

English Teachers' Perceptions of a Language Assessment Literacy Course

Las Percepciones de los Docentes de Inglés sobre un Curso de Literacidad en Evaluación de Lenguas

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Abstract

Language assessment literacy has gained recent attention in the field of language testing, particularly on teachers' profile. However, the literature on LAL is limited regarding teachers' perceptions of language assessment courses. In this paper, we used a case study method to characterize the perceptions of eighteen English language teachers into three components of an online assessment course: contents, activities, and impact on their professional development. For data collection, we used a questionnaire and a focus group interview. Findings indicate that the teachers perceived course contents as organized, relevant, and useful; they also considered test analysis and collaborative tasks as valuable. Regarding professional development,

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the teachers explained that test-analysis tasks made them aware of their mistakes in assessment. Finally, the teachers suggested that the course raised their awareness of what language assessment is and does. Based on these results, we provide recommendations for LAL courses elsewhere.

Keywords: assessment literacy, language testing, language assessment literacy, teachers' professional development

Resumen

La literacidad en evaluación de lenguas extranjeras ha sido un foco de gran atención en el campo de la evaluación de idiomas, en especial lo concerniente con el perfil de los docentes. No obstante, hay poca literatura relacionada con las percepciones de los docentes sobre cursos de evaluación de idiomas. En nuestro artículo, acudimos al estudio de caso para analizar las percepciones de dieciocho docentes de inglés, en relación con tres componentes de un curso de evaluación en línea: los contenidos, las actividades y el impacto del curso en el desarrollo profesional docente. Los hallazgos indican que los docentes concibieron los contenidos del curso como organizados, relevantes y útiles; además consideraron el análisis de pruebas y el trabajo colaborativo como elementos valiosos. Con respecto al desarrollo profesional, los docentes plantearon que se hicieron conscientes de sus errores en la evaluación a medida que hacían las actividades relacionadas con el análisis de pruebas. Por último, los docentes indicaron que el curso elevó su nivel de consciencia sobre lo que es e implica evaluar idiomas. Basándonos en estos resultados, hacemos unas recomendaciones para cursos de evaluación en lenguas extranjeras en otros contextos.

Palabras clave: desarrollo profesional docente, evaluación de lenguas, literacidad en evaluación, literacidad en evaluación de lenguas

Introduction

Language assessment literacy (henceforth LAL) refers to the knowledge, skills, and principles needed for contextualized language assessment (Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2017; Taylor, 2013). These three components have remained constant in LAL discussions for the past fourteen years (Bohn & Tsagari, 2021; Giraldo, 2018). Alongside conceptual discussions of this construct, scholars have argued that LAL is needed among various stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, parents, and even students (Butler et al., 2021; Malone, 2017; Taylor, 2013). The need for LAL comes from the notion that assessment is an impactful activity that has educational and even social consequences (Fulcher, 2010; McNamara & Roever, 2006). Notwithstanding the call for LAL for various people, language teachers have been a major focus of scholarly attention. This focus is sensible given that teachers spend a great deal of time assessing their students' language ability and make decisions based on the data from the assessments they use (Coombe et al., 2012; Tsagari, 2021). Additionally, research studies across the world have shown teachers' need and expectation to develop their LAL (Baker & Riches, 2017; Coombe & Davidson, 2021; Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo & Murcia, 2018; Sultana, 2019; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014).

Research on teachers' LAL has focused on two interrelated aspects. On the one hand, there has been a major impetus for describing their LAL state and needs. This line of research has suggested that teachers are, generally, underprepared for language assessment (Fulcher, 2012; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). The second research focus—which has been gaining pace—revolves around courses for teachers to foster their LAL. Overall, these assessment courses have helped these stakeholders develop the knowledge and skills components of LAL (Arias et al., 2012; Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Kremmel et al., 2018). However, as Giraldo (2021) shows, discussions of principles (e.g., ethics and fairness) are rather limited in LAL initiatives.

