



# Tertiary EFL Practitioners' Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Professional Development in the Area of Assessment and Testing—An Exploratory Study

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**Abstract**

Professional development of teachers, the greatest strength of any educational institute, implies advancement of pedagogical, assessment and success standards. All teacher education activities whether during the pre-or/and in-service phases, should aim to bring about teacher change which refers to the procedures targeting reform in teacher beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, self-awareness, skills and practices. Since teacher beliefs and attitudes serve as an integral part of the process to comprehend how teachers conceptualise, approach and practice their work, change in teacher practices generally precede a change in teacher beliefs and attitudes. In the background of the paucity of scholarship about tertiary EFL practitioners' beliefs and attitudes about their professional development, in general, and in assessment, testing and evaluation, in particular, the present study mainly based on interview data collected from 10 tertiary EFL teachers working in three tertiary educational institutes in Saudi Arabia aimed at exploring tertiary EFL practitioners' philosophies and attitudes towards their PD in assessment and testing to get better insight into language teachers' training needs. It is hoped that the findings of the study will create awareness among novice as well as experienced teachers and help their respective institutions in having better understanding about the various dynamics of teacher PD in assessment and testing.

**Keywords:** Professional development, Beliefs, Attitudes, Assessment, Testing

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The significance of the fundamental role assessment plays in improving classroom pedagogy resulting in better and improved student achievement has been recognised by some prominent research scholars (Taylor, 2009; Scarino, 2013). However, the literature on teacher assessment and testing practices in different contexts world over suggests that teachers' assessment-related knowledge, skills, and their familiarity with the principles and philosophies behind a sound assessment are unfortunately inadequate (Stiggins, 2007) on account of insufficient pre-service and in-service professional training in the field of assessment and testing (Popham, 2009; Lam, 2015; Sultana, 2019). Moreover, some research scholars have questioned the quality of certain pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher training programs, especially regarding the marginalisation of teacher professional training in assessment, evaluation and testing (Fulcher, 2012; GU, 2014). To Stiggins, "We are a nation of assessment illiterates" (1991, p. 535) whereas, for Popham (2004), this assessment illiteracy is "professional suicide" (p. 82). Although these comments were made many years ago, these sentiments seem relevant even today as assessment and testing are still considered an area of neglect by many recent researchers (Tzagari & Vogt, 2017; Sultana, 2019).

Based on the proposition of exploring tertiary EFL practitioners' beliefs about the significance of teacher professional development in the area of assessment and testing and their attitudes towards teacher PD Programs in three tertiary educational institutes in Saudi Arabia, the present qualitative study was carried out with an overall purpose to get a better understanding about how tertiary EFL practitioners perceive the pedagogical significance of teacher professional development, on the one hand, and their specific professional training needs in the area of assessment and testing, on the other.

## 2 Literature Review

The term 'belief' is defined as "an individual's judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition" (Pajares, 1992, p. 316). In this study, the construct 'belief' refers to an individual tertiary EFL teacher's perceptions of the different aspects of teacher professional development in language assessment and testing. According to Brown (2008b), there are generally four major assessment-related conceptions and beliefs held by teachers. Three of these concern the purpose of assessment, considered to school accountability; students' accountability; and pedagogical improvement. The fourth has no connection with assessment purpose; it refers to the use of assessment for administrative reasons only, so having no relevance to student learning based on teacher work. Comprehending the core personal theories, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of teachers that underlie their conceptualisation process related to assessment practices is fundamental in the process of developing teacher professional development in the area of assessment and testing. The below three sections present a review of some of the related research studies.

### **Professional Development for Assessment**

During the last decade and a half, a substantial amount of research on the significance of classroom-based assessment and language teachers' training and preparation, in this regard, both at school and tertiary level has been reported (Black & William, 1998; Rea-Dickens, 2007; Lam, 2015). Nonetheless, certain areas such as teachers' training about interpreting and reporting learner achievement in classroom-based assessment still remain relegated (Moss, 1996).

Lam's (2015) study in the context of Hong Kong tries to explore the overall quality of language assessment training in five teacher training institutes against the background of country-wide assessment reforms at the school level. The study's findings suggest major gaps in the appropriateness of language assessment courses in terms of their capacity to bridge the gap between pre-service teachers' theory and practice-based knowledge of language assessment, resulting in their inadequate preparation in assessment and testing.

