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# Does Writing Assessment Training Really work? The Mexican EFL Perspective

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# Overview

1. Discuss the body of literature in the field of language assessment literacy and writing assessment literacy.

2. Discuss the objective of the study, methodological approach and its results.

3. Propose the Writing Assessment Training Impact Categorization.

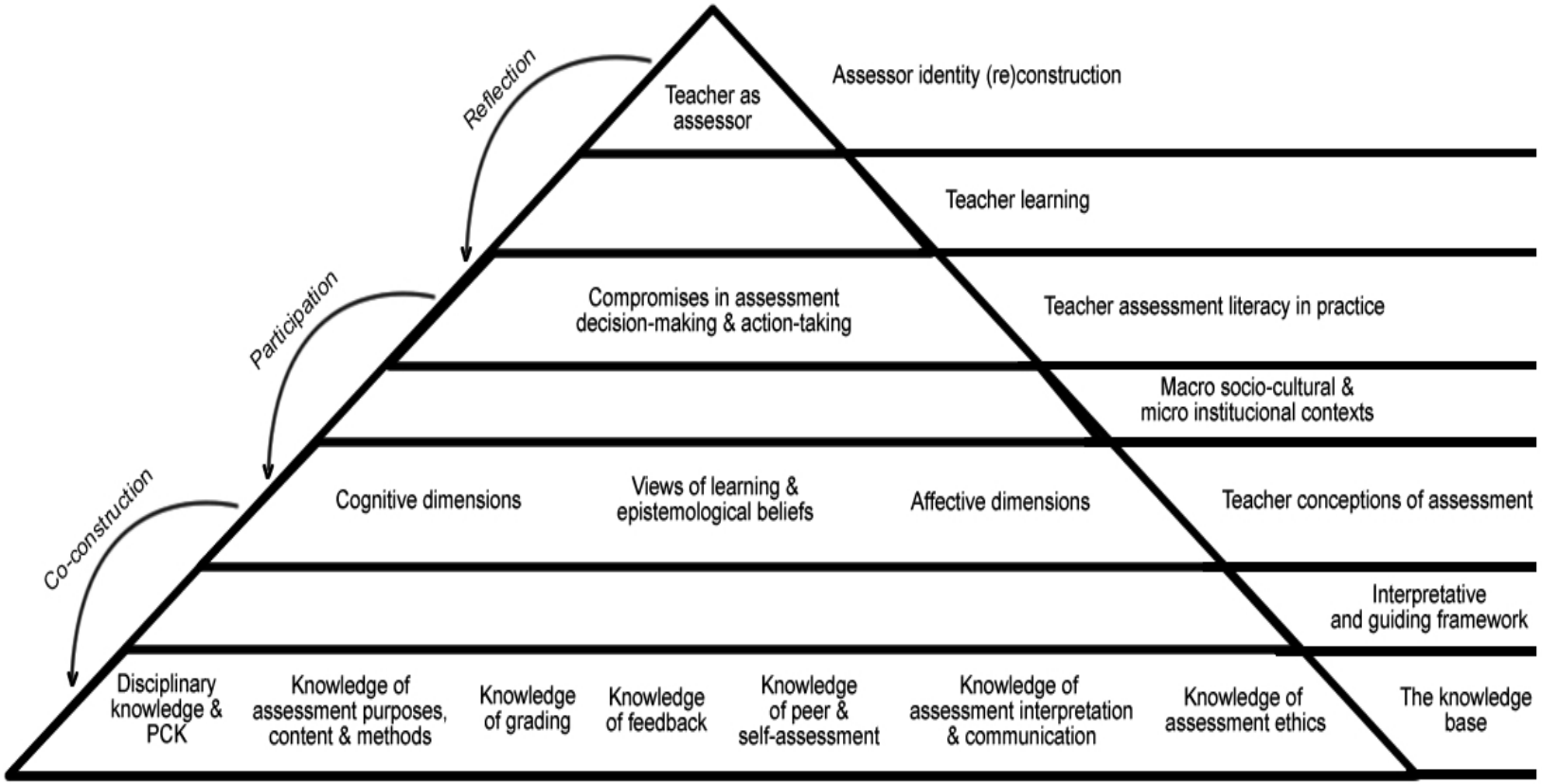
4. Share some implications for EFL writing classroom assessment and future research.

# Introduction

*"…Language teachers are expected to choose or construct, administer and interpret the results of assessments designed for a variety of purposes and situations"* (Stoynoff and Coombe, 2012, p.122).

