At the intersection of language assessment and academic advising: Communicating results of a large-scale diagnostic academic English writing assessment to students and other stakeholders

Dr Ute Knoch
Language Testing Research Centre
University of Melbourne

Many tertiary institutions administer diagnostic academic English assessments to incoming undergraduate students following the large rise in international students. This is often done to ensure students with difficulties in academic English are diagnosed early and referred to appropriate support programs on campus. This paper presents the findings of a series of interviews with the aim of establishing the type of feedback stakeholders favor following such a writing assessment and how the results could best be communicated to students. The findings highlight the integral importance of the role of academic advisors to the success of this large-scale diagnostic writing assessment. A tentative model of diagnostic writing assessment in a tertiary setting is presented.

Key words: post-entry language assessment, writing assessment, academic advising, assessment outcomes, diagnostic assessment

Introduction

Educational institutions in most English-speaking countries have experienced a sharp increase in overseas students in the past decade. These students present special linguistic challenges to their receiving institutions, especially at university where a command of academic English is arguably more critical than at earlier stages of schooling (e.g. Elder, 2003). While the data documenting the English language needs of English-as-an-additional language (EAL) students is growing, it seems that many tertiary institutions are struggling to rise to the challenges these students pose. Barnard (2002) (as cited by Elder, Bright, &

Address for correspondence: Dr Ute Knoch, Language Testing Research Centre, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia; Email: uknoch@unimelb.edu.au

Bennett, 2007), for example, mentions unprepared admissions officers, a shortage of interpreting staff in the international offices, too few suitably trained academic advising staff and a lack of resources to provide adequate English language support. In response to these problems, the University of Melbourne introduced DELA (Diagnostic English Language Assessment) with the aim of diagnosing students' academic English needs immediately post-admission and then, in collaboration with the academic advising staff, provide students with useful recommendations and follow-up programs (Elder & von Randow, 2002, 2008).

The study reported on here set out to canvass opinions from a variety of stakeholders on what level of detail should be included in the feedback profiles following the writing section of the assessment and how the results could best be communicated to students. The main impetus for the study was a policy decision to make the assessment compulsory for certain groups of students. Because of the implications of this change in policy, DELA changed from being a relatively low-stakes assessment to having more importance on campus.

The study had three main aims. The first aim was to establish whether the feedback provided to students could be improved. Diagnostic assessment of writing is often undertaken in small-scale classroom settings and it was therefore of interest whether detailed feedback profiles could be generated in a more large-scale context. The second aim of the study was to establish what specific recommendations test users would find appropriate as the outcome of the assessment. Because diagnostic assessment is 'assessment for learning' rather than 'assessment of learning', the recommendation made to test takers based on their assessment outcome is crucial to the success of the assessment. Prior to the policy change, the range of recommendations made to students was limited and often resulted in no uptake of any academic English support on campus. A detailed feedback profile as well as a useful recommendation following a diagnostic assessment is crucial to the success of such a test. The final aim of the study was to establish what stakeholders consider the best way to communicate the assessment results to students.

Even though this is a relatively small-scale study conducted in a particular context, the overarching goal of this study was to draw up a preliminary model of diagnostic writing assessment in a large-scale English for academic purposes (EAP) setting.

Background

The review of the literature draws on both the fields of language testing as well as on academic advising. The language testing literature provides an insight into what type of feedback is seen to be the most effective following a language assessment as well as what types of feedback students desire. The academic advising literature adds to this study by providing an insight into the role of the academic advisor in communicating assessment results to students. Each of the two aspects will be considered in turn.

Feedback practices and preferences in language assessment

Although being an integral part of language assessment, and especially of diagnostic language assessment, feedback practices have not received as much attention as other aspects of the assessment cycle (see, e.g. Yin, Sims & Cothran, 2012). Feedback in language assessment can constitute a number of different elements, e.g. an explanation of the types of items test takers answered correctly and incorrectly, an overall test result or a result on certain sub-sections on the test and advisory feedback designed to provide explanations to students on what they can do and what they need to do to progress to the next level. Feedback is therefore usually divided into feedback that reports on students' weaknesses and feedback that attempts to help test takers address these weaknesses (Yin, et al., 2012).

