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IN THIS VOLUME

Issues and Trends in English Language Assessment

- Language Testing: The State of The Art
- Current Trends and Issues in English Language Education in Asia
- A Case Study into English Classroom Assessment Practices in Three Primary Schools in Hanoi: Implications for Developing a Contextualized Formative Assessment Practice Framework
- Ongoing Challenges in Language Assessment
- An Investigation into EFL Teachers' Perceptions of In-Class English Speaking Assessment

News

- The 10th Annual International Conference on TESOL at SEAMEO RETRAC
- The 5th International Conference on Learning and Teaching—ICLT 2019
- Online Training Course on Language Assessment in the Classroom
- Teaching for Success: Practices for English Language Teaching

Fun Corner

- The Architect
- Onions and Garlic
- Rescue

ISSUES AND TRENDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

LANGUAGE TESTING: THE STATE OF THE ART

Summarized by Mach Buu Hien ⁽¹⁾



This article is summarized from the online interview, in which James Dean Brown, Professor of Second Language Studies at the University of Hawaii reflected his perspectives on language testing and assessment. More importantly, he considers language testing as a subgroup of applied linguistics, and suggested that language testing should be specialized from hard core positivist approaches to postmodernist interpretive perspectives. He also argues that the perspectives on language testing should take into account the norm-referenced testing (proficiency, placement, and aptitude testing, incorporating complicated statistical analyses and theories of validity) and the criterion-referencing (diagnostics, progress, and achievement testing, such as classroom and curriculum notions of task-based assessments, portfolios, conferences, self- and peer-assessment, as well as continuous, differential, and dynamic assessments).

Moreover, the prerequisite for language testing in the 21st century to acquire good measure should be placed more emphasis on practicality with a dash of reliability rather than focus much

on validity in the past decades. In order to do this, it is suggested to draw on such fields as linguistics, teaching methodology, educational psychology, English for specific purposes, education and so on for ideas and strategies to meet the needs of language teaching and learning. In this light, he also clarifies the meanings of some vital terms, including evaluation, assessment, testing, measurement, high-stakes and low-stakes testing and washback.

Particularly, evaluation relates to processes of determining the ways for the improvement of the curriculum of a course or a program, whereas assessment concentrates at the classroom level, including all kinds of testing to determine students' language performance, progress, and achievement. In the meantime, measurement is done with questionnaires, observations of any different ways, in which language students' behaviors are quantified, coded, and described, but testing emphasizes on summative or formative, direct or indirect observation of language students' behaviors for

¹ Brown, J.D. & Salmani Nodoushan, M.A. (2015). Language Testing: the State of the Art. *International Journal of Language Studies*, vol.9, no.4, p.133-143. From <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED560267.pdf>

feedback and decision-making purposes. From these perspectives, he argues both assessment and evaluation exploit measurement and testing despite different effects.

Finally, high-stakes testing has relatively important implications and consequences in relation with the decisions are made about people's lives and it involves administering tests on a single occasion with many items to ensure reliability. Meanwhile, low-stakes testing does not aim at serious implications and consequences, in which teachers administer numerous low-stakes quizzes and tests and then aggregate information for assessing and

grading students' progress and achievement. Washback is also defined as positive or negative effect which testing can have on the language teaching in associated with learning. From the clarification of these important terms, he raises his concerns about the impacts of language policy on language testing as the adoption of native speaker model regardless of the administering of norm-referenced tests for proficiency or placement testing or criterion-referenced tests for diagnostic or achievement testing. Therefore, other options need to be considered to serve the needs of other non-native speakers.

CURRENT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ASIA

Summarized by Nguyen Thi Anh Thu ⁽²⁾



In order to find out current trends and issues in English language education in Asia, the authors have made a survey in 18 countries/regions. The findings underline two major aspects in terms of the context of English language education as well as the challenges of English language teaching.