There has been an extensive debate in the literature about what dimensions of language learning and its testing and assessment-related knowledge language teachers need to be professionally trained at. This is especially relevant in the wake of recent conceptual changes taking place in language assessment as it considers the role of socio-cultural factors in language learning and its assessment. Scarino (2013) accentuates the need of considering and assimilating "not only the knowledge base required for language assessment but also inter-related understandings of language, culture and learning" in in-service teacher training in the area of assessment, evaluation and testing (P. 324). In a recently conducted mixed-method study in the EFL contexts of Greece and Germany, Vogt, Tzagari and Spanoudis (2020) explore English language teachers' insights and views about language assessment and their professional development needs primarily aiming at the exploration of the role of socio-cultural dynamics of the context, in this regard. The findings revealed that although teachers' conceptualisation of assessment was based on similar

constructs, their perceptions of assessment “training needs differed depending on the educational contexts” underscoring the significance of the relationship between assessment and its social context (p. 386).

### **Teachers’ Involvement in Assessment Activities and Their Professional Development**

On the one hand, the importance of the vital role of classroom assessment in the development of various classroom pedagogies has been emphasised by a number of language assessment and teaching experts (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Tylor, 2009), there are others (Allwright & Baily, 1991; Richards & Lockhart, 1994) on the other hand, who believe that appropriate handling and management of classroom assessment dynamics can provide language teachers important opportunities to groom and develop themselves professionally. For example, Ash and Levitt (2003) based on the data of two case studies and drawing on Vygotskian socio-cultural theory contend that formative assessments, on account of their capacity to involve individual and reciprocal appropriation of learning - be it on the part of the teacher or the learners, can serve as important tools for language teachers’ professional growth. Graham’s (2005) study supports this argument, which investigates the impact of professional training focused on assessment-driven preparation of pre-service teachers. The results indicate that professional dialogue about planning and implementing an assessment activity during face to face on-campus training followed by guided field experiences impacts teacher candidates’ professional development in assessment and evaluation.

Similarly, Gambell and Hunter (2004) study the links between teacher participation in assessment-related activities and their professional development but from a different perspective. They question the assumption held by some professional teacher associations that teachers’ involvement in large-scale assessment does not serve their professional interests, limiting their professional autonomy. They observed that teachers’ self-motivated involvement in the marking of a large-scale reading assessment “served to clarify rather than corrode their pedagogical values, affirmed or improved their classroom assessment and instructional practices, and validated their self-perceptions as professionals” suggesting that teacher participation in low-stakes standardised assessments is in line with the ideas of professionalism (p. 697).

Recognising and valuing teachers’ agency in assessment activities has been supported by Xu and Liu (2009). Their narrative inquiry-based study in China’s EFL context investigates a female college teacher’s understanding and knowledge of its assessment policies. The findings indicate that teacher development in assessment is affected by multifarious factors, including teachers’ past assessment experiences, power issues at the workplace, and the assessment context’s specific dynamics. The findings highlight the significance of teacher involvement in assessment reform policies and the planning of teacher professional development programs. Teacher voices’ role and importance in developing teacher education and training programs, which can serve the practitioners and their professions’ requirements, cannot be underestimated (Boddycott, Walker & Kin, 2001).

In a qualitative study conducted in Turkey’s EFL context, Arikani (2004) uses the critical postmodern approach to study the criticality of the relationship between in-service teacher PD programs and English language instructors. The findings reveal strong power issues as the main hurdle amongst others in the teachers’ professional development emphasising the need for change towards more interactive, progressive, and more humanitarian professional development undertakings. Apart from power, voice, and inclusion issues functioning as an obstacle to teacher professional development, the assessment culture of a particular context influences teachers’ professional growth in assessment and testing. In an exam-dominated EFL context of Bangladesh, Sultana (2019) based on her recent interview data-based study explored if English language teachers were professionally and academically sound to carry out various assessment-related responsibilities or not, and how they perceived their language assessment-related professional training in their assessment practices. The findings disclosed teachers’ lack of preparation for conducting various assessment and testing-related tasks professionally indicating limitations of pre-service and in-service teacher professional development programs related to language assessment and testing.