Student preferences for feedback on their writing have also been investigated in a number of smaller-scale studies. Enginarlar (1993), for example, investigated feedback on student writing in a classroom context at university. He was able to show that students generally appreciate detailed feedback and would like to see comments on more than just surface-level errors such as grammar. Similarly, Lee (2008) was able to show that students want explicit feedback. Most research on student opinions shows that students particularly value feedback on language-related problems in their writing, but also want feedback on other aspects, such as comments on content and ideas in their essays (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991). Based on a number of studies focusing on written corrective feedback, Nicol and Macfarlande-Dick (2006) drew up a list of principles of good feedback listed below:

1. The feedback clarifies what good performance is

2. The feedback facilitates the development of self-assessment

3. The feedback delivers high-quality information to students about their learning

4. The feedback encourages teacher and peer dialogue

5. The feedback enhances motivation and self-esteem

6. The feedback provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance

7. The feedback enables teachers to fine-tune their teaching.

Stern and Solomon (2006) add another effective principle which is to provide positive comments in addition to the corrections.

Interestingly, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), Stern and Solomon (2006) as well as Lee (2007) stress that providing students with written feedback alone is not enough. An ideal situation should include some opportunity for face-to-face discussion of the feedback. In a university context where an assessment is administered to many students at once, this is when an academic advisor can help.

While the studies reported on above have looked at student preferences for feedback in the context of writing, a more recent study by Yin, Sims and Cothran (2012) investigated the feedback preferences of students on a diagnostic grammar test. The authors were also able to show that students generally prefer longer and more detailed explanations although individual differences were noticeable. Students also preferred examples of correct usage and liked to see patterns or formulas on how to construct a certain structure.

The role of academic advising in the assessment cycle

Academic advisors have long played an important role on university campuses across the world. They are, for example, often involved in helping 'special populations' of students such as learners from non-English speaking backgrounds. Strommer (1995) argues that advising such populations calls for structure, and regular contact. Often academic advisors are involved in referring students with special advising needs to a variety of campus offices (Gordon, 1992; Harding, 2008). Academic advisors are also often involved in assessment practices on university campuses. Schuh (2008) argues that academic advisors and their students should work together to conduct an analysis of student's strengths and areas of potential development upon entry into the institution, develop a plan for the student that utilizes the assets available at university and use formative measurement techniques to assess the extent to which students are successful in making progress towards their desired goals. In the case of students from an EAL background, a post-entry

English-language assessment such as described in this paper could be used to achieve this purpose.

The academic advising literature also provides a clue as to what students want to see from their advisors. Frost (1991) shows that students desire a personal relationship with their advisor. They also feel that academic advising is a campus-wide responsibility and therefore requires collaboration between academic affairs, student affairs and student services.

The review of the literature indicates that for the effective delivery of a diagnostic writing assessment at university feedback practices that follow the principles of effective feedback are necessary, as well as a mechanism of feedback which includes academic advisors, ideally in a face-to-face situation.

Research questions

Four research questions were formulated. The first two research questions focused on the feedback section of the diagnostic profiles, the third question focused on the recommendation section and the fourth research question was aimed at investigating the communication of the assessment results.

The specific research questions can be seen below:

1. What type of feedback would students like to receive about their writing?

2. What level of detail do other stakeholders consider useful/feasible?

3. What information would stakeholders like in the recommendation section of the diagnostic feedback?

4. What do stakeholders consider to be the best way to communicate the assessment results?

Methodology

The study was based on a series of semi-structured interviews with different stakeholder groups on campus. The following stakeholder groups were identified as central to the study: students, raters, professional academic advising staff in faculty student centers, English as a second language (ESL) tutors, staff working at the Language and Learning Skills Unit and academic staff lecturing in a range of disciplines.

