Classroom-based Writing Assessment Literacy Components and Needs: Perspectives of In-service EFL Teachers in Iran

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ABSTRACT

As second language writing established itself as an independent area of study, instruction as well as assessment of language writing has taken over a major part in English as second/ foreign language (ESL/EFL) settings. Considering the link between assessment and learning, teachers need to learn about writing assessment together with their learning of writing pedagogy to be prepared for classroom challenges. As a result, over the last few years, there have been calls regarding the importance of developing language teachers' writing assessment literacy (WAL). Developing assessment literate writing teachers requires teacher education programs that equip prospective teachers with sound understanding of theory and practice of writing assessment. To provide EFL/ESL teachers with good assessment education, first we need to have information about current assessment courses and their needs. The purpose of this study was to provide insights into writing assessment education from the perspective of in-service EFL teachers, through a WAL questionnaire developed by the researcher and administered to 200 EFL teachers. The results showed that there might be five distinct components of WAL: Language Pedagogy, Technical skills, Scoring and Decision Making factor, Local Practice, and Principles and Concepts factor. Most teachers perceived themselves to be moderately knowledgeable in the five thematic areas. However, in some items within these five thematic areas, they found themselves to be slightly knowledgeable including knowledge of developing or using rubric or using portfolio assessment.

DOI: 10.22059/jflr.2020.310866.757

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1. Introduction

In view of the importance of assessment in education today and its great contribution to students' achievements, classroom-based assessment that promotes learning is widely acknowledged and progressively receives more scholars' attention (Davison, 2019; Leung, 2014; Plake et al,1993; Rea-Dickins, 2008). In this regards, teachers' abilities to use assessment to increase students' learning as well as checking on students' progress have come into spotlight. As a consequence, teachers are required to keep informed of the latest developments in classroom-based assessment and assessment literacy (AL) (Stiggins 1991; Plake, et al, 1993; Mertler & Campbell 2005; Popham 2006). The concept of assessment literacy was initially introduced by Stiggins (1991) in general education to refer to teachers' abilities to identify sound and unsound assessment practices. Later, this definition expanded to emphasize that teachers need to possess both knowledge of theory and principles of assessment and the ability to use the assessment results to improve students' learning in order to be considered assessment literate. (Stiggins, 2002; Popham, 2009, DeLuca & Klinger, 2010).

Drawing on studies on AL in general education and with the exceptional increase in language testing and assessment in the first decade of the 21st century (Fulcher, 2012), second language education scholars began to investigate what AL means to language teachers, employing the concept of language assessment literacy (LAL) (Brindley, 2001; Davies, 2008; O'Loughlin, 2013; Pill & Harding, 2013; Taylor, 2009, 2013; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014).

As research on LAL developed and expanded, the skill-based notion of LAL was brought about by some scholars who maintain that studies of LAL need to be skill-specific. In this regards, there have been calls for the promotion of writing assessment literacy (WAL) (Crusan, et al, 2016). Given the increasing use of English writing assessments which is extensively used for decision-making across different domains including, immigration, second language education, and article writing for professional development, promoting knowledge of writing assessment sounds necessary for language teachers who are considered to be the main stakeholder involved in assessment process.

Review of the related Literature

While assessment is one of teachers' most significant responsibilities and teachers normally spend a minimum of one-third of their instructional time on assessment and assessment-related activities (White, 2009) prior studies demonstrate that there are concerns with teachers' assessment literacy both in general education (Popham ,2009; DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; MacLellan, 2004) and second language education (Hasselgreen, et al , 2004; Fulcher, 2012; Jin's, 2010; Tsagari & Vogt, 2014; Mosquera et al, 2015).

Teachers' assessment illiteracy is assumed to be the result of lack of appropriate training either in teacher education or professional development programs (Mosquera et al, 2015; Schafer, 1993; Stiggins, 1999; Taras, 2007 DeLuca and Bellara, 2013; Mendoza & Arandia (2009). As Stiggins (2002) states: ''Few teachers are prepared to face the challenges of classroom assessment because they have not been given the opportunity to learn to do so.' (p. 762). Most teachers never received a thorough training in the theory and practice of educational assessment during their pre-service or in-service course (Taylor, 2009).

