

ТЕОРІЯ ТА МЕТОДИКА НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ У ВИЩІЙ ШКОЛІ

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ENHANCING TEACHERS' LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT LITERACY VIA ACTIVITIES OF A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

Abstract

The paper discusses the issues related to the language assessment literacy (LAL) of Ukrainian university teachers of English. The author overviews the development of LAL beginning in 2010 when the first survey of LAL state was conducted by her. The surveys conducted later enabled the comparison of teacher respondents' perceptions of the advances and/or issues in LAL. Although the surveys were not large-scale, the samples were quite fully representative of the university teacher community which allowed to capture the major trends of LAL development. The author further describes the activities of a professional non-for-profit organization – Ukrainian Association for Language Testing and Assessment (UALTA) who made a major contribution to LAL development in the past 6 years by regularly holding training events. The latest event was an in-service teacher training (IN-SETT) course conducted online. The course has laid theoretical and organizational bases for the future events of such kind.

Key words: language assessment literacy, assessment profile, in-service teacher training.

Introduction and literature review

Given its ever-rising significance in today's language education, LAL has received a plethora of definitions in the recent decades. Broadly, it is defined as the capacity of teachers to design and conduct assessments and interpret results in compliance with the purpose of each assessment – formative or summative.

In an oft-cited definition made by Fulcher, LAL is “the knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardized and/or classroom-based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice. The ability to place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order understand why practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals” (Fulcher, 2012, p.125). According to O'Loughlin, who expressed LAL in terms of objectives of LTA courses for student teachers, LAL envisages enabling students “to develop (a) a sound understanding of key concepts in second language assessment; (b) their ability to critically evaluate existing assessment documents,

and (3) their capacity to design or adapt assessment instruments for the particular teaching context” (O'Loughlin, 2006, p. 73). One of the recent definitions of LAL is offered by Vogt and Tzagari who comprehensively define LAL as “the ability to design, develop, and critically evaluate tests and other assessment procedures, as well as the ability to monitor, evaluate, grade, and score assessments on the basis of theoretical knowledge” (Vogt & Tzagari, 2014, p.377).

Frequently referred to in the literature is the system of LAL profiles of different stakeholders developed by Taylor (2013). The language assessment literacy profiles proposed by her includes such categories as knowledge of theory, technical skills, principles and concepts, language pedagogy, sociocultural values, local practices, personal beliefs/attitudes, as well as scores and decision making. Clearly, the profile for classroom teacher differs significantly from the profiles of other groups of stakeholders, e.g. test makers and/or researchers (see Fig.1).

Obviously, the teacher's LAL profile undergoes modifications in line with the new global educational conditions and needs, such as, for instance, the pandemic-forced remote instruction. Apart from the global perspective, the teacher's LAL profile is ultimately a function of local educa-

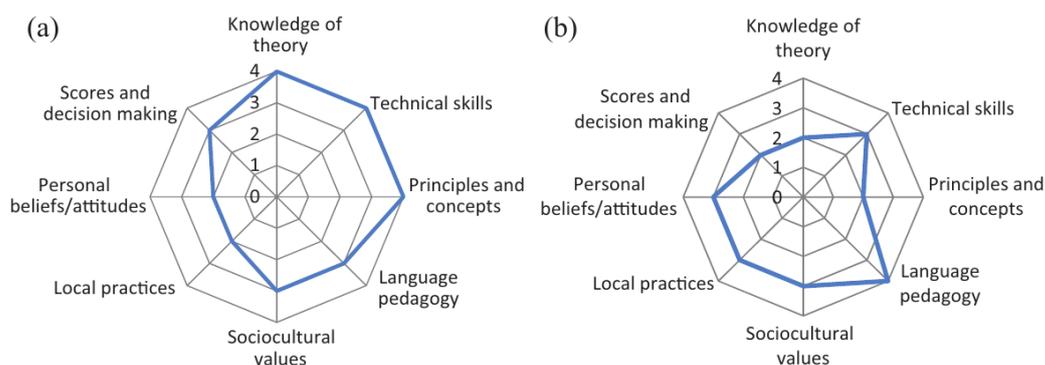


Figure 1. Values of (a) profile for test writers and (b) profile for classroom teachers.

tional culture. In Ukraine, wherein higher education according to Bolitho and West (2017) lacks official standards of language education and the quality assurance system is only emerging, a generally poor quality of language tests and exams seems to be a norm. No essential measures have been taken as yet to meet the “pressing need for training [teachers] in modern, valid testing and assessment procedures” (Bolitho & West, 2017, p. 77). In this light, the niche for LAL has been occupied by non-governmental professional organization, Ukrainian Association for Language Testing and Assessment, that has accepted the role of a beacon of promoting LAL of Ukrainian university teachers. The current paper highlights its activities drawing on the data of several studies and analysis of practical experience.