Context of the study

The study was undertaken in the context of the Diagnostic English Language Assessment (DELA) administered at the University of Melbourne. The DELA comprises three parts, a 45-minute reading section, a 30-minute listening section and a 30-minute writing section. The assessment is compulsory for newly-arriving students who have scored below certain thresholds on English-language assessments used for University entrance (see Ransom, 2009 for a detailed description of the policy around DELA). The assessment is administered in pen-and-paper format. Students receive scores for their assessment as well as a recommendation based on their scores via email within three days of taking the assessment. Although DELA is compulsory for certain undergraduate students, it is also taken by other students voluntarily.

Participants

Thirty students were randomly selected from a database of students who had taken the DELA during the 2008 academic year. These students were from a variety of faculties and first language backgrounds. Representative of the DELA population, most students were undergraduate students, but a small number of postgraduates were also included in the study. The students were mostly in their late teens or early twenties.

Fifteen raters volunteered to take part in the study. These all had experience in rating the DELA writing task over a number of administrations of the assessment. All were current or past university staff and all have a background in English and/or Applied Linguistics and experience in teaching ESL. Some of the raters also have rating experience in other rating contexts.

Forty-five university staff members were also included in the study. These were chosen to represent a variety of stakeholder groups across the university, including tutors working at the Language and Learning Skills Unit, tutors involved in teaching ESL credit subjects, academic staff from a range of disciplines, as well as advisors working in faculty-based student centers which are the main site of contact for students newly entering the university.

Instruments

The writing section of the DELA, which is the focus of this study, requires students to write an argumentative essay on a given topic in thirty minutes. The essays are scored using a rating scale with descriptors in three categories (fluency, content, form) and each is scored on a six-point scale ranging from 1 to 6. DELA has been subject to a number of validation studies (Elder, 2003; Elder, Barkhuizen, Knoch, & von Randow, 2007; Elder & Erlam, 2001; Knoch, 2009).

During the interviews, the participants were shown three possible feedback profiles with varying levels of detail. The first only presents students with three scores for their writing (one score each for fluency, content and form) and no accompanying descriptions. The second feedback profile shown to interviewees had accompanying descriptions for the areas of fluency, content and form (see Figure 1 below). This reflects the current practice after each DELA administration. The third feedback profile was the most detailed with descriptions in seven areas instead of three (see Figure 2 below). The descriptions were also less general than the ones in the second profile.

Fluency
Your writing is mainly satisfactory.
Inappropriate use of linking devices causes some strain for the reader.
Content
You provide sufficient ideas and they are arranged logically. Some ideas might lack supporting evidence or the overall point of view is not always clear.
Form
You use a satisfactory range of sentence structures but are not always accurate in complex sentences. The errors that you make may hinder the expression of ideas.

Figure 1. Feedback Option 2

Grammatical accuracy:
You made a few grammar mistakes (e.g. plural 's; articles) but none of these interfered with meaning.
Academic style
In academic writing, writers usually tone down the strength of the claims they make. They would use phrases and words like '*might*', '*it is likely that*', '*one can assume that*' and '*it seems that*'. You hardly used any of these.
It is also not common to use direct speech and personal pronouns like 'I' or 'we' in academic writing.
Linking devices (e.g. firstly, secondly, however):
You used some linking devices, but some of those were used incorrectly.
Difficulty of vocabulary
You used a variety of academic vocabulary
Sentence structure
You used a range of sentences structures effectively.
Paragraphing and organization
You used insufficient paragraphing. Your essay was organized, but you had no introduction or conclusion.
Content
You had good, original ideas and you developed those; but could have used input material a little more.

Figure 2. Feedback Option 3

The feedback profiles shown to students were custom-made for each particular student interviewed (after a careful review of their writing sample), while staff

members were shown general examples only. The examples in Figures 1 and 2 above are samples of customized profiles.

