

# Language assessment literacy of teachers in an English medium of instruction university: Implications for ELT training in Pakistan

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In Pakistan, English is the official language and a high level of proficiency is considered a passport to success (Manan et al., 2016). However, little is known about Pakistani English teachers' assessment knowledge and training needs. This study investigates the language assessment literacy of English language teachers at a multi-campus English Medium Instruction university in Pakistan. The aims were (1) to evaluate whether the EAP teachers were equipped, academically and professionally, to design and conduct language assessment; (2) to document teachers' language assessment challenges in context and (3) to consult teachers on their training needs in assessment. Data comprised questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and ELT curriculum documents. The analysis revealed little or no training in LAL, large classes, a crowded curriculum, and mixed student abilities impacting on language assessment practices. Implications are discussed for the training needed to support teachers' language assessment practices that underpin student success in EMI programs.

**Key words:** language assessment literacy, classroom-based assessment, English for Academic Purposes, English Medium of Instruction, teacher training

## Introduction

With over half of the world's international students learning in English, and universities increasing courses in this language (Graddol, 2006), English Medium Instruction (EMI) in tertiary education is a continuing growth area. In Pakistan, English is the official language and has always been considered a means by which to achieve upward social

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mobility (Mansoor, 2005); hence, the assessment of language skills in English for academic purposes at university level has social implications. English being a passport to personal and professional success (Manan et al., 2016), it plays the “role of gatekeeper for entry into prestigious higher education institutions and high salaried jobs” (Shamim & Rashid, 2019, p. 44). There has been a shift from Urdu to English as a medium of instruction across the education system right through to higher education (Ashraf, 2008). For historical reasons, English has long been the language of governance and education in Pakistan. This makes the EMI context different from those countries that adopt EMI for internationalization. Private schools and universities are primarily EMI, but in contrast 90% of public schools do not use EMI, which results in a sizable proportion of Higher Education (HE) students having limited English (Mahboob, 2017). University English language teachers face multiple challenges including, but not limited to, improving academic English levels that underpin EMI in Pakistan.

In the Pakistani multilingual context, English is a second language. To chart the historical spread and different uses of English, Kachru (1985) classified World Englishes into a series of three concentric circles.

- The outside ring represents an expanding circle. It includes the countries where English is beginning to be learned more often as a foreign language (EFL). Communities in this circle are called norm-dependent.
- The second ring is referred to as the outer circle. This space represents those countries where English was introduced during the colonial period. These nations speak their own well-established languages, along with varieties of English as a second language (ESL). These are norm-developing communities.
- The inner circle represents the countries where English has always been a first language. These communities are norm-providing.

Recent shifts in globalisation (Kellner, 2002), and new forms such as postmodern globalisation (Hall, 2020), have caused the English varieties to leak outside national borders, making the distinction between ESL and EFL less clear and more complicated, so that the boundaries of Kachru’s Three Circle Model have become rather fuzzy (Canagarajah & Said, 2009). Different varieties of English are emerging in different communities, causing a shift in English Language Teaching (ELT) policy and practices worldwide. According to Canagarajah and Said (2009), these communities need to develop their own policies, professional expertise and pedagogical practices, rather than relying on the norms and expertise provided by inner circle communities. Such ELT policy would serve local knowledge and contextual needs, as Widdowson (2004) asserts: “local contexts of actual practice are to be seen not as constraints to be overcome but conditions to be satisfied” (p. 369). From a critical perspective of EMI, Shohamy (2012)

pointed out issues such as the “inequality in the global status of English for different groups” (p. 205) and “biases due to assessment in second languages” (p. 204).

Dominant ELT ideology still maintains the English of the Kachru Inner Circle as a “native standard”, overlooking students who use English against the backdrop of multilingualism (Jenkins, 2014), despite the term “native speaker” being contested in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics. Thus, the variety of English being taught and assessed in Pakistan is an important consideration. Biases in Pakistani English language assessment would occur if this movement away from native speaker standards remained unacknowledged in this context. The Pakistani English variety as modelled by teachers is the one applied for assessment i.e., assessments set locally, and although there are some studies reported about language teachers’ assessment practices in higher education in Pakistan (Ashraf & Zaki, 2019; Sartaj et al., 2019), still there is a need for research that investigates English language teachers’ language assessment literacy.

### **Language Assessment Literacy**

Language assessment is a key element of language teaching as it can be used as a “bridge” between teaching and learning in the classroom (Colby-Kelly & Turner, 2007) to motivate students and also to enhance learning (e.g., Leung et al., 2018). Classroom-based language assessment (CBLA) is growing as an important area of research; however, it is still not well-developed field in different contexts such as English as a medium of instruction (EMI) and specifically in English for academic Purposes (EAP) contexts. This study examines teachers’ formative classroom assessment practices in EAP and EMI contexts that remain underexplored in the literature.

