathmann (1979) highlights that creating effective distractors—incorrect alternatives designed to challenge students' understanding—requires considerable skill. This aligns with Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), who argue that poorly constructed MC questions can lead to test unreliability and confusion. These findings suggest that a high level of expertise is necessary to ensure that MC assessments accurately measure student abilities rather than introducing ambiguity into the evaluation.

Additionally, a commonly noted criticism of the MC format is its limitation in allowing students to express their own ideas. As Nitko and Brookhart (2011) point out, the MC format provides predefined responses, which restricts the opportunity for students to demonstrate critical thinking, creativity, and personal insight. This critique has been echoed by numerous researchers, such as Hopkins and Antes (1990), who argue that MC tests are less effective in assessing complex cognitive skills that require open-ended responses. For instance, in assessing reading comprehension, students might have a deeper understanding of a text that is not adequately captured by the structured format of a multiple-choice question.

The overreliance on multiple-choice assessments has also been shown to lead to "teaching to the test." As educators focus more on preparing students to perform well on MC assessments, there is a risk of narrowing instruction to test preparation rather than fostering broader educational goals. This phenomenon, known as washback, can have negative consequences on the quality and richness of instruction (Airasian, 2005). Teachers might feel pressured to focus on the specific content tested in the MC format, potentially neglecting other aspects of reading comprehension, such as critical thinking, personal interpretation, or the ability to engage with complex texts. This concern reinforces the argument that relying solely on MC assessments can limit the scope of teaching and assessment (Airasian, 2005; Brown, 2004).

To address these limitations and avoid potential washback, some scholars suggest that educators should diversify their assessment methods. By combining MC tests with other

forms of assessment—such as open-ended questions, essays, or performance-based tasks—teachers can better capture the full spectrum of students' reading comprehension abilities. This approach not only provides a more comprehensive assessment but also supports a more holistic approach to teaching and learning.

4. Conclusion

The ways for creating positive wash back of assessment are appropriate feedback, modification of instruction and the students' involvement in the assessment process. Feedback is the response that teachers give in relation to a student's work toward the criteria (Fisher & Frey, 2009). The best feedback according to Brookhart (2008, as cited in Fisher and Frey, 2009) is the feedback that highlights students' strengths as well as weaknesses. In short, feedback should be informational and constructive. In this way, feedback can support students' learning because they can improve their learning if they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses (Dornyei, 2001). Dornyei also adds that by including students' strengths in the feedback, teachers have given positive reinforcement to students so that students will be more motivated in learning.

The other positive wash back is that assessment can improve the quality of instruction and students' learning. Formative assessment's result which describes students' needs and capabilities gives teachers the opportunities to make adjustment to their teaching to improve students' learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998, as cited in Broadfoot, 2007). For example, teachers can modify their learning materials or teaching techniques if they do not match students' capabilities, needs and interests.

The last key is students' involvement in assessment process. As students are "assessment users" (Stiggins, 1997), their involvement is very important to improve learning. Assessment for learning/ formative assessment and assessment as learning are two kinds of assessments that provide more opportunities for students to be involved in the assessment process (Earl, 2003). An assessment for learning feedback focuses on students' work individually without comparing it to other students. This kind of assessment personalizes students and allows them to understand their weaknesses and strengths. This information helps students improve their learning and is one of the strengths of formative assessment. Assessment as learning involves students as their own assessors (Earl, 2003). Students are self-regulators in which they monitor their own learning and use the feedback of their monitoring to improve their learning. This kind of assessment leads students to be independent learners.

In conclusion, teachers should have a basic knowledge of assessment literacy, such as what assessment is, why they should assess, how they assess and how to make use of assessment to improve the teaching and learning process. With this knowledge, teachers are able to better assist students to be better learners.

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