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## **Assessing Young English Learners: Language Assessment Literacy of Chinese Primary School English Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

Numerous English training programs have sprung up in China for young learners aged between 5 and 12 as education technology companies and training schools have seen the huge commercial potential in children-oriented English courses. However, the attention given to literacy assessment in English is given scant attention, all the more surprising given the particularly onerous requirement for assessment among young language learners. This study looks at primary school English teachers' assessment literacy through qualitative and quantitative methods. An online assessment literacy test was used to carry out a general evaluation of the participants' theoretical base for pupil assessment. Then three teachers were observed in the classroom after they completed a placement test for English proficiency. The focus was on how they assessed students and gave feedback. A test revealed that the 65 participating teachers had only an intuitive understanding of assessment. They provided assessment according to their teaching experience, as is shown in the classroom observation. The lack of assessment education and qualifications posed formidable obstacles to those endeavouring to become professional teachers. Assessment courses and lecturers need to be well-prepared for undergraduates who are expected to be primary school English teachers.

### **Keywords**

Young language learners, assessment literacy, primary school English teachers

## **1 Introduction**

It is compulsory in China to learn English from Grade 3, but many schools dispense lessons to pupils from as early as Grade 1. This increases the pressure on primary school English-language teachers to teach young language learners effectively. One essential element of instruction, assessment, needs specifically to take account of the needs of these young learners. Teachers need to gain a basic understanding of the assessment for their students before they conduct the assessment. They shoulder the burden of motivating pupils with a

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sensible assessment, and the way they do their assessment in and out of class will be influenced by factors such as pressure from parents' anxiety about how their children are performing.

Assessment literacy has become a contentious issue, and the prevailing consensus in academic circles seems to be that most teachers assess their students with a dearth of relevant knowledge and thus perform the task poorly. They are required to spend a lot of time on assessment-related activities (Stiggins, 1995), but they still fall short of assessment literacy. Indeed, teachers who play a significant role in learning interaction with students are often barely aware of the terms relating to assessment literacy. Thus, they often assess young language learners according to their personal experience without any deeper understanding of what they are doing. The unsystematic assessment thus produced is likely to have a substantial effect on learners. The overall effect is to place obstacles in the way of instructors as they try to attain teaching expertise that would also help them become qualified assessors. Assessment literacy is of paramount importance for the instructors, and further analysis of the current solutions is presented in this research.

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is the state of assessment literacy among primary school English teachers?
- (2) What are the barriers to producing good assessments of young language learners and what are the remedies to these problems?

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Language assessment literacy

Assessment literacy refers to skills, knowledge and principles that instructors need to master relating to assessment (Stiggins, 1991). Brookhart (2011) extended the scope of assessment literacy by including abilities based on the recent development of assessment practice and policy. It prioritized self- and peer assessment in light of formative assessment.

A consensus has been reached that teachers should achieve mastery of assessment principles and techniques that would lead to sound judgment about assessment practices in specific contexts (Kane, 2006). Such teachers are capable of applying effective assessment methods properly so that they can keep reliable records of students' progress and accomplishments. They make ethical decisions and establish good communication with other stakeholders including parents and school authorities.

Requirements for assessment literacy were proposed in detail in a list of seven key points including development and use of assessment methodologies, familiarity with standards and score interpretations (AERA et al, 2014). Assessment literacy generally can be measured through objective tests. *Teacher Assessment Literacy Questionnaire* (TALQ) (Plake et al, 1993) and *Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory* (CALI) (Mertler, 2004) are often used to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses concerning assessment literacy.

Language assessment literacy is the assessment literacy required for those in language education. It refers to their knowledge of organizing language assessment activities (Taylor, 2013). Inbar-Lourie (2008) states that it is a combination of assessment skills and language competencies. This view is generally favored by scholars who focus on distinctive facets ranging from the content of language assessment to its method (Shohamy, 2008). Significant progress has been made towards a comprehensive outline for professional development in language assessment in line with common needs and the latest developments in this field (Brindley, 2001).

### 2.2 Research on assessing young language learners

Young language learners are those aged from about 5 to 12 who are learning a foreign or second

language and who are doing so during the first six or seven years of formal schooling (Alderson & Banerjee, 2001). The target populations show defining characteristics in cognitive, social and emotional, and physical growth, literacy and vulnerability. Children's maturation places constraints on assessment tasks and formats. Tasks that work well with adult learners may not do so with children. Only when fully understanding what to do with children can they perform well (Butler & Zeng, 2013).

