



An Exploration of EFL Teachers' Assessment Literacy and Its Enhancement

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Abstract. This paper is an attempt to analyze the assessment literacy of EFL teachers by means of data analysis to illustrate the current assessment patterns of EFL courses at a university in China. Semi-structured interviews were used as the research instrument for this study. Qualitative data were collected and analyzed through a textual analysis method. The results of word frequency analysis and comparison with literature were used to explain the phenomena and infer the causes. While making conclusions, the researcher made recommendations to enhance teachers' assessment literacy.

Keywords: Assessment Literacy · EFL · Summative · Formative · Workshop

1 Introduction

Assessment literacy refers to a teacher's ability to design, select, utilize, and interpret assessment instruments to provide feedback on his or her teaching and to provide corroboration of student learning processes and outcomes. Positive assessment literacy requires a teacher's knowledge and understanding of different forms of assessment, their purposes, practices, theoretical foundations, and the ability to apply them. The significance of assessment literacy is that it can establish a continuum between teaching and assessment and coordinate the two to create a mutual reinforcement that ultimately accomplishes the goals of teaching and learning [1].

EFL education in China is changing from traditional to modern and is facing many challenges and opportunities. The traditional English teaching model focuses on memorization while lacking sufficient training in practical communicative skills. The number and quality of teachers, the diversity of courses, the support of technical facilities, and the diversity of assessments still need to be improved. The purpose of EFL education has transformed from simple language learning to the comprehensive development of multifaceted language skills [2]. EFL education and assessment are facing the challenge of internationalization and need to better adapt to the needs of globalization. EFL education and assessment in China will face and respond to these challenges and opportunities, gradually developing in a direction that better suits the needs of modern society and provides students with a better platform for language learning and application.

2 Background

2.1 General Information of EFL Assessment

EFL assessment is the process of assessing students' proficiency in English, which is important for both learning and teaching. Two mainstream forms of assessment are prevalent in EFL programs in China: internal assessment and external assessment [3]. Internal assessment in EFL refers to the use of multiple assessment instruments by teachers to assess English language proficiency and learning achievement. It is generally designed and implemented within the school. EFL's internal assessments are flexible and adaptable, providing a relatively accurate picture of students' language proficiency and feedback to teachers to improve instruction. However, EFL internal assessments are influenced by scoring criteria, assessment environment, etc., and may be subjective. External assessment in EFL refers to using standardized tests or exams to assess students' language proficiency. These assessments are usually externally organized. Both forms are assessment of learning. Assessment for learning and assessment as learning are seen more in studies than in practice.

2.2 EFL Assessment in University X

EFL course is compulsory at University X. The conventional summative assessment in form of a pen-and-paper test is the principal assessment instrument to measure the EFL learning outcome of the students, conducted at the end of every semester. Some of the teachers additionally implement irregular accompanying tests. Formative assessment is recommended by administrators but not widely accepted and implemented. The College English test is the only external assessment the students are recommended to take. The EFL teachers are facing problems due to the insufficiency of their assessment literacy. The current summative assessment outcome is not better than a way to provide the teachers with information on how well the student has memorized the learning content.

3 Problem Statement

Compared with the increasing importance of the English language, the language proficiency of college students in China cannot meet the needs of their studies and future career. Although the number of Chinese students taking international English exams has been increasing, their English level is still underdeveloped due to social and educational, and cultural factors [4]. Several factors need to be considered for being responsible for the imbalance, including teaching format, assessment method, authentic foreign language context, cultural convention, etc. According to research conducted in 2022 involving close to 150 universities in China, language teachers' assessment literacy is unsatisfactory since they have low participation in assessment activities [5]. China demonstrates a commitment to changing its test-oriented tradition. It has embarked on assessment reform and set out expectations regarding teacher assessment literacy [6]. Therefore, more comprehensive and effective assessment methods need to be researched and applied. The reform of assessment requires EFL teachers to have an adequate and systematic understanding of assessment, including assessment activities, methods, forms, rubrics, etc.

4 Literature Review

One research (Kabuto) points out that assessment literacy enhancement implies having the ability to better understand, interpret, and implement assessments. This article argues that assessment literacy enhancement is a complex issue that should include a critical perspective that critically understands and analyzes assessment in its theoretical and conceptual framework [7].

Another study (Sun) was conducted among EFL teachers in universities to understand and analyze teachers' language assessment literacy. The study participants were drawn from 150 universities. All study participants responded to a questionnaire with questions about teachers' assessment literacy, current forms of assessment, and expectations for the development of assessment literacy. The results showed relatively unsatisfactory findings on all three of these points; EFL teachers' assessment literacy was not sufficient to support assessment reform, teachers were less likely to use alternative assessments, and teachers were less likely to participate in workshops on assessment-related dimensions [6]. These research findings may have more and wider replication in reality. The researcher's findings should have important correlations with cultural backgrounds, educational practices, etc.

5 Methodology

5.1 Instrument

The researcher employed a semi-structured interview to collect data on teachers' understanding, application, training, and research of assessment. The interview contains 10 questions which were sent to two language professors in a different university for a pilot study to check its reliability and validity. Two items were deleted and three items were revised for clarity reasons or courtesy reasons. The final draft of the semi-structured interview employed in the research had 10 items.

5.2 Population and Sampling

Currently, 28 EFL teachers are teaching English courses to 2200 students from 20 specialties. Total sampling was considered the proper sampling method in this research. Total sampling is the selection of all units from the total population, rather than a random selection to represent the total population. This sampling method is suitable for situations where the overall size is small, or where sampling cost is not an issue.