Procedures

Data collection

Students were invited to participate via email and interviewed in the principle researcher's office. The students were interviewed within the first semester of taking the assessment. Staff were approached via email or in person and most were interviewed in their offices or in the researcher's office. The interviews took on average 30 to 40 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded.

Data analysis

The data was transcribed by a research assistant after which the accuracy of the transcriptions was verified by the principal researcher. The data was analyzed by identifying and coding recurrent themes. The recurring themes were double-coded by a research assistant to establish coding accuracy.

Results

The results of the interviews are presented in the order of the research questions. For the purpose of this study, all participants were given a pseudonym so that identification is not possible.

Research Question 1: What type of feedback would students like to receive about their writing?

As mentioned above, to answer this research questions, all interviewees were presented with three feedback profiles with different levels of detail. They were then asked to explain which type of feedback they found the most suitable and provide reasons for their choice.

All students agreed in that they thought the most detailed feedback profiles were more useful. Younghee, for example, said in her interview:

> *Of course, if there is more things it is better. For me, sentence structure, academic style, I need improvement, I know that now. I think this is really good. Definitely useful, very useful, it is perfect for me. I know now how to improve myself.*

Younghee's response after being presented with her feedback profile was mirrored by a number of participants. Marco also thought that the most detailed feedback was useful for him as he noted in his interview:

> *Well, it's clear that this [the most detailed feedback] is useful. I mean, for example, if I had a lot of problems with linking devices or thing like that, I could say, I can see I have trouble with that, I'm gonna learn some linking words…*

Rohana, while reviewing the most detailed profile made the following comments:

> *It is very useful. Definitely useful, it is really true except for content. Well, it is true. It's perfect. I know now how to improve myself. […] I know that I have to avoid some things like I all the time use 'things' and 'things' and 'things'. It is easy. Of course, that I am very happy about well done. Grammar mistakes, of course, but it is maybe because I have not enough time to check. Maybe it is ok. It means that I really have to read again. But even in my language! Paragraphing was good. Yay! I'm very glad to have this information. Ideas logically organized, oh yeah. Used linking device. I know that I have to use that kind of link; firstly, secondly, however, nevertheless, I know. But I am really glad to learn that I use some, this is a good thing, but I used it incorrectly.*

Pascal, who is an international student from France, said:

> *The feedback is useful because that's English that I have learnt in France, but is it good English? Is it appropriate to use this English here? I mean, the thing is, also, between Australia and United Kingdom, USA is different English, so is it appropriate to write like that?*

Being able to notice such fine nuances between the writing requirements and conventions in different English-speaking countries and between these countries and their own country is difficult for many international students and Pascal therefore thought that receiving feedback on his writing could help him notice, understand and address these differences.

Some students thought that it would be good to provide more detailed information about each category on the feedback profile with examples of their writing, but because of the large-scale context of DELA as well as the short time frame for producing results, this is, although desirable, probably not feasible.

Overall, all students preferred the most detailed feedback profile rather than just receiving generic feedback or scores only.

Research Question 2: What level of detail in the feedback profiles do other stakeholders consider useful/feasible?

Although most staff agreed that the most detailed feedback profile (i.e. Option 3, Figure 2) would be the most useful for students, there were some that thought that students would be overwhelmed by so much detail. Brendon, an advisor in a student centre, had the following to say:

> *Knowing students and how little they actually absorb this stuff, I suspect that it is probably too much information, particularly you know at the point when they are getting all this and they are so overwhelmed with information.*

Brendon was referring to the time of year when DELA is administered – the beginning of the semester. At this time of year, students are still learning their way around the campus, struggling to find accommodation and buying and organizing all the basic requirements they will need for their daily life and studies. During orientation week on campus, students are overwhelmed with brochures and new information and therefore Brendon thought that the level of detail in the feedback profiles would not be absorbed by the majority of the students.