Classroom-based assessment is part of teaching and is mostly used for formative purposes. Researchers have examined the assessment process in primary school classrooms with respect to range, quality and procedures and proved that classroom assessment can help produce high-stakes decisions (Rea-Dickins, 2001). But teachers have been found to make little use of the information collected for formative purposes, and not to make use of simple questioning and metacognitive questioning to enhance learning (Gattullo, 2000). On the other hand, studies suggest that primary school English teachers gained insufficient training in the assessment of young language learners (Hild & Nikolov, 2010; Llosa, 2005).

Young language learners' vulnerability determines concerns about the washback of the assessment. The learners are sensitive to criticism that may demotivate them (Hild & Nikolov, 2010). Teachers and parents impose an unavoidable impact on children's attitudes towards assessment. An increasing number of parents are pushing their children to take English proficiency tests for young language learners, hoping this will help them gain admission to prestigious schools. Carless and Wong (2000) noted that children poor at English were discouraged in Hong Kong, where pupils bear a heavy burden of lessons, homework and tests. If tests are designed primarily to motivate students instead of discerning student performance, they would be most likely to have a positive impact (McKay, 2006).

### **2.3 Research on assessment literacy**

Instructors' interpretation of assessment has been the subject of extensive investigation. A framework of assessment conceptions was built up into dimensions such as teaching, learning, accountability of teachers and schools to different stakeholders, and the certification of achievement according to a qualitative analysis in elementary and secondary school teachers (Remesal, 2011). It indicates social and pedagogical interaction in the assessment. Xu and Liu (2009) echoed the view in their exploration of teachers' assessment knowledge and practice in terms of temporality, sociality and place. It was argued that both knowledge and process should be reconsidered in raising self-awareness of teachers' enhanced understanding of assessment as assessors in the face of strong conflict between what is best for students and the necessary accountability for school (Scarino, 2013; Harris & Brown, 2009).

Understanding of assessment affects how it is put into practice. Some studies focused on the assessment under the sway of external forces. Davison (2004) concluded with higher priority in professional judgment in his research on high-stakes teacher-based assessment. The national assessment policy poses challenges to teachers who use the curriculum standards as an assessment tool (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004). The situation is complicated by the pedagogical aspects of various cultures (Cheng et al, 2004). Attention has also been drawn to the cognitive and ethical issues relating to assessment practices. Teachers' assessment of students' performance results in a compromise between individual cognition and social situation (Allal, 2013).

Assessment courses intended for both pre-service and in-service teachers are far from enough (Popham, 2011). Researchers suggest that these kinds of courses should align tailor-made content with professionalism (Engelsen & Smith, 2014), with a rigorous examination of course content (Popham, 2011), characteristics (DeLuca & Bellara, 2013) and instruction that assists learning about assessment (DeLuca et al, 2013). Assessment literacy is now becoming an indispensable part of teacher accreditation and certification (Sato et al, 2008). Few studies have been done directly investigating primary school teachers' assessment literacy. Research on the assessment literacy of elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States functioned as a cornerstone (Plake et al, 1993). It was found that the sub-

jects were poor in terms of assessment literacy. Mertler (2004) found that in-service teachers' scores were higher than those of their pre-service counterparts, which points to the significance of classroom practice. He (2015) did a similar study and reported similar findings. However, more studies are needed to examine the assessment literacy of teachers, especially those at the primary school level.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

Sixty-five primary school English teachers were invited to take the test adapted from *Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory* (Mertler, 2004) online. More than half the participants were between the ages of 26 and 35. Two thirds had teaching experience of no more than 10 years. In addition, three teachers were selected as subjects for case study. They came from the same public school and all gained their bachelor's degrees in English education.

#### 3.2 Instruments

A web-based test, an adapted version of *Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory*, was delivered to in-service primary school English teachers. The instrument has been tested to be reasonably reliable and valid (Plake et al, 1993; Campbell et al, 2002). The corresponding items for each standard are shown in Table 1. Each item is followed by four options of which only one is correct. A higher score represents a higher level of assessment literacy.

Table 1.

*Standards for Assessment Literacy*

Standards	Item number
Choosing appropriate assessment methods	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Developing appropriate assessment methods	6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Administering, scoring and interpreting the results of assessments	11, 12, 13, 14, 15
Using assessment results to make a decision	16, 17, 18, 19, 20
Developing valid grading procedures	21, 22, 23, 24, 25
Communicating assessment results	26, 27, 28, 29, 30
Recognising unethical or illegal practices	31, 32, 33, 34, 35

#### 3.3 Procedures

##### 3.3.1 Online assessment literacy test

The assessment literacy test was administered to the primary school English teachers via the internet. Respondents did the test on their mobile phones or personal computers. To encourage more teachers to take the test, posts in a social networking app were sent to as many participants as possible.