### **Teacher Beliefs and Teacher PD in Assessment and Testing**

The notion of change in teacher professional development is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon referring to transformation in teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, self-understanding and pedagogical approaches (Bailey, 1992). Recognising the importance of one of the common assumptions underlying contemporary teacher PD approaches that there is a strong link between understanding teacher beliefs and the process of their professional development (Golombek, 1998), Richards, Gallo and Renandya (2001) investigate language teachers’ current beliefs about language pedagogy, the transformation their teaching has undergone during the last one year, and the sources of this transformation. The findings suggest a major change in their teaching approaches, mainly due to attending in-service training courses, seminars, workshops, and conferences, highlighting the significance of continuous in-service teacher education and training.

The connection between teacher beliefs and teacher professional development is highlighted in another study. For instance, Munoz, Palacio and Escobar (2012), in their study conducted in the EFL context of Colombia, investigate language teachers' perceptions and beliefs about assessment, in general, and the dynamics of the PD program at the language centre of a private university in the country, in particular. The study's findings highlight teachers reporting a great change in their past and present assessment-related beliefs and practices resulting from professional development activities such as attending in-service seminars, conferences, workshops, and grading standardisation sessions. However, the teachers believe that the PD program needs to promote formative assessments culture underscoring the theoretical and practical significance of reflection-based practice and awareness. Teachers' perceptions of PD programs and their perceived assessment-related training needs are explored in some other studies. For instance, Eksian and Aydin (2013), in their questionnaire-based study in Turkey's EFL context, investigated English instructors' perceptions of the areas where they needed professional training the most and the least. The results indicated that the need area "New theory and practices of ELT" was ranked top of the list of total 21 needs areas, whereas instructors' training needs in "Assessment and Evaluation" and "Test Development" were ranked number 9 and 11 respectively.

Similarly, Zulaiha and Mulyono (2020), in a recently conducted mixed-method study in Indonesia's EFL context, using a survey and semi-structured interviews-based data aimed at exploring EFL teachers' training needs in the area of assessment and testing. The results suggest that teachers needed training related to the test development, analysis and evaluation, test scores' interpretation, classroom assessment, test washback, validity and reliability issues. The findings also emphasised the significance of continuous practical training of teachers based on proper needs analysis.

The detailed review of literature on English language teachers' perceptions and philosophies of teacher professional development, in general, and in the area of English language assessment and testing, in particular, suggests predominantly two categories of research studies: those that revolve around pre-service teacher training or educational programs of language teachers and teacher perceptions about them and those that investigate in-service language teachers' training across a wide variety of classroom pedagogical issues with a special focus on teacher training in assessment and testing, and teachers' beliefs, views and attitudes about them. Moreover, it suggests that there are not many studies that investigate tertiary EFL instructors' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes about their professional development, in general, and in language assessment and testing, in particular, apart from a few studies conducted in the context of Turkey, but those were also on teacher PD in general.

To date, most of the researchers' investigation of assessment in the EFL context of the Middle East has been either from its psychometric and quantitative aspect (e.g. Addamigh, 2006; Gamaroff, 2006), or it has been focused on the assessment of four macro skills in English language (Al-Hamily & Coombe, 2005; Al-Busaidi, 2007). Troudi, Coombe and Al-Hamily (2009) look into EFL teachers' voice and their views about assessment in Kuwait and UAE, whereas Janati (2015) investigates Iranian ELT teachers' assessment-related perceptions and practices believing in the importance of examining language teachers' assessment literacy.

Regarding the Saudi Arabian context, Sywelemand Witte (2013) explore primary school teachers' views about teachers' continuous professional development and the factors that ease or obstruct the process. In another study, Al-bidawi (2015), based on a mixed-methods approach, examines university teachers' philosophies and propositions about their professional development. The majority believed in having a different role for themselves "from transmitter of knowledge to makers of knowledge" for their professional development (p. 975).

The literature review above indicates a scarcity of scholarship about tertiary EFL practitioners' beliefs and attitudes about their professional development, in general, and in assessment, evaluation, and testing in particular. Hence, the present study aims to explore tertiary EFL instructors' philosophies and attitudes towards their PD in assessment and testing to get better insight and understanding about language teachers' training needs in the EFL context of Saudi Arabia.

### 3 Theoretical Background

Paradigmatically, the study is positioned within a wide-ranging interpretive and participatory framework, and theoretically, it is informed by a constructivist approach to teacher professional development. Moreover, the study draws on critical professional development and critical language testing, highlighting the importance of teacher voice and inclusion in the planning and implementing teacher PD programs concerning assessment and testing. In contrast to the traditional "one-shot" training model, which mainly focuses on knowledge transmission in a top-down manner perceiving teachers as bureaucrats responsible for executing given curriculum and specified teaching processes (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Mann, 2005), constructivist teacher learning models are grounded on and influenced by holistic ontology. These models follow bottom up approach and emphasize the

exploration of teachers' personal theories and the significance of their voice, empowerment and participation in various PD activities.