On the other hand, other staff thought that more detail would be better. Below is Sarah's (another advisor in a faculty student centre) view:

> *Students have a right to know as much detail as possible. The more you give them, the better.*

Interestingly, one student adviser, Martin, thought that the most detailed feedback profile would also help student advisors in their daily work. He suggested that with more feedback, advisors would be able to provide more concrete guidance to students as well as have more information that could be kept in a student's file.

Several staff members from a range of disciplines and backgrounds noted that it would be important to explain different terms used in the feedback profile on the back of the feedback profile to ensure that students can get the best possible result from their feedback.

Overall, the views among staff members and student advisors were very spread from some thinking that the most detailed feedback was too much to process to others who thought, like Sarah above, that students should be given the most detailed feedback possible. There were, furthermore, no clear differences between staff members working in different capacities.

Research Question 3: What information would stakeholders like in the recommendation section?

An important section of the feedback provided as a result of a diagnostic assessment, is the recommendation of what students should do to improve any skill areas in which the diagnosis has identified them needing help. In the case of DELA, students with lower academic English proficiency levels are advised to enroll in an ESL (English as a second language) credit course while students with higher proficiency are asked to either enroll in short courses offered by the Language and Learning Skills Unit or to seek individual help at the Language and Learning Skills Unit. Before the change in policy, the uptake of the recommendation was optional, but the new policy stipulates that students below a certain threshold have to take up the recommended support.

Some students reported in their interviews that they found it difficult to fit an ESL credit subject into their timetable. They reported finding it hard to find time for their content subjects and that an ESL course would add to the burden and also to the cost of their studies. They differed in their views if the recommendation should be compulsory or not, with most of them saying that they did not think they should be forced to do anything. Other students reported that because they had to work part-time to support their studies, adding an additional burden to their workload was not possible.

One student, Nurul, who was only interviewed later in the semester, on the other hand, thought that it would have been good for her if the ESL credit subject had been compulsory. She had not anticipated any problems with her English before she arrived in Australia having studied in English in her native Pakistan. However after getting the results of some assignments, she noticed that she needed help (see quote below) and mentioned that it would have probably been good for her to be forced to take part in compulsory writing classes.

> *I was very enthusiastic at that time [beginning of the semester], that I want to learn more, and I thought that I can do well at English because my subjects were in English [in Pakistan]. But I found great difficulty in writing…*

Nurul started taking academic English support in her second semester and she reported benefitting greatly.

As was the case with the students, staff members also did not agree on whether the recommendation should be compulsory. They thought that a certain threshold level of academic English proficiency is necessary for autonomous learning and that possibly everyone beneath that threshold level should take face-to-face classes on campus. Some advisors suggested that the introduction

of a compulsory first-year transition subject would be useful for all students arriving from overseas.

One faculty with above-average resources has started conducting peer-learning programs in which high-achieving second year students are paired with newly incoming first year students to help with all types of academic matters. They reported some success with that initiative.

Most staff agreed that more self-access material was necessary. They suggested that there should be links from the students' individual university computer login access and that this would help in promoting learner autonomy.

The interviews further showed that different faculties had very different needs and resources when it came to the recommendation section of the feedback. For example, students in the education faculty go into placement in schools half-way through the first semester and therefore taking an ESL credit subject is not possible and a more tailor-made solution needs to be found. Also, one faculty with more resources as mentioned above, is able to offer peer-learning programs which other faculties cannot afford.

Research Question 4: What do stakeholders consider the best way to communicate the assessment results?

During the interviews, a variety of issues emerged which interviewees considered important for the success of the DELA. These were:

- Distribution of assessment results and the need for ongoing support and tracking
- Stakeholders that should get the DELA results.

Each of these is discussed below.