First of all, it can be found that the status of English language in these regions is varied. While English is used as a second language in Malaysia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, the other nine nations, such as Viet Nam, Japan, China, Korea, and so on, use it as a foreign language. However, such regions as Hong Kong, Singapore,

Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the UAE use English as both a foreign and second language. Whatever approaches of English language teaching are adopted, it cannot be denied that English has become dominant language in these Asian regions. Moreover, the starting grade of English language education is also different, in which most of the counties start their English language education from the 1st and 3rd grade whereas only a few regions begin teaching English from the 6th and 7th grade.

Despite the different starting grade, these regions have relatively identical aspects in the implementation of English language education in terms of the national English curriculum, school textbooks, the university entrance examination, English teachers and tertiary English education:

- **National English Curriculum**

The national curriculum functions can be viewed as the basic guidelines and principles for what and how to teach, learn and test; for example, the specification of learning contents, achievement standards, and teaching methods and testing. All the 18 Asian countries/regions have a national curriculum

² Choi Y.H. & Lee H.W. (2008). Current Trends and Issues in English Language Education in Asia. The Journal of Asia TEFL, 5/2, pp.1-34. From http://www.asiatefl.org/main/download_pdf.php?i=262&c=1419312102&fn=5_2_01.pdf

for primary or secondary English.

• **School Textbooks**

The textbook is a fundamental mean of achieving educational goals as its significance has been noted in education or language learning. It provides the basic learning contents and classroom activities.

- *At primary and secondary level:* English textbooks are national or government-authorized commercial, especially for state-run or public schools in 12 Asian nations, such as Korea, China, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Israel. However, in other six nations/regions (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and the UAE) primary and secondary English textbooks seem open to free competition of commercial books.

- *At university level:* English textbooks are mostly selected by universities.

• **The University Entrance Examination**

Most Asian countries have a nation-wide university entrance examination. However, Malaysia, Philippines, India and Pakistan do not administer a nationwide university entrance examination. Multiple-choice questions are the test format most prevalently used across the Asian nations. Fill-in-the-blanks are also another common format as well as True-False questions and Short-answer questions. These trends may be accounted for by the issue of practicality and reliability. Moreover, the language skills and knowledge, which tend to be tested, are reading and writing skills, as well as grammar, and vocabulary. This might be due to easiness in test construction and administration and the main learning content of secondary English.

• **English Teachers**

The majority of English teachers are NNESTs (non-native English-speaking teachers) throughout all the school levels. However, the number of NESTs (native English-speaking teachers) increases at tertiary schools (e.g., Korea, China, and the UAE).

- *NNESTs:* China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Pakistan,

Sri Lanka, Israel, and the UAE (primary, secondary), Taiwan (secondary), Korea, Indonesia, Thailand (primary, secondary); Japan (secondary); China (tertiary)

- *NNESTs and NESTs:* Hong Kong, Singapore (primary, secondary); Taiwan (primary, tertiary); Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Israel (tertiary)

• **Tertiary English Education**

All the Asian nations/regions have general English courses (English for General Purposes, or EGP) at universities, except for Israel, which offers mainly EAP (English for Academic Purposes).

Together with the context, five key issues in English language education in Asia are also raised from the findings of the survey.

- The amount of officially allotted time for English language teaching, especially at primary and secondary level is still limited. Consequently, this will affect students' amount of exposure to English.

- Whether teaching English through English (TETE) or the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in non-English subject should be adopted to enhance the effectiveness of English language education.

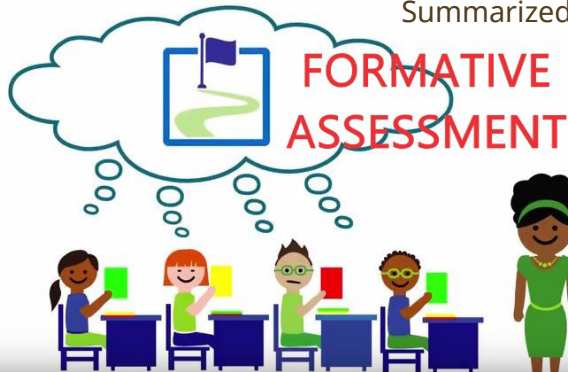
- The centralization or decentralization of English language education in terms of the national curriculum and English textbooks.