Particularly, research on LAL courses has shown that they impact teachers' LAL positively. In the existing initiatives (for a review, see Giraldo, 2021a), the teachers report that they become aware of what language assessment implies and how it can positively impact teaching and learning (Arias et al., 2012; Montee et al., 2013); concepts and frameworks for language assessment (e.g., validity and authenticity; formative and summative) (Kleinsasser, 2005; Nier et al., 2009); and design skills such as those needed to make clear rubrics (Koh et al., 2018; Kremmel et al., 2018; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2019). However, the existing literature on teachers' LAL, thus far, has not studied extensively their perceptions into language assessment courses, specifically tasks they engage in, and materials used for LAL development. Thus, it may be argued that a current gap in LAL research is a clear description of major guiding principles for a pedagogy of/for LAL (Fulcher, 2020); one source to advance such a pedagogy may be teachers' feedback on LAL training.

Against this background, our purpose with the present paper is to characterize the perceptions of English language teachers into three components of a course for LAL: contents, activities, and impact on teachers' professional development. In reporting our findings, we hope to contribute to a pedagogy of/for LAL, based on these teachers' voices vis-à-vis the LAL course in which they participated. We start this paper with a conceptual and research overview of LAL, and then we present the research methodology of the study. Further, we present and discuss the findings and close with recommendations for LAL initiatives elsewhere.

Literature Review

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As we stated earlier, as a construct, LAL is composed of knowledge, skills, and principles. In Table 1 below, we synthesize discussions on each one of these components of LAL, based on the work of various scholars (Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo, 2021b; Herrera & Macías, 2015; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; 2012; 2013; Stabler-Havener, 2018; Taylor, 2013). We must indicate, however, that LAL is a rather recent discussion in language testing. Most certainly, LAL as a construct might expand on two areas: (1) the number stakeholders engaged in language assessment across contexts and (2) the nature of language and language use (Inbar-Lourie, 2017; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2019; Tsagari, 2021).

Table 1. A Synthesis of LAL as a Construct

LAL Components	Some Examples
Knowledge of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Language ability – Language use – Concepts such as validity and reliability – Personal assessment context – Frameworks, e.g., norm- and criterion-referenced – Score interpretation
Skills in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Design of closed- and open-ended items and tasks – Statistics: calculation and interpretation – Integration between assessment, teaching, and learning
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ethics – Fairness – Democracy – Transparency

Conceptualizing LAL

Davies' (2008) paper first conceptualized LAL as having three major components: knowledge, skills, and principles. This early conceptualization has remained in the literature and seems to apply to various stakeholders in language assessment: professional language testers, applied linguists, teachers, among others. However, each component has been the focus of elaborate descriptions. Fulcher (2012, p. 126) collected information from teachers, regarding their training and needs in language assessment; based on this research, the scholar proposed a definition that includes “knowledge, skills, abilities, processes, principles, and concepts”. These components, as Fulcher explains, should be deeply rooted in contexts for language teaching and assessment, which include “historical, social, and philosophical frameworks” (p. 126). Scarino (2013) echoes Fulcher's idea of context, especially regarding language teachers. She argues that teachers' context is a key component of their professional development through language assessment.

Besides, Inbar-Lourie (2008) argues that LAL should address three fundamental questions. According to this scholar, the *why* refers to purposes for language assessment; the *what* refers to descriptions of language ability and language learning; the *how* refers to methods for collecting information about skills, to achieve stated purposes.

Other scholars have suggested that LAL as a construct differs depending on the stakeholders involved. While knowledge, skills, and principles are important for those engaged in assessment, they do not have or need to have similar levels of literacy (Butler et al., 2021; Kremmel & Harding, 2020; Taylor, 2013). According to Taylor (2013, p. 410), teachers should have a sound knowledge of “language pedagogy, sociocultural values, and their local contexts” and be able to design assessments and interpret the data they yield.