Given the significance of exploring teachers' personal theories, beliefs and attitudes towards their professional development, in general and in the area of assessment and testing, in particular, the present study aims at getting better understanding about language teachers' training needs through investigating into the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do tertiary EFL practitioners view teacher professional development, in general, and how do they approach it?

**RQ2:** What are tertiary EFL practitioners' views about teacher professional development in English language assessment and testing?

**RQ3:** According to tertiary EFL practitioners, what are their specific PD need areas in English language assessment and testing?

## 4 Method

An exploratory methodology with a critical element is employed as this is appropriate to investigate the research questions because of its alignment with the study's theoretical background.

### The Participants and the context

A total of 10 tertiary EFL practitioners participated in the research. As shown in Table 1, the selection of the participants was based on purposive sampling technique. This technique, according to Patton (1990) as cited in Perry (2005), is used "to indicate that the sample is chosen deliberately to supply the most information possible regarding the research question" (p. 57). As a result of the use of criterion sampling, factors such as age, gender, nationality, academic background, and teaching experience were considered while selecting the teacher-participants.

Table 1.  
Background information about the participants (n=10)

Gender	Male	4
	Female	6
Nationality	American (Monica, Lauren)	2
	British (Oliver, Mark)	2
	South African (Rayan)	1
	Turkish (Emirhan)	1
	Filipino (Alyssa, Jeffrey)	2
	Saudi (Asma)	1
Age	Pakistani (Zainab)	1
	25-30	1
	35-40	2
	40-45	1
	45-50	3
Educational Background	50-55	3
	Doctoral Degree	2
	Master's Degree	5
	Bachelor Degree( English Major)	1
	Bachelor Degree(Non-English Major) with a certificate in TESL/TEFL/CELTA	2
Teaching Experience	0-5	2
	11-15	1
	16-20	5
	21-25	2
Professional Qualification in Assessment and Evaluation	Basic	3
	Advanced	4
	None	3

\*All names of the participants given are pseudonyms.

The context of the study was three tertiary educational institutes located in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia.

### **Data collection methods and procedures**

According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), in-depth interviewing is the qualitative research hallmark (p. 124). It is a very strong tool that enables participants- be their interviewers or interviewees- to discuss their interpretations of the world they live in and express how they regard situations from their own perspective (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 349). Believing that interviewing participants can help acquire reliable data about the research questions clarified through the interviewees' interpretations (Creswell, 2009), semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 EFL tertiary level practitioners.

In order to generate ideas for the development of interview questions, two pilot interviews were conducted; one of the interviewees (Male) was an academically sound and professionally experienced EFL instructor whereas the other one (Female) was relatively less strong in terms of educational and professional achievements. The rationale behind this was to gain a wide range of ideas for interview questions. Considering the pilot interviews' findings, some questions were taken out, whereas a few others were added in the interview schedule. In some questions, a few words/phrases were slightly changed before the interview schedule was finalised. The second data collection method used was the document review. The data relating to the faculty professional development seminars and workshops conducted during the last five years was reviewed focusing on the workshop/seminar themes and topics.

Grounded theory approach was used to analyse data. According to Cohen et al. (2007), coding in grounded theory involves three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In open coding, the whole data is reduced in manageable chunks in the form of codes, categories, and subcategories. Axial coding refers to integrating codes and categories to explore central categories which are then examined against a particular theoretical positioning (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In contrast, through selective coding, the researchers identify the core categories, examine their relationship with other categories, and from this, they develop their narrative. In these three coding stages, the new data is constantly compared "with existing data, and categories, so that the categories achieve a perfect fit with the data" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 493).

The main purpose behind using grounded theory approach was to explore tertiary EFL practitioners' understanding of teacher professional development in assessment and testing through comprehending "the depth and breadth of the meanings of the participants' statements and opinions" (Patton, 2002 as cited in Cheng, Rogers, & Wang, 2008, p. 12). Moreover, grounded theory was attractive for me as it takes you to the heart of the situation and lets you know what is exactly going on (Glaser & Strauss, 2006).