Distribution of assessment results

The practice before the change in DELA policy was that at the end of the DELA assessment, students were told to approach their faculty student centre a few days after the assessment to pick up their results. However, a number of students reported during the interviews that they forgot where to pick up their results and in the rush of the beginning of the semester gave up finding out about their results. One student also reported that she knew she had performed badly and therefore decided not to pick up her results. For this reason, some students suggested that it would have been easier if they could have received their results via email. However, others thought that they would prefer to discuss their assessment outcomes on a face-to-face basis with an advisor who

could also discuss the possible options of further support. One very pro-active advisor reported that he repeatedly sent out emails to students to remind them to pick up their results and has had quite a large success-rate with this.

All advisors suggested that there was little point in seeing students only once and recommending suitable English language support, but that there was a need for ongoing support and monitoring of uptake and that this should be done by the academic advising staff.

Throughout the interviews, both staff and students stressed the importance of the need for human contact. Purely sending out assessment results via email and not following up with individuals was seen to be significantly less effective in improving students' academic English language abilities. Josh, an advisor, said:

> *It's makes all the difference, just that absolute personal contact and then having someone to take the time to explain and drive it home to the students. Whereas with some automatic sort of procedure, like email, they will just think, yeah, whatever.*

Similarly, Lara, an ESL tutor, noted:

> *Many [students] don't pick up their results. A one-on-one consultation would be much better because it is so important in the whole feedback process that they have that human contact.*

Lara also noted, as did two other ESL tutors, that students at different English language proficiency levels might have different needs when understanding the results of the feedback profile and recommendations. Students above a certain threshold of proficiency might be more likely to cope with email only feedback, whilst students who are less proficient might be more likely to benefit from a face-to-face discussion of their results.

The discussion of the most effective way of distributing the assessment results showed just how important the role of the academic advisors is in this process. The distribution of the results before the policy change made very little use of academic advisors. Both students and staff members from a variety of backgrounds noted the integral importance of student advisors' communication with students upon the presentation of the assessment results. Student advisors provide that 'human' connection which cannot be achieved by purely sending out the results without any follow-up. This shows just how important the role of student advisor is in the success of an assessment system such as the DELA, which is designed to aid students toward maximum possible success in their studies. A well designed assessment with a clear feedback

profile cannot be successful in a vacuum. The role of the student advisor is crucial.

Who should get the DELA results?

All staff were asked who should be given access to the DELA results apart from the students. There was general agreement that the academic advisors in student centres, the tutors teaching ESL subjects as well as the tutors working in the Language and Learning Skills Unit should have access to results. It was also mentioned that there should be dialogue between these groups wherever possible to allow for the best possible outcomes for the students.

Overall, there was a consensus among staff that the university has a responsibility to students whose first language is not English and therefore every possible support needed to be offered to help students achieve the best possible outcome at the university.

Discussion

The interviews showed that all the students and a large number of staff members favoured the more detailed feedback profile, generally following the principle 'the more feedback, the better'. Students commented on the usefulness of a variety of the points made in the feedback. These findings are in line with Lee (2008) who showed that students like explicit feedback as well as authors such as Leki (1991) who found students value feedback on a variety of aspects of their writing.

Some of the student comments showed that the detailed feedback profiles reflected a number of the principles of good feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Stern & Solomon, 2006). The feedback seemed to be successful in clarifying areas in which students have done well, and areas in which they need further improvement. Students generally appeared motivated by the feedback as both positive comments as well as corrections of their writing were included.

The study also showed that there might be different needs for different faculties in terms of the recommendation section, showing that one solution cannot fit all, especially in such a large-scale context. This is reflected in current practice at the University of Melbourne where students are sent different recommendations depending on the faculty they are studying in. This practice could however be further refined based on student feedback.

The most important finding of the study, however, was the crucial role of academic advisors in communicating the assessment results to the students,

most importantly, by being able to add the component of human contact. This has also been stressed by several other authors (Lee, 2008; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Schuh, 2008; Stern & Solomon, 2006). Strommer's (1995) opinion, which called for ongoing contact of students and advising staff, was also reflected in the interview findings.