Emphasis on the importance of teachers’ assessment knowledge and skills led to the concept of Language Assessment Literacy for teachers (LAL). As Hill (2017) points out, past definitions of LAL (e.g., Fulcher, 2012) focused language assessment literacy on testing. However, according to Scarino (2013), language assessment literacy as a concept needs to go beyond testing to recognize language teaching contexts, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and theories, all of which shape teachers’ LAL. Teachers’ prior language learning experiences as students, together with their experiences as teachers, influence their literacy, principles and philosophies, as well as their decisions about what to do in the classroom and how to do it (Crusan et al., 2016). LAL is being refined as a construct that explores what language teachers want and need to know about CBLA to develop their assessment literacy (e.g., Giraldo, 2021; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Tsagari, 2020). A working definition for LAL involves the knowledge of language and language

methodologies; skills for designing, using, and interpreting tests or assessment tasks; and principles of ethical use of assessment information, such as fairness in assessing language abilities. These are qualities related to language assessment ability (e.g., Davies, 2008) and the contexts of teaching (e.g., Scarino, 2013). Recent studies further affirm that skills, knowledge, and principles are the main constituents of LAL (Butler et al., 2021; Giraldo, 2018; Lee & Butler, 2020). LAL is essential for language teachers to realize that their assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices in the classroom have social consequences, so LAL also involves teachers' "understanding of the social role of assessment and the responsibility of the language tester. Understanding of the political [and] social forces involved, test power and consequences" (Inbar-Lourie, 2013, p. 27). Fairness in assessment practices requires teachers to plan and design assessment that effectively provides information about their students' skills. A lack of assessment literacy affects their awareness of critical issues, such as the impact of assessment principles, like ethics and fairness, on their performance and the performance of their students (Deygers, 2019; McNamara et al., 2019). Esfandiari and Nouri (2016) emphasize the need to use appropriate assessment strategies to assess students' performance to support learning. Thus, teachers are "expected to have a working knowledge of all aspects of assessment to support their instruction and to effectively respond to the needs and expectations of students, parents, and the school community" (Herrera Mosquera & Macías, 2015, p. 303). Developing assessment literacy through effective training creates awareness around accountability of assessment practices in language teachers. Overall, there is a growing emphasis on teachers' responsibility as assessors (e.g., Soodmand Afshar & Ranjbar, 2021). It requires them to enhance their language assessment literacy (LAL) for effective assessment practices (e.g., Fulcher, 2012; Harding & Kremmel, 2016), which calls for professional development training to keep the teachers informed about developments in language assessment (e.g., Vogt et al., 2020).

### **Training in context**

It is known that many teachers receive neither testing theory nor assessment practice training (e.g., Hasselgreen et al., 2004, Taylor, 2009). More recent research from Europe calls for the contextual factors influencing teachers' language assessment literacy (Vogt et al., 2020) to be identified and according to Wiliam and Thompson (2017), effective teacher training is related to teachers' context, is sustainable and also extensive. The training required incorporates practical skills in developing, conducting, and using assessment in language classrooms in specific contexts, all critical aspects for fair assessment practices (e.g., Deygers, 2019; McNamara et al., 2019).

Teacher LAL, or TAL (e.g., Hill, 2017), has also been studied in different contexts (e.g., Firoozi et al., 2019; Janatifar & Marandi, 2018; Koh et al., 2017). In Bangladesh, Sultana (2019) concluded that secondary English teachers lacked adequate academic and professional assessment training, which affected the quality of their assessment tasks and contributed to a restricted use of assessment to support language teaching. In Hong Kong, Lam (2019) investigated secondary English teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and assessment practices, concluding that the teachers had appropriate assessment knowledge and positive views towards assessment. The study reported a disparity, however, between what teachers believed and thought they knew about assessment and what happened in practice when they assessed students' English language skills. Manning (2013) maintained more structured training interventions were needed for EAP teachers to become assessment literate or "good" language teachers, who could treat assessment design as a process to be accountable for (Weideman, 2019).

A range of studies focus on the impacts of teacher training on LAL. Both pre-service and in-service teacher training develop and enhance teachers' LAL (e.g., Lam, 2015; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). It is recommended for prospective teachers to take language testing courses during in-service training to create a CBLA culture with the aim to improve language education, i.e., assessment literacy in grading and judgments made about student language skills (Weigle, 2007; White, 2009).

Until recently, however, training bodies have not engaged with language teachers regarding assessment training needs, despite their being important stakeholders of LAL (Scarino, 2013; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). The lack of attention paid to teacher involvement in designing testing courses has resulted in inappropriate and ineffective teacher training programs (e.g., Jeong, 2013). While research has also shown that teachers recognize a need for LAL training (Tsagari & Csépes, 2011), they have been vague in clarifying their requirements (Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). It is unsurprising then that although the focus in the EMI literature is on improving EMI delivery and its "success", research into English language teachers' assessment knowledge or training needs in their EMI contexts remains scarce. The key may lie in examining the challenges that shape assessment practices within specific contexts.

## **Rationale**

Assessment, a critical aspect of English language teaching and learning (Frank, 2012), is essential for motivating and influencing classroom teaching and learning (Davison, 2019; Kellaghan & Greaney, 2001; Lamprianou & Christie, 2009). Teachers' roles as assessors and their attitudes towards assessment are very important for student learning

(Soodmand Afshar & Ranjbar, 2021; Looney et al., 2018) as teachers can enhance language learning by employing effective language assessment strategies in the classroom to motivate and involve language learners (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). The literature suggests there is little research investigating the LAL of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers (Fazel & Ali, 2022; Manning, 2013), and less in EMI contexts.