##### 3.3.2 Classroom instruction observation and transcription

The researchers observed and recorded the teachers' classroom instructions with five lessons (about 200

minutes) for each teacher. Lessons on language skills were given priority for observation. The researchers transcribed all the recordings. Two teachers interested in language testing and assessment were invited to do coding after a session of training to familiarise them with the coding scheme. Coding differences, if any, were negotiated until a final consensus was reached.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Language assessment literacy test

The participating teachers gained an average score of 13.77 in the test. The highest score was 25 and the lowest 6 (Table 2). The instructors got low scores in three standards, i.e., 1) administering, scoring and interpreting the results of assessments; 2) developing valid grading procedures; and 3) communicating assessment results. They attained the lowest score in Item 40, which was related to testing principles unfamiliar to the teachers.

Results showed that the teachers' knowledge of assessment was not affected by their background. T-tests revealed that they exhibited no significant difference in the test despite their differences in degree ( $p=.876$ ) and teaching experience ( $p=.624$ ). Their test scores showed no significant correlation with their self-reported assessment literacy ( $p=.069$ ).

Table 2.

*Test Results*

	Mean score	SD
Standard 1	2.769	1.156
Standard 2	2.446	1.212
Standard 3	1.892	1.048
Standard 4	1.985	1.082
Standard 5	1.246	1.132
Standard 6	1.200	1.019
Standard 7	2.230	1.412
Total	13.77	4.860

### 4.2 Knowledge of language assessment

It turned out that the three observed teachers failed to have considerable knowledge about language assessment. Tina had the highest score, 25 out of 35 items, while Lilian had 20 and Joe 19. They found it difficult to understand the abstruse terminology, leading to their frequently guessing. Their responses contained few accurate professional terms for the assessment of young language learners. In class they did not apply any assessment-related theories to explain their decisions, feedback and comments.

However, they did well in the first 10 items corresponding to the first two standards shown in Table 1, i.e., choosing and developing appropriate assessment methods. It seemed that they could cope with basic questions that directly relate to grading. They also reported in the follow-up interview that they failed to receive language assessment education in college when they were preparing to be teachers. They had to depend on their experience and intuition to undertake the assessment.

### 4.3 Assessment practice

#### 4.3.1 Classroom assessment

In class the teachers would conduct some classroom assessment activities, such as questioning, correcting, judging, rewarding, observing the process and examining the product. They used these techniques in various ways.

For example, these teachers would give strong support to their students when they found it difficult to answer teachers' questions. Joe and Lilian tended to provide sentence examples as clues. By doing this, the students could give desired replies in most cases, as shown below.

Joe: *Why did the bird want to sing?*

Student: *She...*

Joe: *When she...*

Student: *When she is free.*

Joe: *Yes, when she is free.*

Encouraging classmates to offer help seldom happened in their classrooms. "Who can help her/him?" ended up being nothing but a perfunctory question. But Tina did the reverse. She insisted that help between students should be given top priority. Only after group members or desk mates who were invited to provide assistance failed to answer the question would she give tips. An example:

Student A: *Where are you doing, Dad?*

Tina: *Where? Can you try?* (inviting another student)

Student B: *What are you doing, Dad?*

Tina: *Can you do it again?* (turning to the first student)

Student A: *What are you doing, Dad?*

The assessment task, i.e., role play, played a crucial role in the primary school class. This activity involved a group of students and could retain students' attention for a longer time. Teachers would present a short English drama or a conversation passage to the students. The students could do anything appropriate so that they could show their imagination. Two or more groups of four or five would be invited to act out at the front of the classroom after a short rehearsal. For Tina and Joe, both teachers would ask their students to individually make comments on their classmates' performance. The students gradually formed an assessment system by drawing lines, emoticons and other symbols and characters that they thought would appropriately express their judgment. But the students usually evaluated from different angles, which failed to depict the whole picture. To remedy this problem, Tina and Joe both gave a summary of students' comments at the end of the peer assessment and awarded those who gave constructive assessment bonus points and displayed the extra points on the blackboard. When the bonus points reached a certain level they could be used to exchange for small gifts. However, they expressed different views on the reasons why peer comments were encouraged. Tina contended that the process could help the students to more closely concentrate on the activity. She was told the students felt that they were central to the class when they pronounced their assessment. In this way, their interest was aroused and a sense of achievement was felt by the students. However, Joe paid more attention to the information about what the students thought of the texts and the results of the assessment, which she could gather and use to improve her future teaching. An example:

Joe: *I want to invite three pupils to give comments.*

Student A: *I think Hans should take some moves while speaking to Lisa.*



Joe: *Yup, it would be natural. Lily, please!*

Student B: *Lisa mispronounced "tidy" as "tidies".*

Joe: *Good, tidy the living room. Now Michael.*

Student C: *They should talk with emotion changes.*

Joe: *OK, good comments. Group 5 gave us a vivid performance in loud voices confidently. They deserved two stickers. Well, please pay attention to the pronunciation of...*

However, worries about unfriendly or negative individual comments put an end to peer assessment in Lilian's class. With 19 years' teaching experience, she chose to pose the convergent question "Who is better?" rather than the divergent one to all the students and expected choral answers. She explained that as the students got older, they belittled peer performance because they were more self-centered. The students would try to maintain their excellence, which they feared would diminish by giving positive comments on other classmates' performance. Tina raised similar concerns, but she did not give it up. Instead, she required her young language learners to give positive comments first and then negative ones, thus creating a relatively relaxed atmosphere for peer assessment. An example:

Tina: *When giving comments, please first make a judgment of the number of stickers the group should get, then point out the cons and finally pros. Alice, you did a good job just now. But don't use the pointing gesture.*

Students: *Let me try! Let me try!*

Tina: *Alex, please!*

Student A: *Two stickers. Their voice was full of emotion. But John forgot to add an "s" after "two sister".*

Tina: *Nice going. Sit down, please.*

It was generally agreed that teachers should make positive feedback a priority. Young language learners are so sensitive that negative feedback may easily discourage them. They favored individualised and detailed feedback, not just simple replies such as "Good", "Well done" and "Good job". In practice, the teachers did give positive feedback that in turn encouraged students to perform better in the future. But Tina reported that oral feedback in the classroom was useful only when the students were required to redo tasks immediately.

All the teachers gave students awards for satisfactory achievements in class. Either stickers or bonus points were used to motivate students to improve. To gain their awards the students took an active part in different classroom activities. They raised hands or even waved arms while yelling "Let me try". The more awards they received in class, the more motivated they were.

#### 4.3.2 After-class assessment

The ringing of a bell marks the end of class and students rush out of the classroom. But teachers continue doing their assessments over the break. Grading is the major task they have to finish on time. Piles of exercises and test papers place a burden on them. The teachers have to strike a balance between efficiency and the number of comments they give to students. Multiple choices and blank filling that have limited answers are thus preferred. Short answers and composition are uncommon types in daily assignments. The items usually are not originally designed by the teachers who directly teach the students, but come from workbooks closely aligned with textbooks. However, the final exam is prepared by a team of experienced teachers in the local district. Teachers turn out to be more like administrators rather than test designers. Most teachers lack assessment knowledge and skills, and this prevents them from producing high-quality tests.

Offering feedback to students' parents is an arduous task for the teachers, because they have to deal with frequent inquiries from the parents about their child's performance via QQ and WeChat, two popular networking applications in mainland China. Inquiring about test scores is often the main connection between students' parents and teachers. Teachers have to give an explanation of students' scores. They usually report the highest, lowest and average scores, the scorer remaining anonymous. The three teachers said they usually praised students who did a good job in a conversation group. Criticism was sometimes made, but in a much milder way. The quality of feedback given to students reflects teachers' assessment literacy.

#### 4.5 The interview

The follow-up interview focused on the primary school English teachers' assessment background and experience. They gave their views about assessment of young language learners.

Self-assessment was to some extent new to the observed instructors. The assessment pattern did not draw their attention until it was put forward in the conversation. Joe recalled that they used to offer students self-assessment cards to evaluate daily reading and speaking but they gave this activity because of the undue time and effort involved. Tina hardly conducted self-assessment of learners, concerned about the impact of this on them psychologically. The young learners may not be able to assess themselves well because of their underdeveloped metacognition and lack of language skills. In addition, a tight lesson schedule meant there was little time to do self-assessment in class, as shown below.