Implications and limitations

The study has two major implications. The first is theoretical, in that it attempts to build a tentative model of large-scale diagnostic writing assessment in a university setting. To develop such a model, McNamara's (1996) model of performance assessment (Figure 3 below) was taken as a starting point. In this model, a number of possible factors influencing the score in a performance assessment are shown. The model shows that a student's writing performance is influenced by the writing task as well as the rater and the rating scale used in the rating. All these factors combined result in the score awarded to a student.
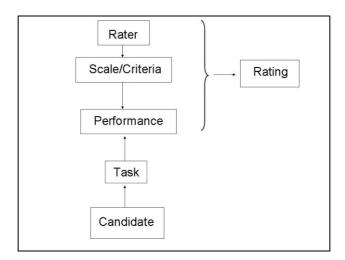

Figure 3. Model of performance assessment (McNamara, 1996)

The current study has illuminated a number of points additional to those shown in McNamara's model which are important to a model of diagnostic writing assessment in a university setting (Figure 4). The assessment outcomes are very important in diagnostic assessment and therefore deserve a prominent place in the model. The assessment outcomes should have two parts: a feedback and a recommendation section. The feedback profile should be detailed with examples and the recommendation section tailor-made for students studying in different disciplines and contexts. The model must also include a mechanism for the distribution of the results to test takers. This mechanism needs to be fast, possibly different for test takers of different proficiency levels or different for students from different faculties, so that all students receive their results within

a short time, there is opportunity for discussing the results face-to-face if desired and that there is maximum uptake of the recommendations made. Figure 4 below shows this initial model created based on the findings in this study.
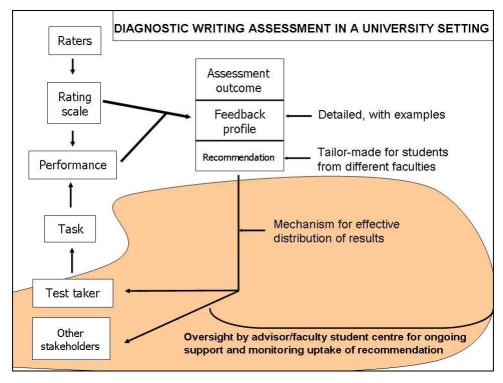

Figure 4. A tentative model of diagnostic writing assessment in a university setting

The second implication of the study is practical. Although the initial focus of the interviews was on establishing what type of feedback was deemed most important by the different stakeholder groups affected by the DELA, it is interesting to note that a large part of the success of the assessment and therefore a large part of the model proposed on the basis of this study is only possible and successful with the help of academic advising staff. All the elements of the model presented in the kidney-shaped, shaded section of the model are directly touched by academic advisors working in faculty student centres.

Finally, it could be argued that advisors in faculty student centres should be given oversight of the cycle to provide ongoing support to students and monitor uptake of recommendations.

Overall, the model shows that a large part of the success of a language assessment in a university setting relies on good co-operation between language assessment specialists and academic advising staff. The model can

provide guidance to other institutions considering implementing a similar assessment system.

The study has several limitations. The data collection relied entirely on semi-structured interviews as well as on a small sample size. More students and staff could have been sampled by adding a questionnaire to the data collection methods. Had the sample size been larger, a more nuanced analysis of the interview data would have been possible. Differences between the feedback preferences of high and low achieving students could have been compared (as was done in Yin, et al., 2012).

One interesting finding, that some staff thought too much feedback would overload students but that students generally preferred to have more feedback than less, is something that could be subject to further research. As readiness and receptivity on the side of the students seems critical to the success of a program such as the DELA, it might be worth investigating at what point in students' academic careers the DELA should be administered and whether the advisers idea that students cannot take in detailed feedback is actually the case.

Conclusion

The current study has shown that while the level of feedback provided after the assessment is important, the overall success of the assessment is greatly influenced by the co-operation and collaboration of both assessment professionals and academic advising staff. This is crucial and integral to the success of the assessment, the aim of which is to provide the best possible academic support to students entering university from abroad and with a first language background other than English.

Acknowledgements

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