The importance of assessment literacy lies in that *"without a higher level of teacher assessment literacy, we (teachers) will be unable to help students attain higher levels of academic achievement"* (Coombe *et al.*, 2012, p.20).

- Inbar-Lourie (2008): assessment literacy implies a social factor in which teachers, assessment techniques and evaluations are embedded in a specific social situation.
- Fulcher (2012) & Taylor (2012): assessment literacy refers to teachers´ familiarity with measurement practices and how this knowledge is applied in the classroom when assessing language.
- Scarino (2013): teachers need to obtain an understanding of their own knowledge, values, conceptualizations, interpretations, judgements, decisions, and experiences (preconceptions) to give way to new knowledge about assessment through self-awareness as a teacher and an assessor.
- Xu and Brown (2016): conceptual framework of Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP). It not only includes theoretical knowledge of assessment and teacher sociocultural perspectives but also one that includes the development of teachers throughout their teacher education programs.




Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice, TALiP (Xu and Brown, 2016)

# Research in Assessment Literacy

a) **Stakeholder (Teachers, Teacher Candidates, Language Students) Perceptions of Assessment literacy:** Coombe, et al. 2012; Falvey & Cheng, 1995; Shohamy et al., 2008; Lopez Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009; Nier, Donnovan & Malone, 2013; Malone, 2013, Crusan, 2016.

b) **Status of Teachers´ Assessment Literacy:** Volante & Fazio, 2007; Metler, 2003; Metler & Campbell, 2005; Lam, 2014, Crusan, 2016.

**c) The Nature of Language Assessment Courses:** Weigle, 2007; Taylor, 2012; Jeong, 2013; Malone, 2008, 2013; Crusan, 2014.

**d) Teachers´ Assessment Literacy Needs:** Hasselgreen, Carlsen & Helness, 2004; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014.

**e) Impact of modes of training on writing assessment:** Weigle, 1994, 1998; Elder, Knoch, Barkhuizen & von Randow 2005, 2007; Contreras, Gonzalez, & Urias, 2009; Knoch, 2011, González & Vega, 2018.

# Mexican EFL context:

Instructors need to

- select an assessment method that corresponds to their assessment purpose,
- develop the assessment tool to use in the classroom,
- administer the tool,
- score students´ performance,
- interpret the score,
- make appropriate decisions based on the score,
- communicate the results to administrative offices and
- be aware of the consequences that assessment decisions may bring.

(Crusan, 2014; Fulcher, 2012; Stoynoff and Coomb, 2012; Weigle, 2007).

- Teachers lack the necessary knowledge to develop their classroom assessment practices (López Mendoza and Bernal Arandia, 2009; Lam, 2014)
- EFL teachers consider they do not have the necessary professional skills to assess writing (Metler, 2003; Lam, 2014; González, 2017) thus avoid its assessment or even teaching it in their classrooms.
- Language institutions occasionally take this `teacher responsibility´ for granted (López Mendoza and Bernal Arandia, 2009; Lam, 2014)

# So, what is needed?

- Explore the actual impact of specific language (speaking, writing, reading, listening) skill assessment training on EFL teachers´ assessment practices.

- The nature of assessment literacy and its multiple forms in Latin American EFL contexts such as the one found in Mexico.

- Perceptions of language teachers, language students and language program managers and the establishment of a common convergence point

# Research Purpose

Examine the impact that writing assessment training has on the reported teaching and assessment practices of forty-eight Mexican University EFL teachers, the EFL program managers and the students enrolled in the EFL programs. It approaches this purpose from three major dimensions:

- **a) teachers´ reported writing assessment practice prior and post to training in the EFL classroom**
- b) teachers´, language managers' and students' perceptions of the assessment of writing and their teachers' assessment literacy
- c) teachers´ use of scoring tools to score students´ opinion-essay samples.

# Research Questions

RQ1 To what extent does writing assessment training impact EFL teachers´ reported classroom assessment of students' writing skills?

RQ2 What is the impact of assessment training on teachers´ perceptions of writing and on their perceptions of classroom writing assessment?

RQ3 What is the impact of assessment training on language program managers´ perceptions of writing assessment?

RQ4 What are students' perceptions of EFL teachers´ regular classroom writing assessment and of the importance of writing assessment training?

RQ5 To what extent does writing assessment training and teachers' personal background impact their use of analytic and holistic scoring tools to assess opinion essays in the EFL classroom?