## **5 Findings**

The detailed analysis of the interview data and the document review unravelled a number of significant findings, which are reported and discussed in the following three sections; each section is based on the theme of the respective research question:

### **Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards teacher professional development, in general**

The first research question was aimed at exploring how tertiary EFL practitioners view teacher professional development programs and what their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes are, in this regard. Three major themes, i.e., the importance of consistency in the operational plan of the PD activities, appropriate vision and planning in terms of teacher's voice and inclusion issues, and PD in the area of assessment and testing as the most neglected part emerged as a result of data analysis in this section.

In response to the question about the participants' views regarding institutional level PD policy for English language teachers, most participants reported that it should be consistent, ongoing and based on appropriate vision and planning. They believed that a teachers' PD program at the institutional level should be anchored on the institution's mission and vision, and it should be well-researched and based on rigorous needs analysis. One of the participants explains this in these words:

*"People have different agendas or needs, so you always need a variety of different programs running – you need things for novice teachers; you need programs for mid-career teachers; you need PD workshops/ seminars for senior-level teachers; you need things for the management, too, so your PD program must address a wide spectrum of areas". (Oliver)*

Another participant expresses her beliefs regarding PD procedures, saying that *"Teachers' PD is an indispensable part of the EFL/ESL curriculum. It should be based on the program's curricular needs and should serve as an off-shoot of teachers' evaluation vis-à-vis with students' opinion surveys". (Alyssa)*

Responding to the question about the management of a teacher PD program, most teacher-informants reported that it should not be controlling and imposed. However, rather, it should be collaborative and inclusive, recognising the value of all stakeholders' voices, especially teachers' whose professional needs and philosophical orientations must be carefully considered.

Jeffrey highlights the significance of inclusive PD policy and management in these words: "...middle management should handle PDs in collaborative consultation with the curriculum committee, testing committee, individual teachers and student service office... the extent and the nature of this collaboration, however, should be well-defined in the department as well as operational manual."

Furthermore, the participants emphasised that the institutional PD committees should be responsible for creating a conducive collegial learning environment, wherein teachers' professional knowledge and understanding are constructed collaboratively. They also reported that the teachers should not be forced to attend the PD seminars whether as presenters or attendees linking their participation with their annual appraisal, but rather it should be voluntary.

When asked about their motivation behind attending teacher training workshops/seminars in their respective institutes, more than half of the participants (7) reported that they did not have much interest or motivation for attending these PD workshops as presenters; however, as attendees, the only motivation for them was gaining an attendance certificate and/or improving their annual appraisal, which is highlighted by Asma in these words: "...due to work pressures and other job responsibilities, I could hardly think of plunging into another mess to participate as a presenter... as an attendee, however, I normally attend training workshops with full enthusiasm". This highlights the strong connection between institutional work policy dynamics and teacher attitudes.

In response to the question about their perceptions of the current PD programs in their respective institutes on teachers' professional development, in general, and in the area of assessment and testing, in particular, the participants expressed mixed feelings, and this is quite evident by the data displayed in Table 2.

Table 2.  
General Perceptions of teachers about PD Activities in general

Teachers believe that PD activities...	Number of participants who reported
• are helpful in making teachers use effective evaluation tools to assess their learners' performance better	4
• lack in training strategies and techniques that instil confidence in teachers for test item writing, marking and interpreting learners' marks	6
• are based on appropriate planning and needs analysis necessary to achieve the goal of teachers' professional and personal development	6

One female participant (Emirhan) says: "*I don't think our PDs focus on any particular aspect of assessments; the questions on test validity, reliability, marking issues, fairness etc. are always there, which are addressed by the teachers themselves. I think we need to have a specialised team responsible for planning and executing PD strategies for the assessment and testing-related teachers' professional growth*". Additionally, the analysis of the document review, i.e., the review of the themes of faculty PD seminars/workshops conducted at one of the institutes during the last five years indicates that during the last ten semesters, there was just one end of semester faculty PD seminar, wherein the theme was language testing. Regarding other institutes, faculty PD program for English teachers was reported to be well-structured and organised; however, the area of assessment and testing was believed to be somewhat ignored.

#### Teachers' views regarding teacher PD in English language assessment and testing

The second research question aimed to explore tertiary EFL practitioners' perceptions of teacher professional development in English language assessment and testing. The data analysis revealed three major themes, i.e., the dynamics of classroom pedagogy and the inevitability of teacher professional and personal growth; diverse and multifaceted approach to teacher learning, and the significance of vision, appropriate planning and needs analysis.