Drawing Teachers’ LAL

As stated above, LAL is highly context-dependent, especially when it comes to teachers. Notwithstanding this observation, we argue that the following are core characteristics of teachers’ LAL, which we derive from relevant literature (Arias et al., 2012; Brindley, 2001; Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo, 2018; Inbar-Lourie, 2008, 2012, 2013; Scarino, 2013; Taylor, 2013). The three components below are common in conceptualizations of LAL (see Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012), each is followed by examples.

Knowledge: language learning models and frameworks (e.g., the CEF); concepts such as validity and authenticity; purposes of assessment; methods for assessment.

Skills: design of closed-ended and open-ended items and tasks to assess language ability; score interpretation; connection between assessment, teaching, and learning; design and use of alternative assessment methods.

Principles: Transparency, democracy, ethics, and fairness.

Research involving teachers’ LAL has shown that they require and expect LAL training in various areas, and this occurs at the pre-service and in-service levels (Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo & Murcia, 2018; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). To reach this conclusion, research studies have collected data through instrument analysis, interviews, and surveys (Frodden et al., 2004; Montee et al., 2013; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Based on the data produced by these methods, various studies have reported the design and implementation of LAL courses, which we review below.

LAL Courses

Empirical studies on teachers’ LAL have indicated that teachers expect to learn about language assessment through practical, hands-on tasks in which theory is presented and used (Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo & Murcia, 2018; Tsagari, 2021). Courses deriving from this teacher-based feedback have, accordingly, focused on engaging teachers in learning about assessment through a praxis-based approach (Arias et al., 2012; Baker & Riches, 2017; Janssen, 2022;

Kremmel et al., 2018; Nguyen & Dursun, 2022). In a review of sixteen LAL courses, Giraldo (2021a) highlights the following major characteristics:

Contents: Overall, these courses tend to focus on topics such as validity, reliability; test purposes; types of tests; models of language ability; and guidelines for the design of assessments of language skills (e.g., listening, speaking).

Activities: LAL courses include test critiques and test design as major tasks for LAL development.

Principles: Principles such as ethics or fairness appear in few LAL courses.

The existing literature on LAL courses primarily report their outcomes, rather than the participants' perceptions towards how they learned or were taught. Of course, the purpose of most existing reports was not to evaluate participants' perceptions of their learning. Feedback from teachers in LAL courses, however, may ignite discussions leading to successful LAL initiatives for these stakeholders. Against this background, in this report we now describe how we studied English language teachers' perceptions into the contents and activities in an LAL course, with particular attention on how the course impacted their professional development.

Methodology

Since we investigated English language teachers' perceptions into an educational phenomenon, we resorted to a purely qualitative case study in a natural context (Creswell, 2015; Richards, 2011). Following Richards' (2011) idea of instrumental case studies, whereas the LAL course took place in a particular educational/social context, the findings may be relevant elsewhere, specifically because a pedagogy of/for LAL is needed in the field (Fulcher, 2020).

The participants in the LAL course of the study were eighteen English language teachers from state high schools in the center of Colombia. The teachers are tasked with teaching the English language to students in urban and rural schools in this area of the country. All teachers participated in a project called Language Assessment Literacy and Teachers' Professional Development.⁴ This project was divided into two major stages: a diagnostic and an implementation. In the first stage, we collected data on teachers' LAL needs and practices, through individual interviews, an analysis of assessment instruments, and a questionnaire on their LAL learning needs. Three major findings from this stage are as follows:

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- *The Need for Overall LAL with an Emphasis on Creating Assessments:* In the interviews, the teachers reported that they wanted to learn about language assessment across the board. They expressed the need to create high-quality assessment instruments.
- *A Course Focused on Knowledge and Skills:* In the results from the questionnaire, the teachers indicated that they wanted to learn about theoretical and technical aspects (i.e., design) of assessment. The results in this instrument confirm the need for LAL training that the teachers reported in the individual interviews.
- *Issues with Design of Assessment Instruments:* Through the analysis of assessment instruments the teachers shared, we identified issues in design: Teachers created items and tasks that posed potential problems to construct validity, reliability, and authenticity.