The research setting, or context, of the study is very important as it helps to explain and understand the findings. Notwithstanding teacher LAL being vital to student success there appears to be no significant study conducted in the Pakistani Higher Education context to deepen understanding of teachers' use of effective formative assessment at university level. In response, the study motivation was to explore university English language teachers' LAL in Pakistan. It anticipated identifying assessment needs of the university English language teachers to help design LAL programs for language teachers in Pakistan.

The research is guided by the following research questions emerging from the literature review:

1. To what extent are English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers in Pakistan academically and professionally equipped to design and conduct language assessment?
2. What are the main language assessment challenges faced by English language teachers in the EMI university context in Pakistan?
3. What do EAP teachers in Pakistan perceive to be their language assessment training needs?

## **Methodology**

The study was inductive in nature as the main objective was to explore and identify different assessment practices in EAP classrooms. Previous LAL research reveals the use of surveys (e.g. Sultana, 2019) as well as a mixed-method approach to explore teacher LAL and assessment practices in the language classroom (Crusan et al., 2016; Malone, 2013; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). This study used a mixed-method research design to explore EAP teachers' knowledge and awareness of assessment practices. For this purpose, both qualitative and quantitative data were generated and analysed with the appropriate tools (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Clark, 2017).

**Table 1.** Summary of data collection and analysis

Data source	Data content	Analysis
Documents (n=3)	Course outlines of ELT programs	Content analysis
Teacher questionnaire (n=26)	Section 1. Experience Section 2. Assessment training and training needs	Descriptive statistics
Teacher interview (n=12)	Semi-structured interview guide	Content analysis

### Research site and context

Data from teachers were collected from the nine affiliated teacher training colleges of the University of Education (UE) Lahore, Pakistan, where English is the medium of instruction, because 1) UE was established to train prospective teachers and to improve the quality of teaching in Punjab, Pakistan; and 2) the first author has been teaching at UE since 2007. Her observations and professional interest in EAP and CBLA motivated the selection of UE as the research site.

English language training at UE is called English for academic purposes (EAP) and is taught in the first four semesters of Bachelor level programs. As per UE assessment and evaluation policy, EAP courses have three assessments. Assessments 1 and 2 are classroom-based assessments designed and assessed by the teachers and Assessment 3 is a formal examination. In this context learners take EAP assessment tasks and standardized tests designed by classroom teachers, but no national and international tests are prepared for or required. There is a likely effect from the summative standardized test on teachers' teaching and assessment, but washback effects (Cheng et al., 2015) are beyond the scope of this paper.

Assessments 1 and 2 are formative assessments, which teachers are expected to use formatively to guide their teaching and help students develop their academic English. Assessment 1 is a mid-term exam consisting of a class test in which the language skills are assessed with separate tasks. Assessment 2 consists of integrated task assignments and an oral presentation. Teachers can decide whether to administer one assignment of 20 marks or two or more assignments. Assessment 3 is a summative final term exam, a standardized test prepared by the institution with separately assessed listening, reading comprehension, and paragraph writing, and discrete testing of grammar and vocabulary.

## **Participants**

For selecting and recruiting participant teachers, an online questionnaire was prepared on Qualtrics (see below). The questionnaire link was emailed to all English teachers at UE, Lahore by the chairperson of the English department. The email specified the questionnaire was for English teachers who had taught, or were teaching, EAP courses at the University. The questionnaire included an invitation for follow-up interviews. It is important to note that since all teaching is in English at UE, most EAP teachers also taught subject specific mainstream courses, on linguistics and literature.

Twenty-six teachers voluntarily responded to the questionnaire. For the most part, they were female, which is representative of the ratio of male and female English teachers at UE. Almost half were aged 31-35. From the twenty-six, twelve teachers from five campuses agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview to further “probe and expand the interviewee's responses” (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 88) from the questionnaire. Most of the interview participants were B.Ed./ MPhil. graduates, with English Language Teaching (ELT) training and varied teaching experience, from 1 to 20 years. It is important to mention here that none of these teachers had international teaching experience.

## **Data sources**

The online questionnaire was prepared and shared using Qualtrics software ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)), which allows researchers to build an instrument, distribute it and analyse responses from an online platform. It was designed based on a literature review using the conceptual framework of CBLA (Hill, 2017) and LAL (Fulcher, 2012). The questionnaire (see Appendix A) included mostly structured-response items (multiple-choice, Likert-type) but also open-ended questions. Section 1 of the questionnaire contained questions to collect data about teachers' background, their academic and professional qualifications, and teaching experience. Section 2 addressed teachers' previous training in English language teaching (ELT), assessment and language assessment. It also served as a needs analysis for the teachers' perceived assessment training requirements (see Appendix A).