# Methodology

- Mixed methods approach for the study: qualitatively driven and quantitative methods used to support qualitative data (Johnson *et al*., 2007; Creswell, 2015, Glowka, 2011), interpretative and exploratory study, data triangulation (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005)

- Multiple data collections sources: qualitative and quantitative instruments

- Core of the study: Two writing assessment training sessions, approx 3hrs, over a period of 12 months.

- **Research context**: EFL university teachers who were in service at three public universities or one language institute in the north-eastern region of Mexico, the state of Tamaulipas.
- **Participants:** All teaching staff at one of these Institutions. A convenience sampling method was used (Dörnyei, 2007) to select participants: 48 participants, from which 11 teachers agreed to be tracked for one year: 4 Males, 8 Females, ages 20-52 years.
- **Data collection instruments**: participant background questionnaire, two semi-structured interviews (prior and post to training, 25-35 min) with 11 of the participants that agreed to participate in the qualitative collection of data.

- **Data analysis:** Grounded theory approach since I aimed to explain a process "grounded" on participants experience and views (Lingard, Albert, Levinson, 2008; Creswell, 2014).
- Interviews audio recorded and transcribed.
- Prior and post training transcriptions were compared: Emergent coding schemes were followed; major thematic categories were identified and finally subthemes were extracted from the major thematic categories.

# Results

Impact in three main areas:

- a) classroom teaching of writing,
- b) classroom assessment of writing and
- c) teachers´ self-awareness of: the nature of writing, the teaching of writing, their assessment procedures and their stances as a writer and as a student

However, the impact of the training on teachers´ actual classroom assessment was quite shallow (b).

## a) Classroom Teaching of Writing

*I implemented more writing exercises and I am using a correction code to provide students the feedback. I used to use a code but I only used two or three symbols and did not really give extended feedback…. I am trying to focus more and use it more…* TP23

*`…there is more interest from me in the sense not to leave it out…I started to put a little more emphasis on writing by writing at least a little or for homework´.* TP325

## b) Classroom Assessment

*… at first it was merely my judgment: I read it, corrected it. I would not let them do so but now …I looked for a tool that fits their level and gave it to them before I applied the writing task…I actually read their work again and never gave them feedback. I corrected them, crossed it out and did not give them the opportunity to reflect on what they thought they were doing.* TP62

## c) Teacher Self-Awareness

*… something I would rescue is that I thought a lot about what I was doing in the classroom and as an EFL teacher…I think I also had the opportunity to become aware of how disorganized I am with my time. I want to sit down and organize my time and my activities so they are not just another activity…*TP32

*…I got stuck doing things the same way all over again and I wasn't able to adapt to my classes because I had a veil over my eyes which was implemented by routine. The (training) sessions helped me remember that feeling like ohhhhh my students are different people… TP22*

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## c) Teacher Self-Awareness: Stance as a Writer

*…I´ve become more conscious that it is a skill we need to teach and evaluate. But, as an English teacher, writing is a skill I am deficient, I'm not good at writing so to be able to teach you need to know how to do it.* TP23

# Conclusion

Only two teachers reported to have changed their actual assessment processes and scoring tools.

Two more described they had managed to increase the amount of classroom activities dedicated to writing.

All the participants reported to have become aware of their need to improve their assessment of the skill and above all to have reflected on their teaching of writing.


**Writing Assessment Training Impact Categorization**

(Gonzalez, E.F. (2019) EFL writing assessment training: a construct of impact, forthcoming)

# Implications

WAT:

- Teacher self-reflection is a complex process, EFL teachers need to be provided with not only one training session, but multiple sessions.
- Teachers´ need time to actually, “sink in” new LA knowledge and actually make a change in their assessment processes.
- Analysing teachers´ needs and perceptions prior to the implementation of assessment training sessions.

WATIC:

- May be a tool for teacher trainers, language program managers to predict the potential effects their training may encourage,
- Plan ahead the contents of their workshops to correspond the desired effects and financially plan training.
- For teachers, may give them a sense of direction as to the benefits of WAT,
- The WATIC may exemplify the conceptual framework of the Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice (TALiP) proposed by Xu & Brown (2016), specifically at the top level of the construct "Assessor identity (reconstruction)"

- <u>WAT-WAL: may trigger further professionalization in the field of language assessment and raise awareness of the importance of writing and its assessment.</u>

# Limitations

- WATIC included the qualitative views of eleven active EFL university teachers…more needs to be done!
- The researcher interviewed teachers and obtained the impact of training according to teachers´ views and their own experience. Is it actually what happened in their classroom?
- The researcher was the trainer and the interviewer of the study.
- The proposal of the WATIC is limited to its construction: validation? Replication?

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