The report we present here is based on the implementation stage, i.e., the online course. The course had the features outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Major Features of the LAL Course

Features	Description
LAL Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fundamentals of language assessment: purposes, constructs, and methods – Qualities of language assessment, e.g., validity, reliability, authenticity. – Assessing the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing – Integrated-skills assessment – Ethics & fairness in classroom language assessment – Alternative assessment – Online assessment
LAL Learning Activities & Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mini tasks derived from reading the handbook (see <i>Support Materials</i> below) and based on the Colombian context of assessment. – Instrument analysis against fundamentals and qualities of language assessment. – Writing up test specifications for planning professional assessments. – Designing assessment instruments based on such specifications. – Discussions around school-based assessment situations: challenges, problems, and solutions. – Mini presentations of assessment materials, e.g., online resources or tests designed in the course.

Features	Description
Length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 40-hour course, between March and May 2021 – 10 weeks – 4 hours a week – Two 2-hour workshops every week
Modality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Taught online, synchronously, thanks to Google Meet and, in general, Google's Workspace technology.
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A handbook as preparatory reading material for teachers to read before each workshop (see the Appendix A for excerpts). – Recordings of all workshops for teachers to watch asynchronously, especially when they could not attend a workshop. – Slides and online handouts prepared by the course instructor and delivered through Google Workspace.

To tap into the participants' perceptions towards this LAL initiative, the study was guided by the following related questions:

What perceptions do English language teachers have regarding the contents and activities in a language assessment course?

What perceptions do these stakeholders have regarding the impact of this course on their professional development?

Data Collection and Analysis

To answer the two questions above, we used two data collection methods. On the one hand, we gave all teachers a questionnaire that they needed to complete every week, by the end of the second workshop. The questionnaire asked them about their perceptions towards the contents and activities in class, along with how they thought the course was impacting their professional development. On the other hand, we administered a focus-group interview to ask the teachers about these matters.

We used an iterative process to identify and analyze emerging themes from the data (Creswell, 2015; Kuckartz, 2014). We found commonalities in the closed- and open-ended items of the weekly questionnaire. Then, we transcribed the answers to the focus group interview and compared the data from both methods to identify major trends, which then led us to the findings we present and discuss next.

Findings and Discussion

The findings in this research study are divided into three sections. First, we explain and discuss the findings related to teachers' perceptions of the contents they learned in the LAL course. Secondly, we refer to findings about teachers' perceptions of activities in the course. Finally, we describe the findings related to the impact this course had on the participants' professional development.

Teacher Perceptions of Contents in the LAL Program

On Content Organization, Relevance, and Usefulness

In the focus-group interview, the teachers affirmed that the contents they studied were organized coherently. Additionally, they reported that the contents held relevance for their LAL development, explaining that this was because of how the data from the diagnostic stage were used for course planning. In the sample below, T10 states that:

Todos [los contenidos] están muy contextualizados [...], basados cuando nos hicieron la primera entrevista y usaron los instrumentos que usábamos para dizque evaluar. Se ve reflejado. De lo general a lo específico, con una buena secuencia. Si me pierdo una clase, me pierdo la conexión al siguiente tema o contenido.

All [contents] are very contextualized [...] based on what we had suggested in the first interview and the instruments we used to, supposedly, assess. We can see that we go from general to specific topics, and the lessons have a good sequence. If I miss a lesson, I lose the connection to the next topic or content.

Thanks to the questionnaires used throughout the course, the teachers had the chance to state whether course contents were useful for their LAL development. Tables 3 and 4 below include examples of how the teachers agreed on the usefulness of these course contents for their LAL.