Thus far, little attention has been paid to writing as a component of teacher education (Hirvela and Belcher 2007) and writing assessment preparation in ESL/EFL contexts (Lee, 2017). Most studies on second language writing have tended to focus more on the needs of learners rather than on the needs of teachers who teach and assess writing (Hirvela and Belcher 2007). The small number of studies that have so far focused on teachers' classroom WAL also confirm that assessment illiteracy holds true

for L2 writing teachers and they do not receive sufficient training in writing assessment maintaining that writing assessment training in teacher education programs receives a low profile (Weigle, 2007; Lee 2017; Crusan et al, 2016). Weigle (2007) state that:'' many graduate programs in TESOL and rhetoric/composition do not require students to take a course in assessment or evaluation, and courses on teaching writing often devote only a limited amount of time to the discussion of assessment'' (P.194). Since teachers are not prepared to take full responsibilities of assessment practices in classroom, they usually think assessment is a ''necessary evil'' and not ''a central aspect of teaching'' (Weigle, 2007, P.194) that can be helpful to both teachers and students.

Crusan et al (2016) mentions that teacher-training program should equip the candidates with essential assessment knowledge and she favors the inclusion of a writing assessment component to second language education course that would enable the candidates to conduct best practices in writing assessment. According to Lam (2015), it is usually taken for granted that pre-service teacher training can provide prospective teachers with sufficient assessment knowledge and skills but the fact of the matter is that they are typically incompetent and unqualified at assessing their students due to poor training provided by teacher education programs.

To develop ESL/EFL teachers' WAL, it should be made clear what they require to know in different aspects of writing assessment so that they can perform their assessment practices. Concerning the assessment knowledge, the paradigm shift in assessment has made the required professional repertoire of teachers more complex than the past (Brookhart 2003; Scarino, 2013). Teachers are required to apply assessment methods that are in line with the skills required in information age involving critical thinking skill, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, and self-learning (Binkley et al., 2012). There is now a wider range of assessment

in use now including portfolio assessment, self and peer assessment, performance assessment, and dynamic assessment. As DeLuca and Bellara (2013) put it, with all these changes in educational assessment 'there is a continued need to shift pre-service assessment education experiences that prepare teachers to embrace multiple purposes and practices of assessment in schools' (p. 367).

Wiegle (2007) believes that ''writing teachers must be adequately prepared to construct, administer, score, and communicate the results of valid and reliable classroom tests'' P.195). She articulates that development of classroom writing assessment like any other types of assessment should go through some critical steps which teachers are required to learn about and these include: ''setting measurable objectives, deciding on how to assess objectives (formally and informally), setting tasks, and scoring'' (P.196).

In response to the call for research in the area of WAL in the context of classroom-based assessment and regarding scarcity of studies in EFL context, the present study attempts to provide insights into Iranian EFL writing teachers current background in WAL and their training needs. To understand if teachers receive the writing assessment education they require, we should find out how and what they learn about writing assessment in their pre-service education programs (Hill, et al, 2010). Crusan et al. (2016) investigated second language teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices with regard to writing assessment through a questionnaire. More than half of the participants in their study mentioned that they received training in writing assessment and regarded themselves as being competent in writing assessments even though they revealed that they did not have enough confidence in their assessment practices. Another study related to WAL was conducted by Lam (2019) in which he investigated the Hong Kong secondary school teachers' knowledge, conceptions and practices regarding writing assessment through a questionnaire, interviews

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and observations. The result of the study revealed that the participants had basic writing assessment knowledge, had positive conceptions about alternative writing assessments and believed that writing assessments could help improve writing.