Interviewer: *How about self-assessment?*

Joe: *It is a little bit time-consuming in class. Some students often find it hard to get themselves relaxed at the front, for which I try to control the process with frequent prompts. If required to do an instant self-assessment they may become even more nervous. It takes much more time. Those who are quiet in class, therefore, lose the chance to speak out. On the other hand, giving students self-assessment cards after class does not mean that everything goes quite well with no complaints of an extra burden.*

Portfolios of learning English achieved little success. It seemed that the teachers failed to understand the concept of portfolios. They did something related to keeping records, though. It was found that they regularly gave feedback to students and their parents. In the midterm or at the end of the term the teachers would award excellent students with complimentary letters and small gifts in class. Children who fell far behind were encouraged to do better. In Joe's class, a prize-giving ceremony for individual achievements was held twice a term, while Lilian tended to offer inexpensive presents by group. Both teachers recognized the value of praise in public. It was found that their judgments were based on progress tests and classroom performance. They seldom required their students to collect evidence to chart their progress towards a higher level, which could help students appreciate their gradual progress and eventually feel a sense of achievement.

Pre-service and in-service assessment training seemed to be practically nonexistent to the three teachers. Assessment literacy was not included in different teacher trainings at school. Lilian contended that she did not receive any assessment training and said she was very curious about the idea. Joe said teaching competitions became the major content of teacher training and they showed little concern about their assessment literacy. Instructors who stood out in the contests may be very poor in terms of assessment literacy, reflecting a mismatch between their teaching ability and assessment literacy. To bridge the gap, the participating teachers spoke of what they wanted from assessment training programs and emphasized that they hoped that the training courses could include knowledge and skills of assessing young language learners.



## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 General evaluation of assessment literacy**

Primary school English teachers applied teaching skills in the instruction of young language learners according to their experience, which manifested the necessity to enhance teachers' assessment literacy. They maintained that they were well-prepared in terms of language assessment, but in reality their performance in the test of assessment literacy was deficient. The weakness has also been seen in recent studies that showed teachers were not highly skilled in assessment (Harding & Kremmel, 2016). The instructors developed fuzzy concepts about assessment, and there was a lack of operational implementation (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). More specifically, they had to make improvements in valid development of grading procedures, clear interpretation and effective communication of assessment results, contributing to enhanced assessment literacy. Primary school English teachers had to pay more attention to their professional development than to survival on the job.

The teachers implemented assessment based on their experience. They assessed young language learners both in and after class because they considered it a part of the teaching, and not just assessment for its own sake. Teaching experience led them to use awards to encourage excellent answers and actions, and to get as many learners as possible involved in peer comments. They compensated for the shortage of assessment literacy by learning on the job (Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). The teachers could not build up a working framework in the assessment of young language learners. For them, the assessment cycle ended right after they offered feedback, usually through test scores, to students and their parents. They were unaware of the necessity of interpreting the results of the assessment and keeping track of students' progress by way of portfolios. They failed to realize that their tutorial understanding of assessment could lead to less convincing assessment results that were unfair to their students. The classroom assessment they conducted was not concrete and practical enough for assessment purposes. They did not value self-assessment as accountable for assessing young language learners. Simple conversations in class fell short of eliciting student questioning and lateral thinking. It created an illusion that what had been taught was unquestionable. The assessment task, therefore, failed to some extent. Words of encouragement played an important role in instruction but more constructive advice would be welcome. Communication of test results does not mean just a common report of data. In contrast, it is supposed to include an accurate interpretation of figures evidenced by daily performance.

### **5.2 Barriers to improving assessment literacy**

Misunderstanding assessment arose when teachers of young language learners showed fear of statistics or abstruse assessment terminology. They felt that assessment was all about calculations, formulas and academic terms that were far from easy or interesting. This outlook prevented them from further learning, giving rise to a knowledge gap that has to be narrowed. The teachers seemed to find it hard to take in the technical terms, thus putting an end to their interest in learning more about assessment. The weak motivation reflects that the instructors regard assessment as a very specialized field. Top priority was not given to assessment as shown in the survey on teachers' concerns (Hill, 2000; Jantscher & Landsiedler, 2000). They naturally separated assessment from teaching, with no idea that assessment could be part of teaching. Their misunderstanding of assessment created an obstacle particularly in the context in which external testing and assessment prevailed.