- The question of whether NESTs or NNESTs should be employed to enhance English language education. The answer for this question is the balance of NESTs and NNESTs to complement their advantages and disadvantages. A qualified NEST can foster NNESTs' English proficiency and help them to develop teaching materials and tests.

- The content and testing method of nation-wide university entrance examination need to be examined as it is found that multiple choice questions are the most common technique as well as reading, vocabulary and grammar are the major content in most of Asian countries. This will lead to a mismatch between the aims to foster all English language skills with the content of nation-wide university entrance examination, which does not focus on the direct testing of the language skills.

A CASE STUDY INTO ENGLISH CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN HANOI: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING A CONTEXTUALIZED FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Summarized by Mai Thi Minh Tho ⁽³⁾



Towards the trend in upgrading teaching and learning practice in different levels of schools, formative assessment (FA) has been considered as a useful tool to implement in the English language classrooms. However, the practice of FA has still not met the expectations, and according to the author, the core issue is the lack workable frameworks to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Therefore, this study aims to propose some principles to develop a contextualized formative assessment practice framework (CFAPF). In order to achieve this target, several studies on FA practices in Hong Kong and Western countries are reviewed as well as the rationale for the necessity of building a contextualized framework for the local context is explicitly expressed. The major findings which are extracted from the observation of classroom assessment process, the evidence of formative assessment elements in daily teaching strategies as well as some threats to FA help to build up some principles for suggested framework. Particularly, these principles consist of particularity, practicality, and learning promotion:

- **Particularity:** relates to the consideration of the practical realities of particular classrooms and teachers' attitudes and beliefs for the implementation of new approaches of assessment.
- **Practicality:** is relevant to the relationship between theory and practice, in which time management, classroom management and organization of learning/ assessment activities should be taken into thorough account.
- **Learning promotion:** depends on teachers' act in setting clear learning goals and seeking ways to measure students' achievement, and encouraging students to be active learners

Finally, the author emphasizes some important key points and necessary conditions for the successful application of the framework. The first key point is the importance of daily lesson planning, which requires teachers to set clear learning goals and to measure them effectively. Secondly, the framework needs to place more focus on three important components of FA, incorporating the validity of teaching and assessing activity, techniques for giving feedback and scaffolding, as well as students' self-assessment and self-regulation for active learning. Lastly, the framework should take thorough consideration of poor learning conditions, time management and classroom management as this affect the effectiveness of the techniques used for whole class teaching, the self- and peer-assessment, and manageable procedure of recording evidence of learning.

³ Pham Lan Anh (2013). A case study into English classroom assessment practices in three primary schools in Hanoi: Implications for developing a contextualized formative assessment practice framework, VNU Journal of Foreign Studies, 29/1, pp.1-16. From <https://js.vnu.edu.vn/FS/article/view/1074>

ONGOING CHALLENGES IN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

Summarized by Do Kieu Anh ⁽⁴⁾



In this article, the author delineated a detailed picture in relation to the challenges that face the field of language assessment in the past few decades. Firstly, he discussed several issues of continuing concern including (1) the validity of score-based interpretations and the nature of the construct we want to assess—language ability; (2) ethics and professionalism in the way we develop and use language assessments; (3) the role of language assessments in accountability decisions; and (4) the impact of assessments on instruction. While validity and validation continue to form a major area of focus in language assessment research (e.g., Bachman, 2005), more and more language testers are investigating difficult questions about how and why language assessments are used, about the ethical responsibilities of test developers and users.