As a follow-up, the semi-structured interview was used to obtain detailed data by “providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses” (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 88) and “keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study” (Berg, 2007, p. 39). An interview guide (see Appendix B) that interrogated the EAP teachers' LAL was used to assist the interviewer to obtain reliable and comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The interviews were conducted in English either face-to-face or by telephone. Teachers were free to respond to the interview questions in Urdu or English and they all opted to



respond in English. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher for analysis. The teachers' privacy was protected by using code names.

The third source of data, the document analysis, was used to corroborate evidence and to verify findings (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000) from the questionnaires and interviews. Course outline documents for ELT programs were obtained not only from UE but from three other educational institutions, Punjab University Lahore, Allam Iqbal Open University Islamabad and the British Council in Pakistan.

### **Data analysis**

The structured-response items in the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively in terms of frequencies of response. Content analysis (Schreier, 2012), with NVivo 12 software, was used to analyze the responses to open-ended questions as well as the documents that provided information about course offerings in ELT training programs. Similarly, the interviews were transcribed and organized using NVivo before using content analysis to identify major themes relating to LAL.

The reflexive thematic analysis approach was used for coding (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Research questions provided the starting point and helped to identify initial codes in the interview transcripts. Initial codes were then confirmed by re-reading the interview transcripts and repeating the coding process after a few days to ensure intra-coder reliability which "involves a coder's consistency across time" (Lacy et al., 2015, p. 10).

The interview data was read and re-read by the researcher for coding the text by breaking it into smaller meaningful chunks. After coding, similar codes were kept under one node. The context of the codes in a text is also important, and NVivo enables the viewing of the coding stripes in the margins of documents so that the researcher can see where these codes have been used in the original documents. Nodes, therefore, helped to organise different themes, and were assigned names that reflected the theme. The sub-themes identified in the interview data were grouped and the results of the analysis were consolidated into themes.

## **Findings**

The results are organized by the three research questions, combining the questionnaire, interview, and document results where relevant.

**RQ1 To what extent are EAP teachers in Pakistan academically and professionally equipped to design and conduct language assessment?**

To address RQ1, the themes “assessment training and qualifications” and “the role of experience” emerging from the thematic analysis of the interviews and the questionnaire results are reported on.

#### *Assessment training and qualifications*

Questionnaire responses showed that all teachers had completed EMI higher education, the standard for university teaching, and higher degrees i.e., MS/MPhil or PhD. About 54% of the teachers held a professional qualification, a B.Ed., which covered assessment and evaluation in general education, but not language testing and assessment (LTA) within specifically designed English language teaching qualifications. In the absence of professional qualifications and pre-service ELT training, opportunities offered for professional development programs were explored and 56% had in-service training in ELT. Three teachers noted that their ELT training did not cover LTA, whereas 37% reported one course and 32% had completed two assessment-related courses. Only 15% of the teachers reported training on specific topics: “writing and reading assessment”, “assessment techniques”, “assessment and evaluation”, and “language testing, construction of objective and subjective type tests, validity, reliability”. Most teachers who reported training in LTA had participated in seminars and in-service workshops: 60% of the teachers did not report any specific training related to assessing writing, while 40% had received training in writing assessment while studying for their B.Ed.

The teachers agreed on the value of assessment training programs to develop awareness of the latest assessment strategies in the interviews. Emphasising the importance of training, Roha noted, ‘*Yes, training is very helpful and if proper training is given teachers can assess in a better way*’. However, concern was expressed regarding the quantity and quality of language assessment training programs because: ‘*The available training is very less. They are inappropriate. They don’t train teachers; they are just seminars.*’ (Aalamgir). Similarly, teachers expressed dissatisfaction regarding the adequacy of pre-service and in-service assessment training for language teachers. Laiba, for example said, ‘*Actually, the dilemma of our institutes is this that once the teachers are appointed, there are no in-service teachers’ training and pre-service is never there. And the people and the institutes, they don’t realise that it must be there*’. Furthermore, teachers asked for pre-service training to be reformed. Jibrán stated, ‘*The content of the workshop should be revamped in order to equip the teachers.*’ In-service teacher training programs were deemed effective, as Naimal pointed out, ‘*Pre-service training- I do not think that these work ..... but in-service, the teachers really know about the problems of assessment, and they know about the learning problems of the students, and they also know about their deficiencies when they are in-service. So, they learn many skills and they work when they go back to their classes.*’ Emphasising the importance of in-service training, Hira stated, ‘*I feel like in-service writing assessment training should be conducted as it can be*

*really helpful to polish and to brush up the teacher's way of taking assessment and doing assessment'. There seemed to be a consensus on the significance of training; however, pre-service training was found to be unrealistic by some because it disregarded the challenges teachers faced in the actual classroom.*

*The role of experience in developing assessment knowledge and skills.*

The majority of the teachers (85%) had more than five years' teaching experience, according to the questionnaire, and analysis of the interview transcripts emphasised the importance teachers placed on it. Hira stated, *'I do believe that experience affects writing assessment abilities and practices'*, and Shirin valued experience over qualifications: *'If teachers have experience of teaching ESL students for four or five years, then it's more than the qualification according to me.'* An experienced teacher was perceived to be aware of students' errors. (Al) said, *'An experienced teacher is an asset; he knows many things through his experience. He knows what types of errors are there and he knows how to explain this'*. Other teachers pointed out that new teachers were eager to improve things, but enthusiasm waned over time: *'When people join a service, [and]they are more enthusiastic about their teaching, and they pay more attention towards it.'* (Maryam). However, teachers became less motivated or interested in being innovative, as Maryam observed: *'When they see that this kind of things are happening time and again and this kind of problems are part of the process, I guess they become lenient perhaps in their style and their assessment in the classroom do not improve with the passage of time or experience in developing assessment knowledge and skills.'* In sum, the teachers emphasised the importance of experience in enhancing teachers' assessment skills.