Table 3. Questionnaire for Week 1 (15 respondents)

Content	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
Constructs and standards for language assessment.			15 (100%)

Table 4. Questionnaire for Week 9 (10 respondents)

Content	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
Ethics and fairness in language assessment.			10 (100%)

The literature on courses for language teachers has shown that these stakeholders welcome the contents they study. Most specifically, they tend to appreciate contents that are more directly related to their classroom experience in assessment (Kremmel et al., 2018; Montee et al., 2013). This positive response towards course contents may occur when teachers willingly participate in language courses, which is also the case in the present study.

As for content relevance, we designed the course in the present report by considering the data from the diagnostic stage. The course catered to teachers' needs in LAL, which may be the key reason why they welcomed course contents. Thus, a diagnostic stage for course planning has been proven to be useful for problematizing teachers' LAL development (Arias et al., 2012; Fulcher, 2012; Montee et al., 2013). Additionally, as the teachers in Fulcher's (2012) study argue, they expect LAL training that relates to their profiles as teachers within their personal contexts. In fact, as Scarino (2013) argues, teachers' LAL contexts are crucial for professional development. Thus, based on the feedback given by teachers in these studies and ours, LAL courses need to be context-sensitive and have a coherent organization in theoretical contents that are relevant to teachers.

On Learning about Design in LAL

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the teachers expected a course with an emphasis on how to design assessment instruments. Correspondingly, this was a content that teachers perceived as majorly useful in the LAL course. Most importantly, the teachers suggested that learning about design allowed them to practice knowledge in LAL (i.e., content). For example, in Table 5, all teachers stated that they found design considerations useful in the course.

Table 5. Questionnaire for Week 6 (12 respondents)

Content	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
Considerations for designing items for reading and listening assessments: T-F, MCQs, open questions, and matching.			12 (100%)

Following is an answer from a teacher (T25) in the focus group interview, through which T25 remarked on the usefulness of learning about design:

Me ha servido [el tema de diseño] mucho. Las rúbricas, como decía T10. No nos habían dicho cómo hacer y plantear rúbricas. Esa parte ha sido importante y la estoy aplicando en las guías de aprendizaje que está enviando [a sus estudiantes].

[The topic of rubric design] has worked well for me..., as T10 said. We had not been told how to make and propose rubrics. That part has been important, and I've been applying it in the learning guides I am sending [to her learners]].

Research studies in LAL have consistently shown teachers' positive perceptions towards learning about assessment design. Such content makes teachers aware of technicalities pertaining to test construction (Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Kremmel et al., 2018) and the importance of describing constructs well for assessment (Arias et al., 2012; Baker & Riches, 2017; Nguyen & Dursun, 2022).

The interview excerpt above reiterates teachers' need and want to develop the skills of LAL, operationalized here as the design of assessments. As we highlight in the literature review above, research findings have shown that the design of assessment is a skill that teachers should develop more conscientiously (Frodden et al., 2004; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2019; Koh et al., 2018). Ultimately, as Fulcher (2010) states, the design of good assessment instruments is a fundamental task in language assessment.

Teacher Perceptions of Activities in the LAL Course

Analyzing Assessment for LAL Development

In the LAL initiative reported in this paper, two major tasks involved the analysis of existing assessment instruments and the design of assessment based on specifications. The answers the teachers gave in the weekly questionnaire and the interview suggest that these two tasks were major catalysts of knowledge, skills, and reflection towards language assessment. The first data sample below comes from the questionnaire in week 2 and suggests how useful the teachers found analysis of tasks for LAL.

Table 6. Questionnaire for Week 2 (15 respondents)

Activity	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
Analyzing assessment instruments based on qualities (e.g., authenticity and practicality)			15 100%

The next sample comes from an open-ended item in the questionnaire for week 5 in the course. The teacher (T22) commented on the usefulness of test analysis.