Methodology

The author employs the data of several qualitative studies conducted in 2010-2019 with the view to gauge the progress in LAL in the country. The studies were based on small-scale surveys of university teachers’ training needs and accomplishments in LAL enhancement. The author also draws on the experiential analysis of training events – courses, workshops, etc. In term of theory, concept analysis was employed to contextualize LAL profile for a university teacher.

Results and discussion

Survey 1 (2010) replicated the survey of European teachers conducted by Vogt and others (Vogt et al. 2008) which allowed comparing the responses of European and Ukrainian teachers of English. The findings of this survey stated that the Ukrainian respondents in the survey (50) were almost as assessment literate as their European counterparts. Some areas were likewise

identified as problematic and lacking assessment literacy, such as alternative assessments (self – and peer-assessment and portfolio) in both contexts. However, the differences in educational traditions including concepts and terminology urged preparing and conducting another survey which needed to be better adjusted to the culture-specific national context.

Survey 2 (2013) intended to determine the spectrum of local particularities of a LAL profile. It appeared that the Ukrainian respondents were quite advanced in implementing formative assessments and fulfilled multiple responsibilities related to summative test design and administration. The majority of the respondents, however, claimed that they had hardly received any formal training in language testing and assessment but expressed willingness and commitment to undergo training be it offered by educational administrators.

This survey also yielded insights into typical assessment practices shared by the respondents. By 2013, the teachers had mostly focused on testing reading skills, language use. Additionally, some of them used tests of writing skills, assessed oral presentations and projects (Kvasova and Kavytska, 2014).

The results of the survey were used to develop a curriculum for in-service teacher training course consisting of six modules. Module One of this course was piloted by the author in years 2009-2012 and Module Two in 2014 (Kvasova, 2016). The course had a comprehensive theoretical foundation, the coursework contained contact and independent work, individual as well as team work, readings and tasks to be carried out individually/in teams. Interesting conclusions were made in relation to language teacher’s LAL profile in terms of its adaptation to the target audience needs. This will be touched upon later in this article.

With the inauguration of Ukrainian Association for Language Testing and Assessment (UALTA) in 2015, the organization developed close ties with international language testing experts and organisations. International Language Testing Association (ILTA) and European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) funded several workshops involving 35-50 Ukrainian participants each. A series of dissemination events following those workshops multiplied the impact of the workshops on the local participants' LAL. The workshops conducted by UALTA facilitators at universities across the country as well as co-organizing of several conferences were yet another constructive experience promoting LAL.

This point was confirmed by the data elicited in *Survey 3 (2017)* the respondents in which were 34 UALTA members and 21 teachers who were not UALTA members. This participation allowed comparing the responses of the two groups of respondents thus specifying UALTA's impact on LAL development. In this survey, both groups of respondents prioritized the impact of UALTA- conducted workshops probably because few training events by other organisations were dedicated purely to assessment and testing. Webinars and on-line courses did not receive the top scores in popularity either. Interestingly, the respondents, who had claimed that they owed their current assessment literacy level to self-study, expressed willingness to undergo formally orga-

nized training. However, none of such training events had been offered to teachers in the years discussed. In the meantime, the respondents stated they took an active part in preparing not only moderate-stakes tests such as mid-term and end-of-course tests but also high-stakes ones – graduation and admission tests as well as tests for accreditation purposes (Kvasova, 2018).

Survey 4 (2019) did not involve only UALTA members as respondents although it was conducted in the institutions which kept close ties with UALTA. The survey aimed to investigate the reliability of classroom-based assessments developed by grassroots teachers and proved to demonstrate enhanced understanding of assessment-related issues by respondents and their more conscious and meticulous implementation of assessments. Additionally, the survey aimed to gauge the perceptions of training needs in LTA. On the one hand, it confirmed the increased attention to organization of teacher training in LTA at places. The teachers, for instance, paid due credit to the seminars in LTA conducted at their departments by the teachers alike. On the other hand, the respondents in the survey expressed clear preference for systematical training organized by specialists rather than for departmental seminars or self-study. The most feasible of the mentioned formats of LAL enhancement were short-term in-service teacher training courses (Kvasova and Shovkovy, 2020) (see Table 1.)