To identify WAL requirements in a classroom-based context for EFL teachers in order to improve classroom teaching and learning outcomes, this study intend to address the following research questions:

1. Which aspects of classroom-based WAL, do Iranian EFL teachers believe are required to be included in teacher education program?
2. What levels of classroom-based WAL do Iranian in-service EFL teachers think to possess?
3. To what extent do in-service EFL teachers feel that their teacher education programs prepared them for assessment of students' writing?

Methodology

The study of English writing teachers presented in this paper is part of our project that aims at developing a test of WAL for Iranian EFL teachers. The present study is a mixed-method study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) and involves both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data is obtained through a questionnaire which is accompanied by a qualitative semi- structured interviews with ten participating teachers to provide in-depth reflective responses in their local contexts.

As already noted, there are three research questions in the present study .The first question is concerned with important aspects of writing assessment knowledge that teachers believe need to be accounted for in teacher education courses. The second question is to figure out the current levels of WAL for in-service EFL teachers according to their own perspectives, and the third question is to address the efficiency of university education in addressing writing assessment knowledge.

Instrument

The point of departure for developing the

questionnaire items was Xu and Brown (2016) classification of LAL which is classroom-oriented and suits the purpose of this study. In order to elaborate the items further and adopt appropriate scales, we drew on various available assessment literacy questionnaires used specifically for English teachers including Fulcher (2012) and Tsagari (2013) as well as extensive and thorough analysis of studies on second language writing teaching and assessment issues (for example, Weigle, 2002; Hyland,2003; Crusan, 2010; Lee, 2017). Based on these studies, an item pool related to writing assessment knowledge was developed. The resulting item pool was further modified to contain only items that were clear and relevant. The initial questionnaire underwent revisions by one expert and then was piloted using a number of EFL teachers. The pilot study indicated minor issues around wording of some items which were then revised before the main study began, some items needed to be more detailed to avoid any ambiguity. The questionnaire was administered in English.

The final questionnaire had three parts and included multiple-choice items. The first part asked teachers to provide some background information. The second part included items 5-11, which asked questions regarding their experience of assessment courses. These questions helped figure out if we had reached our intended audience or not.

The third part included items 12 and 13 and was related to teachers' perceived WAL level and their ideas regarding what aspects of WAL they believed should be included in an assessment course. Item 12 asked respondents how important they considered various aspects of WAL to be included in an assessment course. Sub-items in item 13 were similar to item 12 but they asked respondents to determine how knowledgeable they perceived themselves to be in those aspects.

To make the collected data more organized and easier to understand, we tried to group the 32 items into thematically similar categorization. After studying the available thematic groups (Fulcher, 2012; Tylor, 2013; Vogt & Tsagari,

2014), we found our items better fit Taylor's (2013) hypothesized dimensions of LAL which consists of eight components. Taylor (2013) did not provide further detailed definitions of each of the eight categories so we drew on Kremel & Harding (2019) sub- categorization based on the Tylor's LAL profile. The 32 items related to WAL in our survey could finally be mapped onto five out of eight Taylors' categories including "technical skills, language pedagogy, local practice factor, scoring and decision making , and concepts and principles".

The follow-up interview was conducted by ten participating teachers who agreed to participate in the second part of the study in order to gain more detailed and reflective information regarding the inadequacy of assessment courses at university and their challenges regarding writing assessment. The interview questions were piloted with two teachers and necessary revisions were made to make the questions clear and unambiguous. The interviews lasted around 20 minutes each and with the permission of respondents they were all audiotaped and the transcripts were content analyzed. The transcripts were examined through an inductive approach allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the data (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2010). The analysis of the transcripts were analyzed separately by two researchers for verification of the data.

Participants

The online questionnaire was developed and sent via email and WhatsApp (a popular social network in Iran) to approximately 320 in-service EFL teachers teaching either at university or private English language institutes. After excluding incomplete answers, 200 responses altogether were accepted and were prepared for

statistical analysis.