*ELT training program course outline: findings*

The analysis of course outlines, from participating ELT programs, showed students could undertake ELT Certificates and Diplomas or an MA in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Content analysis in NVivo was used to identify the training focus. It should be noted that no program included a separate course on language testing and assessment, not even at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) Islamabad, the largest supplier of teachers and ELT professionals in Pakistan.

## **RQ 2 What are the main language assessment challenges faced by EAP teachers in Pakistan?**

To address RQ2, the themes "teacher language awareness" and "teaching context" emerging from the thematic analysis of the interviews and the questionnaire results are reported on.

*Teacher language awareness*

For the most part, teachers reported they were confident about their knowledge and understanding of basic assessment-related concepts and theories in the questionnaire. Some, 10%, even felt *extremely* satisfied about their preparation for administering assessments of students' English composition; and 5% of the teachers admitted being *somewhat* dissatisfied with their preparation in assessment.

The interview revealed teachers had theoretical knowledge of basic concepts, i.e., effective feedback and student self-assessment. Many also differentiated between formative and summative assessment, as one of the teachers noted: *'We can use it (formative assessment) to make improvement for final assessment while final assessments are more systematic..... so, it can be tagged as more formal as compared to classroom assessments.'* (Hira). Furthermore, teachers were aware of the purpose of classroom assessment. For example, *'The classroom assessment is in fact gradual assessment of students and ..... is for the training of the students also because .... teacher from time to time guides and asks them (students) to improve'* (Naimal). However, they did not always differentiate between the purpose of classroom-based and final assessments. For example, Maryam said, *'To me, there is not that much difference between classroom and final assessment. Like assessment, students are going through the same kind of things, and you are giving them the feedback like what is missing... or what mistakes have been done in their write-up and same is the case in the final assessment'*. Though knowledge of assessment practice was demonstrated in the interviews, genuine appreciation of the power of assessment as a teaching and learning tool was not evident, nor were the subtleties of assessment.

When the teachers were speaking of student assessment, it was not consciously associated with teaching. Afifa expressed this idea, saying, *'When you are having the pressure of covering the course outline, so, it is difficult that you focus on such **other** (assessment) things'*. Even mid-term formative assessment was undervalued by the pressure the teachers felt to conform and perform for the university. As Laiba said, *'As far as the university exams are concerned, they are very important for the university, so we have to really plan them. We have to actually consider the paper pattern on which we can assess the students'*. This observation underlines most of the participant teachers' attitude towards the summative final assessment, which was not set by them. Formative assessment did not appear to be a priority since teachers did not discuss planning learning tasks that would allow assessments to scaffold student skills or improve their own teaching. Summative assessment, on the other hand, was an important university process from their perspective.

### *The teaching context*

The greatest challenges the teachers faced when attempting to provide formative assessment were time constraints and class sizes. As Afifa stated, *'First, the strength (size) of the class, that's the biggest challenge and there is another challenge and that is the course outline .... So, it is very difficult when you are having the pressure of covering the course outline as well .... it is difficult that you focus on other things (assessment)'*. Large classes are another obstacle, a belief expressed by Maryam: *'The time constraint is here. But more important for me is the number of students because there are so many students and at times you are unable to pay individual attention them and that needs extra effort on the part of the teacher.'* The challenges were heightened by varying language proficiency levels and consequent errors. As a result, many of the participants felt unable to respond to the errors with feedback within the limited time frame while also covering the content established by the university. *'It is very, very difficult .... because there are multiple students, like students with different writing calibre, some are good and some are weak as compared to the other so, so much is required for the writing skills and assessing those writing tasks. So, I believe that it is a hard job.'* (Roha). Student numbers and learning styles determined the assessment context.