I think having the opportunity to look at the example of the Cambridge test was so helpful because it allowed me to understand the way it is conducted. I could also analyze the probable constructs they consider before designing the test.

Reported initiatives for teachers' LAL have shown that as teachers analyze and/or design assessment, they become aware of aspects ranging from technicalities of design, e.g., how to make a more robust rubric (Arias et al., 2012), theoretical considerations (Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Kremmel et al., 2018; Nguyen & Dursun, 2022), and principles such as democracy and transparency (Arias et al., 2012). The course we report here placed great emphasis, particularly on design, given the need expressed by teachers in the diagnostic stage. This may have been, fundamentally, the reason why teachers appreciated design as a core activity for LAL.

Most importantly, perhaps, is how analyzing assessments is an activity that contributes to LAL development. In the present study, teachers merged theoretical and technical aspects of LAL as they studied assessment carefully. In other studies, with this LAL activity, teachers became aware of faulty design and how it could negatively impact the validity of assessment (Arias et al., 2012; Baker & Riches, 2017; Kleinsasser, 2005). In conclusion, the findings in our and other studies provide empirical support for an LAL pedagogy that includes test analysis as a core activity.

Collaborative Tasks for LAL Development

Another core activity that seemed to drive LAL development in the course, as reported by the teachers, was the use of collaborative tasks. The participants continuously affirmed that, as they worked on a collaborative task, they could discuss issues that were meaningful to them and –most importantly it seemed– they could learn from each other. The first data sample is from the questionnaire for week 4. The teachers had to design a speaking assessment based on several specifications.

Table 7. Questionnaire for Week 4 (12 respondents)

Activity	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
Designing a speaking assessment with other teachers.			7 (100%)

The answer below, from the focus group interview, reiterates the usefulness of collaborative tasks. T12 commented that,

Es importante que él [el instructor del curso] trate de crear espacios, para tener la explicación con él, también en grupo con compañeros. Uno aporta, otro corrige, uno aprende mucho de los compañeros.

[It is important that he [the course instructor] tries to create spaces to have his explanation, also in groups with classmates. You contribute, another corrects; you learn a lot from classmates.]

Collaborative tasks move attention from a cognitive view of LAL development and place learning communities at the forefront. In fact, a social view of LAL development has been garnering attention in LAL discussions (Baker, 2021; Yan, 2021); the present study provides evidence to support that teachers can learn from and support each other towards their LAL development, especially when they share backgrounds, as it happened in the course reported here.

LAL activities which involve interaction and collaboration among teachers seem to drive LAL development. One way to foster LAL, as the interview data above indicate, is the feedback that teacher participants give to one another. Other studies have indicated that this peer feedback can be useful to increase the quality of assessment instruments (Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Kleinsasser, 2005; Kremmel et al., 2018; Montee et al., 2013). Thus, consonant with a collaborative and intercultural approach to LAL development (Baker, 2021; Yan, 2021), LAL courses may benefit from including tasks in which teachers give and receive feedback on assessment tasks that they design.

Teacher Perceptions of How the Course Impacted their Professional Development

LAL as a Trigger of Self-Reflection

The participants in this LAL initiative reported that the assessment course led them to reflect on mistakes they previously made in language assessment. In the questionnaire and the focus-group interview, the data indicate that the teachers were unaware of issues in the design of their assessments and their use. In the first data sample, from the questionnaire for week 9, T19 states how the workshops led her to reflection on mistakes she made.

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The workshops helped me identify the several mistakes I make when I design a test for my students, I haven't noticed many things.

In the focus group interview, T27 commented on changing her perception of assessment:

Hasta el momento ha tenido que olvidar ciertas cosas que hacía, desaprender muchas cosas porque a la hora de realizar evaluación, sobre todo en un idioma extranjero, cometemos muchos errores.

[Up to now, I have had to forget certain things I did, unlearn many things because when it comes to designing an assessment, especially in a foreign language, we make many mistakes.]