In addition to these four long-term issues, he argued that the globalization has posed some

recent challenges such as (1) the role of assessment in language classrooms, (2) training classroom teachers in language assessment, and (3) language assessment for citizenship and naturalization. He highlighted that language testers have also become increasingly researched two areas of classroom assessment: the assessment of young language learners; and the role and function of assessment in the language classroom. In this part, he mentioned two perspectives formative assessment and dynamic assessment to discuss the role and function of assessment in the language classroom. Additionally, he emphasized that teachers are generally neither knowledgeable about nor well-trained in assessment, so more training and researched are needed. Finally, he concluded that in order to turn these mentioned challenges into opportunities, language testers are supposed to apply the knowledge and skills acquired to deal with the practical problems of assessment in our education systems.

⁴Bachman, L.F. (2017). Ongoing Challenges in Language Assessment. From https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316148718_Ongoing_Challenges_in_Language_Assessment

AN INVESTIGATION INTO EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF IN-CLASS ENGLISH SPEAKING ASSESSMENT

Summarized by Mach Buu Hien ⁽⁵⁾

This study is conducted to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of in-class English speaking assessment, incorporating their general understanding of speaking assessment, the task types of in-class speaking assessment and the teachers' work to implement the assessment. In the first part of the article, the authors reviewed the document (Dispatch No 5333/BGDĐT-GDTrH) promulgated by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), in which English testing and assessment at high school level are requested to conduct in four skills including reading, writing, speaking and listening. Besides, important theoretical literature on language assessment, particularly English speaking assessment is also discussed analytically and systematically.

In order to collect the data, the authors utilized both questionnaires and in-depth interview to find out teachers' perceptions on in-class English speaking assessment. More specifically, 42 EFL teachers from different high schools in Quang Tri province, Vietnam were chosen for survey questionnaire respondents, and five of them participated in the following in-depth interview. The results of the study are interpreted and discussed in three thematic aspects. Firstly, the findings reveal that the teachers are aware of the necessity of in-class speaking assessment and they seem to be more favor of the purposes of formative assessment than summative assessment because this type of assessment can help students improve their speaking skills. Secondly, in terms of teachers' perception of the task types of in-class speaking assessment, it is found that the teachers have positive perceptions of various task types of



in-class speaking assessment, in which interviews and role-plays are more favorably used than portfolios and self-assessment. Finally, teachers' perception of the work involved in assessment implementation of pre-stage, while-stage and post-stage is appropriate. Particularly, the teachers perceive grammar as the least important criterion when assessing students' speaking performance. Despite the teachers' positive perceptions of in-class speaking assessment, they have limited knowledge of some task types of speaking assessment. For example, they are expected what oral portfolios are and how self-assessment is implemented. For this reason, the authors suggest that pre-service teachers should be equipped with adequate knowledge of language testing and assessment as well as in-service teachers should be offered more opportunities for their professional development.

⁵Nguyen Ho Hoang Thuy & Tran Thi Thanh Nga (2018). An Investigation into EFL Teachers' Perceptions of In-class English Speaking Assessment, VNU Journal of Foreign Studies, 34/2, pp.125-139. From <https://js.vnu.edu.vn/FS/article/view/4251>

NEWS

The 10th Annual International Conference on TESOL



The 10th Annual International Conference on TESOL will be collaboratively organized by SEAMEO Regional Training Center (SEAMEO RETRAC) in Vietnam and Curtin University in Australia. The event provides an excellent venue for academics, researchers, students and professionals in the field of English language education to share and discuss research findings, experiences, and practical and theoretical issues related to the teaching of English to learners of different backgrounds, levels, interests and motives.

Conference Theme: Diversification and Engagement in English Language Teaching

Session Strands:

Strand 1: Language Skills and Language Systems

Acquiring, processing, teaching, and using second language skills and language systems

Possible presentation topics:

- teaching of speaking, listening, reading & writing
- teaching of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar & discourse
- integrated teaching of language skills/ language skills and language systems

Strand 2: Content and Language-Integrated Approaches

Diverse methods of instruction in content and language integrated learning or English as a medium of instruction.