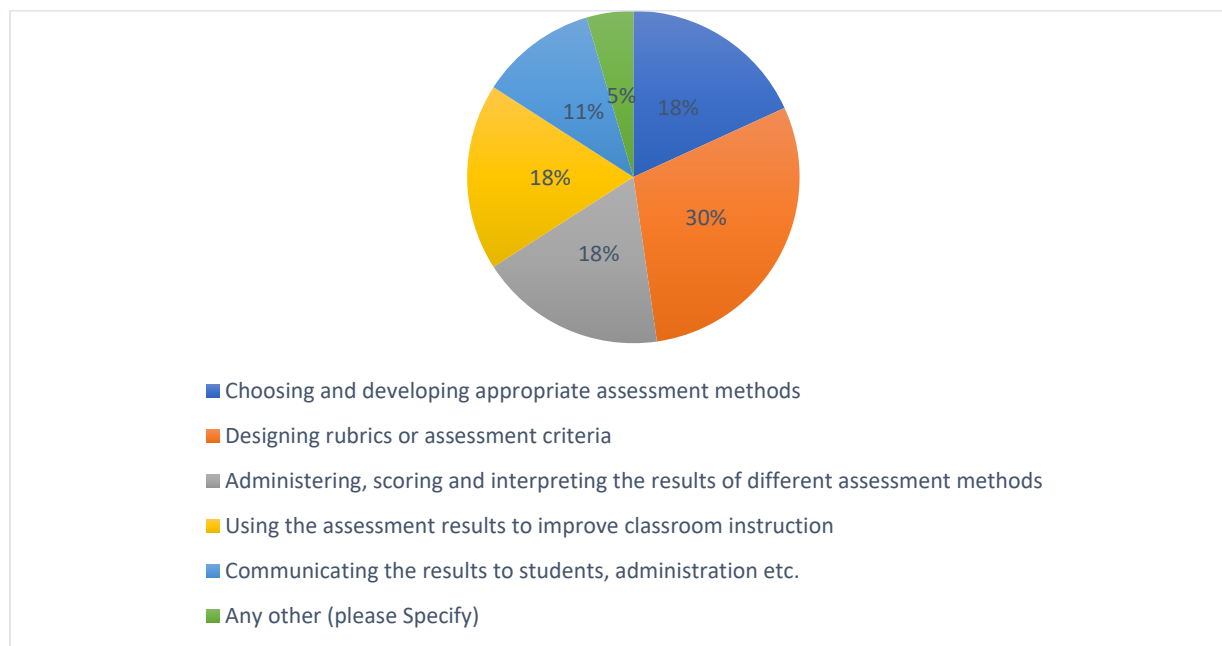
Teachers felt that the students should also have some assessment awareness and needed to be trained in the sorts of classroom interaction that formative assessment can require. For example, *'In Pakistan actually, there is a problem that we have large classes, and our students are also not trained to respond quickly.'* (Aalamgir). Another commented that assessment training would help develop students' assessment literacy: *'Students should be trained to know, mark and upgrade their mistakes'* and *'[They] must be given an orientation about language assessment (Aalamgir)'*. The teachers had difficulty coping with challenges and adopted individual assessment strategies. In this context, Aalamgir pointed out that *'in the Pakistani classroom, teacher is an authoritative person, and he teaches students and delivers the things as these are sacred things and students would take as they are given to them and usually, they don't talk much about it.'* Formative assessment requires feedback, either from the teacher, a peer or reflectively. In other words, it takes time. Curriculum course outlines were so crammed that the teachers in this context were unable to create a balance between teaching and assessment.

### **RQ 3 What do EAP teachers in Pakistan perceive to be their LAL training needs?**

#### *Assessment training needs*

The questionnaire provided data on the participants' academic and professional qualifications, their teaching experience and in-service LTA training; in addition, there were experiences that added to their knowledge of assessment and to their skills, while also enabling them to identify their needs and desires for further LTA training. Despite

their confidence in their assessment knowledge and their perceived ability to accurately assess students' writing, the EAP teachers at the UE still felt the need to enhance their writing assessment abilities and skills. Figure 1 illustrates that most teachers were interested in assessment skills, i.e., designing rubrics; selecting criteria; developing, administering and scoring assessments; and interpreting the results. In addition, they wanted to further their ability to use assessment results to improve instruction as well as to develop time management skills to ensure they had time to make accurate judgments about students' writing.



**Figure 1.** Assessment-related skills English language teachers wished to develop

Based on the questionnaires, it can be argued that, although the teachers at UE lacked sufficient training in LTA, they were confident and satisfied with their assessment knowledge and skills, which might result from experience. Nevertheless, they still desired further LTA training to enhance their assessment practices because perhaps something was lacking in their practice which they were not able to make explicit in the questionnaire.

In sum, analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data from interviews and questionnaires led to the conclusion that the teachers' current knowledge of assessment, their concept of assessment's role in the classroom, the lack of sufficient assessment training and their desire for further assessment training all demonstrated a low level of LAL. Returning to the assessment training results, these reveal that teachers perceived the need for such training and strongly emphasized its importance because they felt underprepared. In response to the final free-text question on the questionnaire, teachers

made explicit what they would most like to see included was practical LTA training to equip them with skills in which they felt lacking.

## Discussion

The study set out to investigate LAL of EAP teachers in an EMI context which had not previously been investigated. The context proved pivotal to help explain and understand the findings from UE, all of which emphasise the difficulties of the context and the way teacher circumstances shape their ability to grow LAL practices. This is the significant contribution of the study as it has not been explored in educational studies set in Pakistan. The teaching **context** plays a significant role in the development of LAL (Fulcher, 2012; Scarino, 2013). It is therefore paramount to consider the participant teachers' unique context in order to appreciate the minutiae of assessment training and experience which determined their LAL. Interview results echoing the findings of previous studies (e.g. Crusan et al., 2016; Tao, 2014; Vogt et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2018) reveal that large classes, teaching workloads, university assessment policies, teacher qualification, experience and training, institutional responsibilities and assessment policies are some of the contextual factors which determine teachers' LAL and their assessment training needs while influencing assessment beliefs and assessment culture, which, in turn, guide teachers' assessment practices. On a similar note, Berry et al. (2019) claim that teachers' engagement in knowledge sharing with colleagues supports their assessment literacy.