The fact that teachers became aware of their mistakes in assessment may stem from the test-analysis tasks in the course. The teachers examined traditional and alternative test formats and pinpointed aspects these instruments needed to improve. This analysis then seemed to have led the teachers to reflection on their own assessment instruments. Other LAL initiatives show how teachers reflect on what assessment is and does (Boyd & Donnarumma, 2018; Giraldo & Murcia, 2019) (more in the next finding); however, as far as the literature review for this article goes, there are no studies reporting on how teachers in LAL courses become aware of mistakes *they* make in assessment as they analyze assessment instruments.

Understanding Assessment

A final perception the teachers reported was how the course impacted their professional development through enhanced awareness of what assessment is and does. The teachers reported that now they see the complexity of what assessment involves and the care and rigor that is needed for language assessment to work well. The data below show a common trend. The breadth and depth of assessment can be elucidated in T10's answer below, from the focus-group interview.

Tengo que conocer qué es lo que voy a hacer, cómo, hacia quiénes. Me gustó el qué, cómo, de la evaluación, el propósito. No es coger preguntas y hacerlas al azar de acuerdo con un tema y pare de contar. Es realmente lo que pretendo los objetivos que me tracé desde el principio. Este tipo de herramientas, para mí debe ser algo que se hace con cuidado. Es delicado.

[I must know what it is that I am going to do, how, towards whom. I liked what and how in assessment, its purpose. It is not about taking questions and making them at random based on a topic and that is it. It actually is what I intend to do, the objectives I set out from the beginning. This kind of tool, for me, must be something to be done with care. It is a sensitive issue.]

Learning involves change of perceptions towards a subject, and this is naturally the case when it comes to teachers learning about language assessment. Other studies with pre-service and in-service teachers have shown that these stakeholders' views of assessment change radically after studying assessment formally (Arias et al., 2012; Boyd & Donnarumma, 2018; Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Jaramillo-Delgado & Gil-Bedoya, 2019; Montee et al., 2013; Restrepo, 2020). This change and growing awareness may occur given the explicit attention that LAL initiatives give to assessment and its impact on language teaching and learning.

Scholars have argued that language teachers need a sound understanding of what assessment is (Brindley, 2001; Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2008). Such understanding may come from courses that combine theoretical, technical, and critical aspects of assessment, as the present study and others have suggested (Arias et al., 2012; Baker & Riches, 2017; Giraldo & Murcia, 2019). Collectively, the existing research evidence strongly suggests that

LAL courses contribute to how teachers envision assessment and move them, so we argue, towards LAL at large.

Limitations

We should address three limitations in our study. While we hope our case study will be useful to other contexts where LAL initiatives are being cultivated, we acknowledge that this is a small case study pertaining to a particular LAL context. Thus, the findings and conclusions need to be analyzed against the contexts where other LAL courses are to operate. Secondly, in the questionnaire data, we report the answers given by fifteen respondents, even though we state that the participants were eighteen teachers. This occurred because three teachers could not attend synchronous sessions, so they watched video recordings of all the workshops; these teachers did not answer the questionnaire. Likewise, the number of respondents per week fluctuated, with weeks having seven respondents and others fifteen. This happened mostly because of teachers' lack of access to a stable internet connection. Finally, the questionnaire had three options for each item, which may limit participants' room for decision-making.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we hope that this research report can provide food for thought on what to do, and even what not to do, regarding the implementation of LAL courses for teachers; in other words, as we stated at the start of this paper, we hope that our findings are useful contributions for a pedagogy of/for LAL. As Vogt et al. (2020) argue, local initiatives based on teacher feedback on LAL training can further LAL discussions and improvement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this article, we characterized the perceptions of eighteen English language teachers into three components of a language assessment course: contents, activities, and impact on their professional development. The findings indicate that the teachers found course contents organized, useful, and relevant, particularly because of how they were derived from the diagnostic stage. The teachers also considered the design of assessments as key since it led to careful work and fostering of LAL. Regarding the activities in the LAL course, there were two that teachers found most useful: analysis of assessments and collaborative tasks, both gearing towards LAL development. Regarding the course's impact on the teachers' professional development, we highlight self-reflection on their assessment practices and a heightened awareness of what assessment involves.