The sampling method used was convenience sampling. The EFL teachers had to meet the requirement that they had to have taught writing either at university to English-major students at the BA or MA level or at private institutes involving essay writing or academic writing as independent, stand-alone courses or as integrated syllabus components combined with other aspects of English such as IELTS and TOFEL preparation classes. The reason we did not include school teachers is that they are not normally required to teach writing at schools (Marefat & Heydari, 2018).

As shown in Table 1 the majority of the participants (59%) were teachers at English private institutes and nearly 41% of them were teaching at university. The majority of them were at the age range of 36-45. Concerning education degree, almost 17% of respondents held a BA degree, 43% had an MA degree, and 40% had a PhD Degree.

Data analysis and results

To address Research Question 1 (concerning the EFL teachers' perceptions of significant topics in writing assessment which ultimately help identify main components of WAL), Item 12 on the questionnaire was analyzed using exploratory factor analysis. When factors were extracted, descriptive statistics and reliability measures were calculated for each factor.

To determine whether the data was adequate for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) fitness index and the Bartlett test were used. KMO test is used in research to determine the sampling adequacy of the data that are to be used for Factor Analysis.

Table 1. Teachers recruited for the data collection

Institution	(%)	Degree (%)		Age Range (%)		Gender	(%)
University	41.00	BA	17.00	< 25	5.00	Male	55.0
Private Institutes	59.00	MA	43.00	26-35	20.50	Female	45.0
		PhD	40.00	36-45	54.00		
				46-55	19.50		
				>56	1.00		

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Table 2- Results of KMO index and Bartlett test for WAL

Component	KMO and Bartlets Test	
WAL	KMO	0.928
	Barttlett	4,101.162
	Df	496
	P-Value	0.0009

Table 2 shows that the KMO (sampling adequacy) value is 0.928 and the significance level of the Barlett Crowe test is 0.0099. Therefore, factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted. The statistical characteristics obtained in the analysis of the five extracted factors is shown in Table 3 below. The table shows that five factors emerged, accounting for approximately 62% of the total variance in responses, with eigenvalue of 37.977 for the first factor, 8.099 for the second factor, 6.482 for the third factor, 5.112 for the fourth factor, and the 4,199 for the fifth factor.

The extracted factors based on the varimax rotation were determined as follows (Table 4): 1. Language Pedagogy (6 items), 2. Technical skills (7 items), 3. Scoring and Decision Making factor (7 items), 4. Local Practice (2 items), and 5. Principles and Concepts factor (5 items). It is noteworthy that in the process of analysis we had to remove items which had low factor loadings. The outcome of this process was the removal of 4 items, 5, 6, 21, 31 leaving a final collection of 28 items.

Table 3- Factors extracted and the percentage of variance explained by WA

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	12.153	37.977	37.977	12.153	37.977	37.977	5.642	17.632	17.632
2	2.592	8.099	46.076	2.592	8.099	46.076	4.342	13.568	31.200
3	2.074	6.482	52.558	2.074	6.482	52.558	3.963	12.385	43.586
4	1.636	5.112	57.670	1.636	5.112	57.670	3.952	12.350	55.936
5	1.344	4.199	61.869	1.344	4.199	61.869	1.784	5.576	61.511

Table 4. Rotated pattern matrix with factor loadings of WAL components

Items	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Knowledge of English writing		0.618			
2. Developing writing prompt		0.725			
3. Developing assessment content		0.578			
4. developing test specifications		0.627			
7. knowledge of developing or using rubric		0.718			
8. Using statistics		0.684			
9.Using technology in writing assessment		0.721			
10.pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of teaching writing)	0.737				
11. Using portfolio assessment	0.701				
12. Using self and peer assessment	0.745				
13. Using assessment results to plan teaching	0.696				
14. Using assessment results to diagnose students weakness and strength	0.723				
15.providing students with feedback	0.715				
16. developing appropriate test tasks that is relevant to out of class need of my students					
17. designing writing tasks that my students are interested					0.712
18. Using rating scale to score students writing			0.857		
19. using holistic scoring			0.815		
20. using analytic scoring			0.830		
22. interpreting scores and results			0.806		
23. communicating assessment results to pupils			0.808		
24. Using assessment results to make decisions about students			0.832		
25. Setting fail/pass marks			0.819		
26. knowledge of different purposes for writing assessment					0.797
27. Knowledge of Reliability theory					0.744
28. Knowledge of validity theory					0.705
29. Knowledge of writing test authenticity					0.804
30. Knowledge of writing test practicality					0.827
32. Knowledge of ethical consideration					