Table 1.

Ranking of Training Format in order of Effectiveness (Kvasova and Shovkovy, 2020, p.190)

Rank	Format	Score
1	Traineeship abroad	4,97
2	Workshops by international experts	4,2
3	Workshops by national experts	3,59
4	Short-term courses	3,25
5	Staff seminars	3,23
6	LTA conferences	3,19
7	Traineeship in Ukraine	2,8
8	Longer courses	2,54
9	Self-study	2,19
10	Distant courses	1,76
11	Other	0

In response to these needs, a joint course in LTA was launched in February 2021 at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The only possible format for running/conducting the course under the circumstances of Covid-19 pandemic

was an online one. The preparation of the course in terms of its content and organization drew a lot on running INSETT and PRESETT course in previous years (Kvasova 2017, 2020).

The course curriculum covered such areas as assessment for and of learning, development and administration of assessments, qualities of efficient assessments, item types and item writing, testing grammar and integrated skills, assessing oral production and oral interaction, peer- and self-assessment, washback effect and feedback in teaching at university. The course consisted of eight modules, with each module including a plenary delivered by an international expert and a follow-up workshop conducted by a local facilitator. This structure enabled a synergy of solid theoretical input and a practical elaboration of the topic. Importantly, within each module an assignment to be done independently was offered to the participants. The latter were also supplied with the recordings of the sessions as well as slides and supplementary materials – articles and even books/handbooks authored by the plenary speakers.

Feedback questionnaire filled in after the course completion yielded overall very high level of appreciation. The respondents stated that both course plenaries and workshops were useful (82.6 % and 91.3% respectively) with only a few areas reported as not quite useful in answers to open-ended questions. The participants also came up with the areas in LTA that they would like to get further training in, the list suggesting that some areas covered in the course should additionally be further elaborated on in the future (assessing speaking, integrated skills, self-assessment, etc.). Some thought-provoking responses were provided as for the length of the course which in fact lasted for three months (with two webinars conducted every other week) and the assignments for independent work with which 10 % of the respondents were not fully satisfied. The majority of the participants, however, supported the point of view expressed by one of the respondents: *“All the workshops followed by home assignments were very useful, which helped consolidate the insights gained and reflect on the issues under consideration in more depth”*. Overall, the format including a 60-minute plenary followed by an 80-minute workshop on the following day was found very efficient, the evaluation of the course was very positive, which suggests that the course was insightful and effectively promoting professional development in LTA.

It is worthwhile paying special attention to the home assignments offered to the course par-

ticipants. The tasks included: 1) activities in the test format (matching, gap-filling, etc.) aimed at hands-on mastering of the main concepts of LTA such as components of a test task, aspects of test usefulness, etc.; 2) writing a test specification for a mid-term local test; 3) rating oral test-takers' performance; 4) providing feedback on the recorded paired tasks; 5) analysing the offered test tasks; 6) writing discursive essay; 7) doing a project (developing a test specification and a mid-term test paper). The tasks are diverse in form and focus on a variety of aspects of LTA.

The analysis of the tasks performed by the participants in the course independently yielded interesting information of teachers' engagement in it. Approximately 30% of the tasks were rated as excellent by trainers, demonstrating their authors' very good knowledge of the subject and high level of performance bordering on mastery. The major part of the tasks (about 55 %) was performed at a good level, with occasional errors in tasks concerned with the development of technical skills (e.g. item writing) or caused by misunderstanding of the task structure. The smaller part (15%) of the tasks were underperformed or incomplete which suggests that the participants could not meet deadlines due to certain reasons, regular workload included.

Based on the previously run PRESETT courses and multiple INSETT workshops for in-service teachers conducted by the author of this paper, the course proves to have integrated the accomplishments of both mentioned types of training. In fact, it can serve a pilot version of a contact short-term course in LTA to be conducted within the teacher re-training programme at the university.

The course also appeared efficient in terms of its organisation. The involvement of eight testing experts from a number of foreign countries has built up the organisers' experience of international collaboration and laid the basis for further similar endeavours. Additionally, the organisers grew expertise in conducting webinars which is sure to promote opportunities for larger attendances of future events.