Based on our findings and aware of the limitations of the study, we first suggest that a diagnostic stage be conducted to design the course. In this way, contents and activities can

be aligned with teachers' needs and expectations, so they can foster their LAL—the goal of such a course. Furthermore, teachers may become engaged in the course as they perceive progress and learning of the aspects they mentioned in the diagnostic stage. Second, we encourage the prioritization of activities in which teachers analyze and design assessments. These two tasks potentially lead teachers to understand the care and complexity needed for sound assessment. Finally, we recommend the collection of feedback from teachers as the course progresses. During the course, we used a weekly questionnaire that allowed us to know the perceptions of their learning process and make changes to course delivery.

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Appendix A: Excerpts from The Handbook the Teachers Used in the LAL Course

The writing assessment I will develop now is for the task in Eighth grade: **A survey about consumption**. For this assessment, I will use a method called a checklist. Here are the specifications for this instrument:

Grade: 8

Standards/Syllabus objectives:

- Completa información personal básica en formatos y documentos sencillos.
- ADAPTED: Creo formatos sencillos para recoger información personal.

Purpose: Assess students' progress in their writing skills for the second school period.

Task: A Survey about Food Consumption in Households

Skills to be assessed:

The ability to...

- make grammatically accurate Wh-questions and Yes-No questions.
- correctly spell vocabulary related to food consumption.
- use the present tense with do for the questions in the survey.
- use question marks correctly, at the end of sentences.
- organize the questions in coherent categories.

Method: A checklist

Task instructions for students (in L1 or L2):

Based on the example survey questions we studied last class, create a survey asking about food consumption in people's households. Include four food categories: Fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy, and grains. Write 3 questions for each category.

Instructions for writing the descriptors in the checklist:

- Write the descriptors as achievement indicators, e.g., In this survey, the student uses grammatically correct...

- Write the descriptors as achievement indicators, e.g., In this survey, the student uses grammatically correct...
- After each descriptor, include a small space for comments or evidence of what was done well or what needs to be improved.
- Add a box next to the checklist for point allocation (to be negotiated with students).

Washback and use:

Washback: Show students the checklist at the start of the second school period, so they know what will be assessed and how; ask students questions about the checklist: Are the descriptors clear?

Have your students write a first draft of the survey and conduct a self-assessment exercise. Collect general feedback of what language aspects they want to improve based on the task. Ask students whether they want to add any descriptors to make the survey better. Finally, negotiate point allocation for the checklist. How many points per correct item in the checklist?

Use: Summative. Produce a score based on the checklist to represent students' progress (or part of it) in the second school period.

Based on the instrument, you can plan lessons that allow students to be successful in doing the task. Additionally, the writing task can lead to a speaking task: Students can use some (or all) of the questions for an interview in which they pretend to be a reporter asking questions about food consumption. Of course, many skills above can be used for the interview, with the added skills to represent the construct of speaking.

Sample Checklist for a Writing Assessment

Task: A Survey about Food Consumption in Households

Student's name: _____

Assessment Criteria	Check	Points
1. The student makes grammatically accurate Wh-questions.		
Comments:		
2. The student makes grammatically accurate Yes-No questions.		
Comments:		
3. The student correctly spells vocabulary related to food consumption.		
Comments:		
4. The student uses the present tense with <i>do</i> for the questions in the survey.		
Comments:		
5. The student uses question marks correctly, only at the end of sentences.		
Comments:		
6. The student organizes the questions in coherent categories.		
Comments:		
Totals and grade:		