To examine the reliability of each of the five extracted factors, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The labels and their reliability indices are shown in Table 5. As a result, in answer to the first research, we found from the factor loadings described above five distinct factors for WAL as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The 5 factors of WAL as represented in the final version of the LAL survey

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Item numbers
Language Pedagogy	0.885	0.912	0.634	10-11-12-13-14-15
Technical skills	0.878	0.905	0.577	1,2,3,4,7,8,9
Scoring and Decision Making	0.957	0.964	0.794	18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25
Local Practice	0.919	0.961	0.924	16-17
Principles and Concepts	0.911	0.931	0.693	26-27-28-29-30-32

To address Research Question 2, which concerns the EFL teachers' self-perceived competence in different areas of WAL, the data obtained from Item 13 of the survey with 32 sub-items was analyzed and the results are reported in Table 6. Table 6 shows that most of the WAL aspects as determined by respondents are at average level.

Table 6 .Teachers self-perceived competence in WAL

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Technical skills	200	2.08	0.92	0.00	5.00
Language Pedagogy	200	1.78	0.73	0.67	4.67
Local Practice	200	1.77	1.02	0.50	5.00
Scoring and Decision Making	200	1.98	0.81	0.00	4.75
Principles and Concepts	200	1.73	0.96	0.00	5.00
WA assessment	200	1.90	0.81	0.47	4.66

For "language pedagogy" (items 10 to 15), Table 6 shows *moderately knowledgeable* for the five aspects of this thematic area, except for "knowledge of portfolio". This might suggest that teachers do not have solid knowledge about portfolio or about how to use it in the classroom. The number of teachers who responded *slightly knowledgeable* in areas of using "self and peer assessment" and "providing feedback" is noticeable. For the thematic area of "technical skills" including items 1 to 9, the mean is around 2. Participants find themselves to be *moderately knowledgeable* in these items. Except for items 7 and 8 which are related to "using rubrics" and statistics" majority of the participants tend to perceive themselves as being *slightly knowledgeable*. On the whole, we may conclude that in-service EFL teachers are not technically literate enough to handle writing assessment practices in EFL classroom.

For the thematic area of "local practice" which included items 15 and 16, the mean was 1.77. These items were related to teachers'

competence with regards to designing tasks that is geared to the needs and interests of their own students and majority of teachers found themselves to be at the average level. Regarding the thematic area of "scores and decision making" (items from 18 to 25), participants specified to be *slightly knowledgeable* in aspects such as "analytic scoring" and "interpreting scores and results". This indicates that in-service EFL teachers may experience difficulties in assigning grades to students' writing and making decisions about students.The third research question was concerned with participants' views on the efficiency of teacher education programs in preparing them to cope with classroom writing assessment and their perceived confidence level in conducting writing assessment practices. Figure 1 indicates the majority of the teachers in the study considered university assessment courses inadequate in preparing them for writing assessment practices (46.5 %). The majority of participants (78.3%) preferred to learn about writing assessment during BA or MA teacher

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education programs and around 41% of them mentioned that continuous in-service short-term writing assessment courses were more efficient in making teachers assessment literate in writing. 95% of teachers believed that they needed to have separate stand-alone courses for the assessment of the writing skill rather than having one general course on assessment at university. Their perceived level of confidence in conducting writing assessment was average for 56.4 % of teachers.