The extensive experience gained by the author of this paper during a decade supported by the data of the surveys described above allows contextualising the language teacher LAL profile proposed by Taylor (2013) and mentioned above. With respect to a Ukrainian university teacher level of LAL, we may hypothesise that such as-

pects of the profile as “Knowledge of theory” as well as “Principles and concepts” occupy a more prominent position. Given a university teacher’s role in developing and conducting assessments, particularly assessment for accountability, it appears that “Scoring and decision making” should

be raised within the profile not by one but by two points. Accordingly, the representation of a Ukrainian university teacher’s LAL profile acquires the following configuration (Figure 2), thus approaching to some extent the profile of a testing professional.

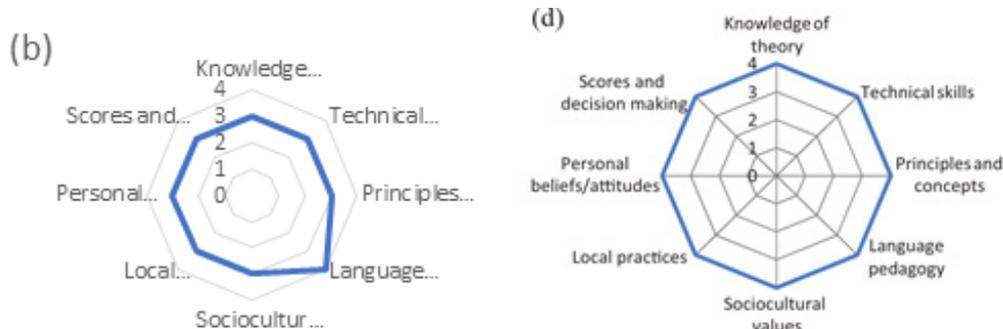


Figure 2. Values of (b) profile for university teachers and (d) profile for professional language testers.

We conclude that the LAL profile for a university teacher should be positioned higher than that for a classroom teacher and not be radically different from the profile for a test writer. For a teacher working in higher education, it is equally important to have knowledge of theory and testing principles alongside the knowledge of language pedagogy which is marked top in the profile of a secondary school teacher. Moreover, given a broad range of university teacher’s responsibilities regarding the development of moderately high-stakes assessments, university teachers need to have a proper level of technical skills in test design as well as possess the ability to assign scores and make accurate decisions while interpreting them.

Conclusion

The contextual representation of the LAL profile for university English teachers in Ukraine is hypothetically developed on the basis of the empirical studies and experience considered in this paper. In order to attain the theoretical status, the contextualized LAL profile needs to be further researched and underpinned by a broader range and scope of empirical data. However, even in its current view the profile may be relied on in designing in-services training courses and programmes in LTA for university teachers.

With respect to LAL enhancement, it is desirable that it should be paid more attention of educational administrators. The much sought-after by teachers short-term courses in LTA may

be efficiently organized based on a content base of the curricula developed for INSETT and PRE-SETT. The activities of UALTA, the professional organization, should be supported and relied on while meeting the pressing need in enhancing the language testing culture in the country.

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ПІДВИЩЕННЯ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ ВИКЛАДАЧІВ У КОНТРОЛІ ТА ОЦІНЮВАННІ ЗА ДОПОМОГОЮ РОБОТИ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЇ

Ольга Квасова (Україна)

Анотація

У статті обговорені питання, що стосуються підвищення компетентності у контролі та оцінюванні викладачів англійської мови, які працюють в українських університетах. Авторка оглядає розвиток компетентності викладачів у контролі та оцінюванні починаючи з 2010 року, коли вперше провела відповідне опитування. Опитування, проведені пізніше, дозволили порівняти відповіді респондентів стосовно успіхів та проблем у розвитку цієї компетентності. Незважаючи на невелику вибірку респондентів у опитуваннях, авторці вдалося охопити представників різноманітної спільноти викладачів іноземних мов університетів та окреслити основні тенденції розвитку компетентності у контролі та оцінюванні. Далі авторка описує діяльність професійної неприбуткової організації – Всеукраїнської асоціації з мовного тестування та оцінювання (ВУАМТО), яка зробила вагомий внесок до розвитку компетентності у контролі та оцінюванні викладачів протягом останніх 6 років. Останнім заходом асоціації став курс з підвищення компетентності викладачів, проведений онлайн. Курсом закладені теоретичні та організаційні основи для наступних навчальних подій подібного типу.

Ключові слова: компетентність у контролі та оцінюванні; профіль умінь у контролі та оцінюванні; підвищення кваліфікації викладачів.

БІО

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