5.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The 28 EFL teachers attended their interviews respectively in their office. The interview time was decided by the interviewees themselves referring to their different schedules. The interview was door-closing to avoid interference or other potential influences between answers to interviewed questions from different respondents. The interview was between the researcher and one of the teachers each time. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Text analysis was conducted, and word frequency was analyzed.

6 Findings

Finding 1: The interview revealed that the assessment method adopted by the EFL teachers at University X was unitary. A pen-and-paper test was conducted at the end of every semester as the only principal assessment method. Formative assessment was conducted by a small percentage of the respondents. The response revealed no other alternative assessment methods. The result is shown in Table 1.

Finding 2: The high-frequency words in the response explained the assessment literacy of the teachers and some of the reasons behind it. The repetition of the same word in one respondent's statement was counted as one in word frequency analysis. The words and phrases spoken by 50% (14 out of 28) and more of the respondents were listed and analyzed for understanding the reasons behind the momentousness of assessment at University X. The word frequency analysis results are shown in Fig. 1.

EFL assessment implemented by teachers at University X was monotonous, unchanging, lacking innovation, not sufficiently adaptable, and not able to provide accurate and effective feedback. The main reasons were analyzed based on the word frequency analysis results and illustrated in Table 2.

Table 1. Assessment methods adopted by respondents

	Summative assessment	Formative assessment	Diagnostic assessment	Performance assessment	Authentic assessment	Other assessment methods
Adopted by	28	9	0	0	0	0
Adoption percentage (%)	100	32.14	0	0	0	0

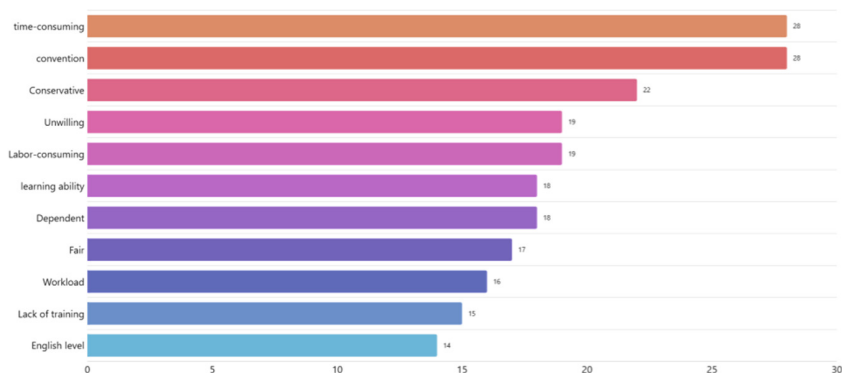


Fig. 1. Word frequency analysis results

Table 2. Text inference

Words	Inference	Potential attribution
work load; time-consuming; labor-consuming	The EFL teachers at University X have an average teaching load of 18 h per week and are constrained by workloads to optimize their work methods	teachers
lack of training; unwilling	The lack of academic research context and willingness to conduct academic research leads to teachers not updating their knowledge system and professional skills in a timely manner	teachers
fair; convention	Summative assessment is the traditional assessment in education, ensuring fairness in the form of a single assessment on the one hand, and difficult to replace because of its wide acceptance on the other	educational context
conservative; unwilling; dependent	The traditional education model is teacher-centered. Students are relatively dependent and lack the ability to learn on their own and the desire to participate in more forms of teaching and learning activities	students
English level; learning ability	The difficulty of the discipline itself and the lack of students' abilities make it difficult to use new forms of teaching or assessment	students; discipline

7 Discussion and Conclusion

The data analysis revealed a relatively insufficient assessment literacy of the EFL teachers at University X. The barriers to assessment literacy are attributed to three main factors, namely the teachers, the students, and the discipline. To a certain extent, it confirms the findings of the literature. Considering that summative assessment will keep its mainstream position, the prospects for assessment reform are not good.

Integrating the feedback from the interviewed teachers and the findings of the literature, the researcher of this paper proposes a workshop to improve teachers' assessment literacy. Figure 2 presents a framework for the assessment workshop.

Assessment is one of the important aspects of teaching and learning because it helps teachers understand what students are gaining or losing in the learning process, whether teaching strategies are effective, and whether the curriculum needs to be updated. However, assessment cannot be a one-size-fits-all strategy because a single assessment

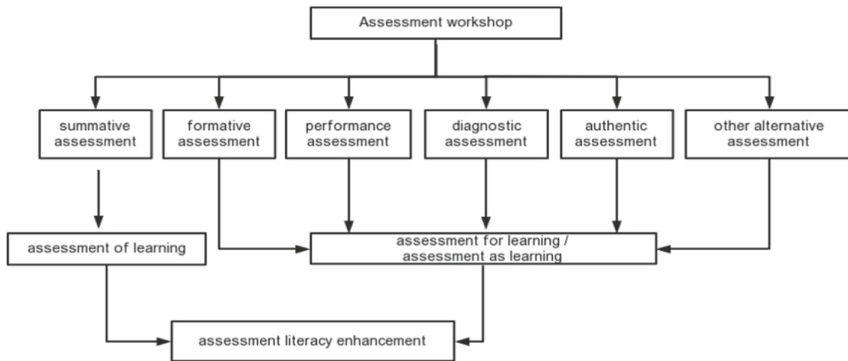


Fig. 2. Assessment workshop framework

model cannot adequately and effectively assess student learning processes and learning outcomes. In the context of foreign language education in China, assessment must be a combination of multiple forms of assessment.

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