Findings from Follow-up Interviews

To obtain in-depth information regarding participants' writing assessment needs, especially their views regarding efficiency of assessment course at university in preparing them for WA practices in classroom, a semi-structured interview was conducted which lasted around twenty minutes asking teachers to reflect on their needs and their conceived problems and inadequacies of their teacher education programs as regards writing assessment skills. The obtained data pointed to various challenges participating teachers encountered and their views regarding the absence of a proper assessment program dedicated to theoretical and practical assessment skills in writing.
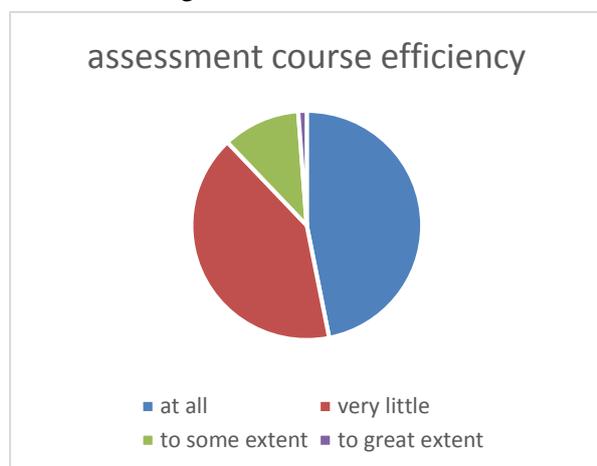
Figure 1. Adequacy of university assessment course

Three themes emerged from their comments with regard to teachers' assessment needs to implement writing classroom assessment practices: the absence of appropriate language assessment course in general and writing assessment course in particular, lack of well-informed teacher educators, the need to train theoretical and practical aspects of writing assessment

1. Neglect of writing assessment in university education and training

All participants emphasized the necessity of writing assessment training and regretted the absence of such attention to writing assessment and their unpreparedness when they began teaching and assessing writing as teachers. They held the view that more time was required to be given to teaching and assessing writing. All stated that they had passed a general language testing and assessment course at university which was not helpful in writing assessment. There were so many topics to be covered in a general assessment course in one semester that assessment writing was either ignored or was only superficially addressed in one session with a focus on theoretical issues. The following comments reflect the teachers' general concerns about lack of sufficient training.

Teacher 1, a male faculty member at Islamic Azad University teaching and assessing writing courses to English majors over 12 years, stated that: "We were not taught to assess students' writing. My course did not teach me much at university. I learn everything on my own through self-study. I tried to review many international journals, many course books to learn about assessing writing."

Teacher 4, a female faculty at Azad University also stated: "When I finished university, I absolutely knew nothing about teaching and assessing students' writing. I assessed students' writing samples without any clear criteria and based on my general impression of the text. The assessment course we had back then at university was concerned with our teachers' explanation of different topics every session, and seldom required us to reflect or design our own assessments. I do remember in our course syllabus we had only one session dedicated to assessment of language skills (all four skills in one session). Obviously, it was

unhelpful with regard to writing assessment."

Teacher 5, a PhD candidate who taught IELTS in an English institute mentioned: "Unfortunately, I received no training on how to assess writing. The general assessment course was too short and it did not even address other topics in depth so I did not learn a lot about assessment in general either. I was not confident when I started assessing writing Task 1 and Task 2 and I learned it by myself."

2. The necessity of both discussing theoretical issues and practically involving student teachers

While teachers expressed their frustration over lack of training in writing assessment, they revealed their common problems in writing classes and what prospective teachers needed to know if they wanted to be writing teachers. Their common challenges included both theoretical and practical issues including, conceptual definition of the construct of writing, process involved, reliability and validity, feedback giving, using portfolios, and interpreting scores. Pre-service teachers, accordingly, reported that they needed training in theoretical aspects of writing assessment as well as receiving hands-on experience with real writing texts.

Teacher 2 noted that "the materials covered in general assessment course were noteworthy and based on current assessment issues but not that much helpful to turn us into an assessor in our classroom. It was totally theory-laden with no emphasis on the practice of assessment. To become successful assessors, we needed to develop our understanding of theory and concepts of language assessment but we needed as much to be involved in actual design of assessment and tests but regrettably were not." She continued that she liked to have received practical training in task design, working with scales, giving feedback, and interpreting scores in a reliable way.