Majoring in elementary education has been generally acknowledged since the Ministry of Education redesigned the framework of normal schools at the tertiary level (Liu, 2004). But the professionalisation of English teachers is relatively new to the 118 teachers' colleges in China authorised to confer a bachelor's degree on their graduates (Han, 2018). It turns out, unfortunately, that the schools for teachers still have to clear up the problem of an unpleasant training system. On one hand the courses emphasize com-

plete mastery of knowledge and skills about English (Ouyang & Dai, 2014), but on the other they fail to properly prepare the pre-service teachers with necessary assessment knowledge and skills. Instead, a series of courses are arranged to teach the would-be teachers how they can be general supervisors of the children. The lack of knowledge of educational and psychological measurements throughout the whole training program impedes primary school English teachers' professional development.

The dearth of or deficiency in pre- and in-service assessment training programs create grave difficulties. No defined relationship was found between teaching experience and assessment literacy, which goes against previous studies (Hoover, 2009; Mertler, 2004). It suggests that personal experience is no replacement for professional training. But professional preparations in college still need improvement. Jin (2010) conducted a nationwide study showing that only 26 assessment programs were intended for undergraduate students, while 60 were for graduates. After landing jobs in school, the teachers would have few opportunities to learn about assessment. Vogt and Tsagari (2014) who did a study on assessment literacy across Europe, echoed this finding. The teachers reportedly received limited training in assessment over their in-service period and thus had to ask their mentors or colleagues for advice. The teachers who were the subject of investigation in this study said they had asked for professional training but were met with negative responses.

To make matters worse, evaluation of in-service teachers concentrates less on assessment literacy. School authorities and parents ultimately take students' high scores in high-stakes tests as a symbol of effective instruction. The teachers turn out to be testing servants instead of informers and diagnosticians, which mirrors the dilemma of primary school and secondary school English instruction in China. Test-oriented teaching makes it hard to adopt and use formative assessment for young learners in class. However, with curriculum reform things are gradually changing. In the long term, a shift to interaction, creativity and contexts may redress the imbalance of teaching and assessment.

### 5.3 Ways of improving assessment literacy

To remove barriers, assessment for young language learners should be inserted into the overall professionalisation of a primary school English teacher in his or her tertiary education and in-service training.

English teachers in primary schools need well-designed assessment courses that arouse their interest. For teachers to implement classroom assessment, a broader knowledge base should be developed (Rea-Dickins, 2000). Necessity and practical usefulness require students to take the necessary courses (Jin, 2010). Course length and credits should be increased, and we suggest that it be made compulsory for teacher candidates. In response to professional deficiencies, some universities have taken actions in recent years to involve language testing and assessment in their training programs for English teachers. Lectures by testing experts and professionals are usually open to all students. Furthermore, related courses should be designed to start from the very beginning in terms of language assessment literacy. The results of this study indicate that the initial emphasis should be on the development of grading procedures, clear interpretation and effective communication of assessment results. If the courses start with easy-to-grasp facts combined with hands-on exercise in class, students may find it less challenging to follow the lectures on language assessment (Jin, 2010).

Smith (2011) showed that educators' competence in assessment can greatly help develop future teachers' expertise. The corresponding lectures should cover language testing and assessment theory, measurement and classroom assessment knowledge and practice. This can also help teachers mainly concerned with formal final exams as ultimate assessment tools and who seldom carry out classroom assessment. Lectures and training programs on the assessment of young language learners should be available to all pre- and in-service primary school English teachers. At present, assessment training remains inadequate, and selected language assessment courses cannot narrow the gap between theory and practice (Lam, 2015). The perception-practice mismatch needs to be tackled through consecutive professional develop-

ment sessions considering the one-shot assessment courses in most cases (Öz & Atay, 2017). Teachers voiced the need for regular training with a less test-oriented aim (Mede & Atay, 2017). However, fully developed curriculums are seldom offered in many training programs in China. This poses a challenge for testing professionals to embark on a series of training projects. Fan et al (2011) set up a web-based system for assessment literacy that helps secondary in-service teachers gain assistance from online learning resources.

## 6 Conclusion

This study investigated primary school English teachers' assessment literacy through an online test, classroom observation and a follow-up interview. It found that the participants had only an intuitional understanding of language assessment. Their practice of language assessment was implemented mostly based on their teaching experience and self-directed understanding of the concept. The study further analyzed assessment training courses, undergraduate education for primary school English teachers, and misunderstandings in China about language assessment.

This research stresses the necessity and urgency of improving primary school English teachers' assessment literacy. Language assessment courses can familiarise primary school English teachers with the concepts, procedures, principles, techniques and many other necessary components related to language assessment. Much more effort, therefore, should be devoted to designing courses and training teachers in terms of language assessment literacy. Such training should be conducted regularly.

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