Moreover, Yan et al. (2018) also mention that there are larger social, cultural, political, and historical factors which form the "assessment culture" in a particular teaching context. In Pakistan, the official status of English; the power and prestige associated with English because of the colonial legacy; the shift from Urdu to English as a medium of instruction in higher education; and exam-oriented teaching all contribute towards the assessment culture and must be recognised as constraints on language teachers' conceptual development. The practice of relying on summative assessment is most probably the outcome of the traditional exam-oriented culture in Pakistan (Rehmani, 2003). Teacher attitudes also determine the assessment culture in particular contexts (Yan et al., 2018). A teacher-controlled classroom does not favour involving students in assessment practices and sharing the power which is associated with assessment, making the Pakistani educational context detrimental to life-long learning because student participation is constrained by habit.

The UE teachers attended more to teaching and less to assessment, without realising the two are integral to each other. This attitude perhaps stems from a belief that a teacher's primary job is to teach, and it is not important to know whether students have learned

what is taught or not, a finding that is in line with Soodmand Afshar and Ranjbar (2018). They concluded that because of different contextual factors EAP teachers tended to use traditional summative assessment rather than alternative assessments in the classroom, despite their knowledge and awareness of assessment *as a thing teachers do*. However, every context is unique and “more detailed insights into perceived LAL training needs across educational contexts seem to be missing, as well as contextual factors that might impact on teachers’ training needs” (Vogt et al., 2020, p. 387). Teachers voiced comments that implied they did not regard assessment as central to language teaching, although effective formative classroom assessment is critical to language learning (e.g., Davison, 2019; Leung et al., 2018).

Data from the study indicated that the teachers viewed themselves in the traditional role of a “teacher”, who is responsible only for ensuring the curriculum was covered; they saw assessment as largely summative and were unaware of the importance of their new roles as assessors of language skills (Looney et al., 2018). Teachers had little awareness of the latest trends and strategies such as assessment for learning and learning-oriented assessment in the language classroom, as is reported in other studies (e.g., Lam, 2019). This resulted in their use of traditional summative assessment during their lessons (López Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009) and a failure to adopt more up-to-date pedagogies. Thus, assessment training for teachers in Pakistan at all levels is required to develop teachers’ LAL by helping them to unlearn and relearn the concept and use of assessment (Coombe et al., 2020).

Assessment training is not an integral element of ELT programs, despite the continuous emphasis by researchers that “what is needed to facilitate assessment literacy in teacher education is more than a brief mention of assessment in a course” (Popham, 2009, p. 265). A similar lack of focus on CBLA in teacher training programs has meant that “most training programs only include a generic assessment course” (Coombe et al., 2020, p. 9) or they focus on large scale standardised testing (Brown & Bailey, 2008), which provides assessment knowledge irrelevant to everyday classroom assessment practices (Yan et al., 2018) with no reference to the pedagogic importance of teacher-developed small-scale tests (Jeong, 2011). Researchers have consistently argued for the inclusion of assessment in training programs for teachers (e.g., Harding & Kremmel, 2016; Lan & Fan, 2019). The content analysis of the course outlines in this study made it clear that, in a program that focuses on ELT training in Pakistan, very little emphasis is placed on classroom-based assessment for language learning, with all it encompasses, indicating that a critical teaching and learning tool is being overlooked.

To compensate for the paucity of LTA training, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan is offering to ELT faculty in-service continuous professional development (CPD)



courses of one week and one-month duration. The courses are sponsored by the English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) project and hosted by universities and colleges. The core aim of these CPD courses is professional in-service development of the teaching faculties of public sector higher education institutions (HEIs) with regard to contemporary trends in English teaching and practices. The CPD programs focus on training the ELT faculty for improvement in current assessment practices by equipping them with latest trends and techniques in LTA, and should be of some benefit to the EAP teachers who participate in them.

For the present, UE teachers surveyed in this study expressed dissatisfaction with both the quality and quantity of existing ELT training programs in Pakistan, which give little attention to the concepts and skills which can be practically applied by teachers in the class for assessment purposes (e.g., Coombe et al., 2020). EAP teachers at the UE indicated a need for more frequent training tailor-made to their specific assessment needs. They felt that this would be knowledge which they could relate to and use in the classroom to support the language teaching process. The findings support targeted and contextualised professional assessment training programs designed to cater to the need of teachers (Looney et al., 2018) in the language classroom. Echoing these findings, Wiliam and Thompson (2007) emphasised that effective teacher training is related to the teaching context, and happens in sustainable and extensive courses, rather than in one-day workshops. The long-term impacts of short-term teacher training programs have been questioned by researchers such as Giraldo (2021). Furthermore, the training should actively involve teachers as participants, not just as an audience.