Teacher 7 stated that: "the most important aspect that I wish I had received training in was the practical assessment of others' writing assignments. The general assessment focused on theoretical domains and completely lacked the practical sense of actually correcting things, their efficiency was not applicable in real –life situations. I wish we had learned to correct students without harming or scaring them as well as a course on advanced grammar commonly used in formal and informal situations, how to spot grammatical mistakes, and how to correct them."

3. The need for well-informed teacher educators

The significance of teacher educators in future teachers' success is undeniable. A knowledgeable teacher educator who is familiar with current assessment issues in education can provide student teachers with valuable authentic experience through actual modeling of various kinds and methods of assessment in their own classroom. Unfortunately, six out of ten participating teachers in the interview complained of the absence of well-informed experienced teachers for their assessment course. In this regard, Teacher 9 noted that: "our assessment professor taught us all about innovative assessment methods and assessment for learning or as learning in theory but in practice our own assessment was all conducted in traditional methods involving only assessment of learning."

Teacher 8 maintained that the reason they did not receive practical training was related to the fact that the teacher educators were not proficient in actual assessment practices and learned about assessment only theoretically by reading books or textbooks.

Teacher educators shape pre-service teacher's assessment behaviors through models of assessment practice they display in classroom. Teachers usually tend to assess their students based on the way they had been assessed in classrooms by their own teachers. Teacher educators have to model appropriate writing assessment strategies and practically involve

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students to make connections between what they are learning and what they will be experiencing in a real classroom

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the components and structure of WAL in the context of Iran. To achieve this purpose, we developed an online survey reviewed by experts which required EFL teachers to indicate how important they considered various aspects of WAL and how knowledgeable they perceived themselves in those aspects. The obtained results indicated that most topics in writing assessment were regarded by the participating teachers as either important or essential to be included in a course of language assessment. The results also showed that there might be five distinct components of WAL based on Taylor's (2013) hypothesized LAL components: Language Pedagogy, Technical skills, Scoring and Decision Making factor, Local Practice, and Principles and Concepts factor. Most teachers perceived themselves to be moderately knowledgeable in the five thematic areas. However, in some items within these five thematic areas, they found themselves to be slightly knowledgeable including knowledge of developing or using rubrics, using statistics, using portfolio assessment, using analytic scoring, and knowledge of validity theory. According to Taylor's (2013) profile of LAL for teachers, for thematic areas such as "knowledge of theory", "principles and concepts", and "scores and decision making", teachers are believed to have functional literacy, for the thematic area of "technical skills" they need to have procedural and conceptual literacy, and for the thematic area of "language pedagogy'' they need to attain multidimensional literacy. With reference to the literacy continuum proposed by Pill and Harding (2013), functional literacy means sound understanding of basic terms and concepts, procedural and conceptual literacy means understanding central concepts of the field, and using knowledge in practice, and Multidimensional literacy means knowledge extending beyond ordinary concepts including philosophical, historical and social dimensions of assessment. The present study indicates that EFL teachers need to develop sound and clear conceptual understanding of WAL as well as the ability to use the knowledge in practice in the actual context of classroom. University education and the general assessment courses provided for them were insufficient to equip them with conceptual and practical knowledge as far as writing assessment is concerned. It is wrong to believe that courses in general assessment can provide pre-service ESL /EFL teachers with the assessment knowledge they need for L2 writing assessment.