Possible presentation topics:

- content-based/task-based/project-based instruction
- content and language integrated learning
- English for specific purposes
- English as a medium of instruction

Strand 3: Digital Technologies in ELT

Issues related to language teaching and learning with the application of digital technologies

Possible presentation topics:

- online learning and teaching
- computer/mobile-assisted language learning (CALL/MALL)
- massive open online courses (MOOCs)
- blended/hybrid settings for language learning and teaching

Strand 4: Language Assessment

Diversification of techniques and strategies in second language testing, assessment, and evaluation

Possible presentation topics:

- Designing and administering different kinds of tests and testing
- Alternative assessment of students' learning

Strand 5: Teacher Professional Development

Continuing professional development of teachers in diverse teaching settings

Possible presentation topics:

- reflective practice
- teacher identity and classroom-based/action/practitioner research in/for continuing teacher learning
- continuing education and professional development

Date: 15-16 August 2019

Venue: 35 Le Thanh Ton Street, Ben Nghe Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Website: <http://www.vnseameo.org/TESOLConference2019/>

The 5th International Conference on Learning and Teaching—ICLT 2019

The 5th International Conference on Learning and Teaching—ICLT 2019, which will be held in Seoul, South Korea from May 27-29, 2019. ICLT 2019, organized by IEDRC, aims to create a platform towards sharing rigorous research and current practices being conducted in learning and teaching.

In the 21st century, the provision of education that relates to an individual's interests, needs, expectations and global expectations is gaining importance day by day. Moreover, the match between an individual's characteristics with the environment in which learning takes place, together with the management of those learning environments are also important. In this framework, the conference focuses on the unique challenges of learning and teaching in multi-cultural contexts in universities and high schools and on innovative and emergent

practices that are informed by pragmatic scholarship.

Time & Venue:

• **Date: May 27- 29, 2019**

• **Venue: Seoul, South Korea**

• **Website: <http://www.iclt.org/index.html>**

This conference provides opportunities to explore psychological, theoretical and practical aspects of language learning. Whether one's focus is the impact of technology or the integration of emotions into the classroom, we can and must all rely on each other to best serve students and support them in becoming autonomous, independent language learners who can be successful in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. An international, intercultural, and interdisciplinary conference such as this brings us together; to surprise, support, and learn from each other.



Online Training Course on Language Assessment in the Classroom



In this course, you will learn about the principles of sound language assessment. You will develop an understanding of the ideas in developing different types of test and how they can be applied. With guidance from experienced test developers and international assessment experts, you will explore practical ways of assessing language and skills which you can use in your classroom.

The course will cover the following topics:

- **Principles of language assessment**
Formative and summative assessment
Positive washback
Assessment and testing
- **Assessing speaking**
Formats, tasks and settings
Rating scales
- **Assessing writing**
Assessment tasks
Marking criteria
Feedback
- **Assessing reading**
Meaningfulness and authenticity
Developing reading tests
Scoring reading tests
- **Assessing listening**
Task types for listening assessment
Scoring listening tests
- **Assessing grammar and vocabulary**
Principles of testing grammar and vocabulary
- **Test development**
Assessment and course planning
Approaches to testing
The test development cycle
Evaluating the effectiveness of a test

For further details, please go to the website: <https://goo.gl/jzYK7g>

Teaching for Success: Practices for English Language Teaching



This British Council program will help English language teachers understand and plan their own professional development needs and share their experience with other teachers around the world.

The program framework identifies 12 different practices that teachers should consider as they plan their professional development inside and outside the classroom. From planning lessons and courses to promoting 21st century skills, the framework is a practical guide for teachers in all situations through 12 professional practices in three areas:

- Lessons and Teaching
- Learning and Learners
- The Classroom and the World.

By the end of the program, you will be equipped with the following skills to understand and plan

your professional development as an English language teacher

- Planning lessons and courses
- Understanding learners
- Managing the lesson
- Knowing the subject
- Managing resources
- Assessing learning
- Integrating ICT
- Taking responsibility for professional development
- Using inclusive practices
- Using multilingual approaches
- Promoting 21st-century skills
- Understanding educational policies and practice.