Targeted and contextualised professional language assessment training programs are required in the EAP and EMI context in Pakistan, even though some studies investigating the impact of assessment training have found that assessment training does not lead teachers to improve their assessment practices (Crusan et al., 2016). However, using training as a strategy to raise key stakeholders' awareness of assessment techniques may help teachers feel even more confident in their knowledge and skills and, as a result, improve classroom assessment. Moreover, teachers may have the chance to improve their practices through ongoing training or reflective sessions supported by educational institution administrators (Gonzalez, 2021). Teachers' self-reflection is a key strategy as it enables teachers to identify their own assessment biases and re-evaluate the integration of language assessment, teaching, and learning for improved assessment practices (Yan & Fan, 2021). Moreover, collaborative reflection i.e., seeking advice from people who are dealing with comparable issues but in different contexts, could give teachers the confidence they need to deal with difficult assessment situations (Tian et al., 2021).

Previous research emphasized that teaching experience contributes towards teachers' assessment literacy and, consequently, their LAL. Studies also recognise the role of experience in overcoming a lack of focus on assessment as a teaching tool in teacher education (Vogt et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2018). Teachers' experience can balance the lack of assessment training and can compensate for the effects of lacklustre teacher education (Vogt et al., 2020). In their study on teachers' LAL, Sheehan and Munro (2017) found that classroom experience could compensate for a lack of training and reflection. Research also indicates that "teachers spend as much as one quarter to one-third of their professional time on assessment-related activities, almost all without the benefit of having learned the principles of sound assessment" (White, 2009, p. 6). It suggests that insufficient assessment training forced language teachers to acquire assessment skills on the job by using their colleagues as models (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014), reaching back to their own experiences, or reflecting on their circumstances. This observation is supported by Sharpling (2002), who noted that teachers' EAP assessment skills were either developed on the job or through professional practice. The findings from the present study indicate that most of the teachers have a basic knowledge of assessment related concepts, which might be the outcome of their teaching experience, and the fact that they were also once learners in the same system.

## **Conclusion**

In response to the call for research to identify the contextual factors influencing teachers' language assessment literacy, the current study highlights factors outside the participants' control related to their personal educational experiences, to their students and to the university itself, all embedded in the larger social, political, and historical landscape of Pakistan. Assessment, properly understood, can be used to promote effective learning but language assessment literacy requires language teachers to be better trained.

In supportive environments teacher learning could begin by engaging with MOOCS, watching online seminars, using online tools (e.g., Teachers Assessment Literacy Enhancement-TALE), attending local and international presenters offering short courses and pre-conference workshops. Future research on LAL training in the pre-service teacher area would strengthen arguments for positive effects on student learning to be used for institutional or government funding initiatives. Future action research by teachers already teaching EAP in EMI contexts might explore how, by participation in distributive leadership (Harvey and Jones, 2021), they could actively support each other and make learning about assessment literacy sustainable. The new knowledge about

assessment for language learning and teaching might be shared by creating local and national assessment groups.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A Teacher Questionnaire

#### Section 1 Background

- Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Educational qualifications (please check all that apply and mention the institute):
  - a. Certificate in Teaching ESL/TESOL:
  - b. Diploma in Teaching ESL:
  - c. B.Ed.
  - d. Master's degree (MA(English), MA Applied linguistics etc.)
  - e. M.Phil./MS
  - f. PhD
  - g. Others (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Total Teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_
- Which courses do you mostly teach?
  - a. EAP courses only
  - b. Only mainstream courses
  - c. both
- How many hours do you teach per week? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 2 Training in ELT and Language assessment

1. Do you have any training in ELT?
  - a. No (move to question 4)
  - b. Yes
2. How many courses in your ELT training e.g. diploma/ certificate in ELT had a focus on language assessment?
  - a) None      b. One      c. Two      d. Three
3. What topics were covered in the professional development training you referred to in question 1?
4. How would you rate your knowledge and understanding of language assessment?  
5 = very good    4 = good      3 = average    2 = poor      1 = very poor
5. How do you feel about your level of preparation for assessing language skills?
  - a. Not at all prepared    b. Slightly prepared
  - c. Somewhat prepared    d. Well prepared
6. To what extent are you confident in your ability to accurately assess students' English language proficiency?
  - a. Not at all confident    b. Somewhat confident
  - c. Confident              d. Very confident

7. Which of the following statement best describes your feeling towards assessment in language classroom?
  - a. It is time consuming
  - b. It is frustrating
  - c. It is least attractive part of teaching Academic English
  - d. It is challenging
  - e. I hate it
  - f. Any other statement.....
8. What features (e.g., activities, practical tasks, knowledge) would you most like to see in a practical language assessment training?

## **Appendix B**

### **Teacher Interview Guide**

1. What do you think is the role of assessment in the language classroom?
2. How do you differentiate between classroom assessment and final assessment?
3. Do you think teachers are usually aware of importance of classroom assessment?
4. Do you think teachers' qualification and experience affect their assessment ability and practices?
5. What is your opinion about pre-service and in-service assessment training?
6. What is the biggest challenge you face in your context when you assess language skills?
7. How can the classroom assessment be used to further support students' language skills? (your suggestions)