This is what teachers who attended the follow-up interview emphasized. They underscored the need for a stand-alone writing assessment course taught by well-informed teacher educators which deals with both theoretical and practical aspects of writing assessment. These findings imply that English teacher education programs require some modification and adjustment as regards teaching writing assessment. As previous studies expressed concerns for the neglect of writing and writing assessment in ESL context (Hirvela and Belcher, 2007; wiegle, 2002), this study showed the same concern in EFL context where teacher training programs tend to give little attention to writing assessment as it is often the topic of only one or a few sessions, and many programs may ignore it altogether.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Online questionnaire

Part A: Background information

1. What is your gender

2. What is your age range?

3. In which context are you teaching?

4. Which of the following best describes your degree?

5. Have you ever taught a English writing course

Part B: Writing Assessment Course

6. Did you pass general testing and assessment course at university?

7. Did you pass a separate course or workshop on testing and assessment of writing ?

8.Did the assessment course at university prepare you for assessing students' writing?

9. Which one do you prefer to develop your writing assessment ability? (Please select as many options that you think are correct)

10. How would you rate your level of confidence in conduction writing assessment?

11.Do you think we should have separate course for the assessment of writing skill rather than having one general course on assessment at university?

Part C: writing assessment training needs

12. Which of the following topics in writing assessment is important enough to be included in a course? Indicate your response as follows:

1=unimportant 2=not very important 3=fairly important 4=important 5=essential

1. Knowledge of English writing
2. Developing writing prompt
3. Developing assessment content
4. developing test specifications
5. using in-class impromptu assessments
6. using out-of- class assessment
7. knowledge of developing or using rubric
8. Using statistics
9. Using technology in writing assessment
10. pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of language teaching writing)
11. using portfolio assessment
12. using self and peer assessment
13. Using assessment results to plan teaching
14. Using assessment results to diagnose students weakness and strength
15. providing students with feedback

16. developing appropriate test tasks that is relevant to out of class need of my students
17. designing writing tasks that my students are interested
18. Using rating scale to score students writing
19. using holistic scoring
20. using analytic scoring
21. scoring both in-class and out of class writing samples
22. interpreting scores and results
23. communicating assessment results to pupils
24. Using assessment results to make decisions about students
25. Setting fail/pass marks
26. knowledge of different purposes for writing assessment
27. Knowledge of Reliability theory
28. Knowledge of validity theory
29. Knowledge of writing test authenticity
30. Knowledge of writing test practicality
31. Knowledge of writing test interactivity
32. Knowledge of ethical consideration

13. How knowledgeable do you think you are about each aspect of writing assessment?

1. not knowledgeable at all

2. slightly knowledgeable

3. knowledgeable

4. very knowledgeable

1. Knowledge of English writing
2. Developing writing prompt
3. Developing assessment content
4. developing test specifications
5. using in-class impromptu assessments
6. using out-of- class assessment
7. knowledge of developing or using rubric
8. Using statistics
9. Using technology in writing assessment
10. pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of language teaching writing)
11. using portfolio assessment
12. using self and peer assessment
13. Using assessment results to plan teaching
14. Using assessment results to diagnose students weakness and strength
15. providing students with feedback
16. developing appropriate test tasks that is relevant to out of class need of my students
17. designing writing tasks that my students are interested
18. Using rating scale to score students writing
19. using holistic scoring
20. using analytic scoring
21. scoring both in-class and out of class writing samples
22. interpreting scores and results
23. communicating assessment results to pupils
24. Using assessment results to make decisions about students
25. Setting fail/pass marks
26. knowledge of different purposes for writing assessment
27. Knowledge of Reliability theory
28. Knowledge of validity theory
29. Knowledge of writing test authenticity
30. Knowledge of writing test practicality
31. Knowledge of writing test interactivity
32. Knowledge of ethical consideration

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

The purpose of this study is to learn about EFL teachers' writing assessment needs in Iran. I would like to extend my gratitude for your kind contribution.

Best wishes.

1. During your studies at university, what did you learn about writing assessment? What were typical requirement with regard to writing assessment?
2. To what extent do you think university prepared you to assess students'' writing?
3. What are some challenges you encounter while assessing students writing that you wish you had received training at university?
4. What skills must teachers acquire to be able to successfully assess students' written assignments?
5. If you were to give advice to pre-service teachers about what they need to know in order to be able to assess students' writing, what advice would you give them?'
6. what types of assessment training would most benefit student teachers?

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.