For further details, please go to the website:
<https://goo.gl/hjZTfR>

FUN CORNER

THE ARCHITECT



One Sunday, an architect visited Seoul, Korea. He was there for a conference but had all Sunday to explore the city. He decided to take a taxi around the city and see lots of sites. He paid the taxi driver \$100 and said, "Take me around Seoul and show me all the sites".

The taxi driver was very happy for the business and started driving. Immediately, they saw a big,

beautiful palace. The architect said in a loud voice (for he was from Texas). "What is the building?" The taxi driver said, "That is Gyeongbokgung. It took almost 20 years to build!" "Ah, that's nothing" replied the American. "We could build that in a year in America. The driver continued driving. Suddenly the Texan saw a large domed building. He asked, "What building is that?" The taxi driver said, "That is the National Assembly, it is the largest in Asia." The architect replied, "Ah, that's nothing. Back home, we could build that in a few weeks!" The taxi driver continued driving. They passed a very high, gold building which shimmered in the sun. The architect jumped up in his seat and screamed, "Oh my god! What building is that?" The taxi driver looked back at him and shook his head. He said, "I DON'T KNOW. IT WASN'T THERE THIS MORNING!"

ONIONS AND GARLIC



Long ago there lived two brothers, Joshua and Eli. They lived on a farm and were very poor. Joshua worked hard every day. Eli was lazy and didn't like to work. One day, Joshua heard of a kingdom far away. This kingdom didn't have onions! Hmm, thought Joshua. If I could sell them onions, they'd pay a lot of money! He asked to see the king and was granted an audience. Joshua told the king about the onions and the king was curious. He invited Joshua to make a big feast with many dishes prepared with onions.

That evening, the king and his guests tasted the dishes. Everyone agreed, the onion made

everything taste so much better! The king smiled from ear to ear. He said to Joshua, "These onions are the most precious thing in my kingdom. In return for them, I will give you their equal weight in the most precious thing I have – diamonds." Joshua was instantly rich and returned to his village with a wagon full of diamonds.

Joshua shared his wealth but his brother Eli was still very jealous. He asked Joshua if this kingdom has garlic. Joshua thought and said, "In fact, they don't have any garlic." Hmm, thought Eli. If I could sell them garlic, I'd be very rich indeed. Garlic is much tastier than onions.

Eli traveled to the kingdom as his brother had done. Just like Joshua, he got an audience with the king and made a feast. And just like Joshua, the king declared garlic the most precious thing in his kingdom. It was a big hit! The king said, "I will give you their equal weight in the most precious thing in my kingdom." Here you are – Onions!

Source:

<http://eflclassroom.com/books/premium/funnystories.pdf>

RESCUE

This is an interesting activity, which is designed for students who are at level B2 (CEFR) and provides them with meaningful opportunities to speaking English more communicatively and confidently. Following is the description of how to conduct it in communicative English classrooms.

Activity name	Rescue
Level	B2
Skill	Speaking
Time	15-25 minutes
Grouping of students	Groups of 5 to 8

- Objective:
Stating opinions, offering and asking for reasons, agreeing and disagreeing, comparing

- Instructions:
The teacher explains a situation: (2-3 minutes)

The earth is going to be destroyed over the next two days due to radiation. Alien from another planet have come to our rescue but they can only rescue twelve people and move them to a planet which is very similar to our earth. These twelve people will start a new world there. Imagine that you have been asked to draw up this list. What criteria would you use to make your decision and why. Discuss this within the group and arrive at a consensus, choosing ten criteria.

Each group presents its list of criteria to the class. The lists are discussed. (8-10 minutes)

Notes:

1. The task can be made more specific by asking the students to list fifteen criteria.
2. After the criteria are decided the groups can also write a list of ten things they would like to take with them.

- Stages:
 - Setting up (forming of groups, giving instructions – guidelines, objectives, rules, time limit and rubric for assessment): 5 minutes
 - Warm up and activity: 30 minutes
 - Evaluation and feedback to students: 5 minutes

Source: <https://bit.ly/2H552YJ>