In response to the question about the assessment and testing-related challenges the teachers have to encounter, the majority of the participants reported, as indicated in Table 3 below, that they were faced with the issues such as test validity, reliability, authenticity, assessment feedback, and lack of teacher expertise in employing

formative assessments, therefore, teacher professional development in assessment and testing was indispensable, and this is reflected in these words:

*“... teacher instruction and assessment marry together; we can’t separate them - the challenges in the classroom abound, and a teacher who is well-grounded on the principles of assessment and testing can regulate teaching and assessment smartly, which helps in foster learning...I think teacher training in this area is key to success as a teacher, a department and may be as an institution”. (Monica)*

Table 3.  
*Assessment and testing-related Challenges*

Issues relating to:	Number of Participants who reported
• test validity, reliability and authenticity	7
• lack of appropriate analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the previous exam - no follow up	7
• dominance of summative assessment system	8
• fairness in marking	5
• large classes- assessment difficulties	5
• test washback	3
• teachers’ attitudes	4

More than half of the participants (7) believed that teachers needed to be encouraged, supported and trained in utilising formative assessments and alternative methodologies in assessment to inspire student learning and develop their professional knowledge and skills. These beliefs align with the literature’s reflections (Ash & Levitt, 2003; Lam, 2015). Three participants believed that teachers’ professional learning was strongly interconnected with their attitudes. Teachers’ negative attitudes work as a strong obstacle in their way to develop assessment literacy (Coombe, Troudi, & Al-Hamily, 2012).

In response to the question about their perceptions of teacher PD approaches and strategies in assessment and testing, almost all the participants (9) reported that teacher PD should not be limited to attending only training seminars/workshops or conferences, rather it should be based on both self-directed and collaborative learning approaches. According to them, the most appropriate strategies for teachers’ PD in assessment, testing and evaluation are reflective teaching (7); teacher-research; exploratory practice (3); attending on/off-campus seminars/workshops/conferences (5); reading the up-dated relevant literature (2); and peer coaching (4).

### **Teachers’ PD need areas in English language assessment and testing**

The purpose of the third research question was to explore tertiary EFL teachers’ specific professional development need areas in assessment and testing. The major themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis are the importance of teacher PD in both standardised and classroom-based teacher assessment and the significance of utilising process assessment for teacher learning.

As shown in Table 4 below, teachers need professional training in summative and formative assessments; however, most of the participants (7) reported that the area of formative assessments needed more emphasis as it was the least focused one.

Ryan, one of the participants, says:

*“Although various forms of assessments, i.e., formatives and summatives and methodologies (standard, alternative, etc.) have equal importance as both complement each other in the whole operation of the testing and assessment process...but I think here formatives need more focus for their being mostly ignored in a summative assessments-dominated setting like ours”.*

Table 4.

*Assessment and Testing PD Need Areas*

	Number of Participants who reported
• formal assessments (summative)	4
• informal assessments (formative)	7
• both formal and informal	6
• authentic assessments	3
• test development /writing	7
• test marking	4
• scores evaluation/ interpretation	6
• feedback techniques	7
• portfolio assessment	6
• self-assessment	9
• peer assessment	9
• concept checking questions	3
• observations	-
• combination of all	6

Regarding individual PD need areas in both formal and informal assessments, the majority reported test development, scores' interpretation/evaluation, feedback, portfolio assessment, and self-& peer-assessment as being the highest teachers' PD need areas. One interviewee says:

*"...I find conducting and managing self and peer-assessments very challenging here; the students are not trained in being self-critical and critical of others; they are neither able to evaluate/question themselves nor others - there is way too much face-saving... I think this PD area surely needs attention".(Oliver)*

The majority reported that teacher professional training in classroom-based assessments could help teachers promote learning inside the class by constantly adding something new and useful in their repertoire in terms of their pedagogical knowledge, understanding and skills.

## 6 Discussion

The findings unfold various aspects of tertiary EFL practitioners' views and attitudes towards teacher professional development in assessment and testing. The main themes identified as a result of the interpretation of findings are the neglect of teacher professional development related to language assessment and testing; the importance of teacher voice and inclusion in the planning and implementation stages of language assessment and testing-related PD policies; multiplicity and diversity of approaches to teacher learning; and the significance of the use of classroom assessment as a source of teacher professional growth.

The role of teachers' personal beliefs and theories in the overall teaching-learning process is highly important on account of their schematic function that a teacher educator exploits to comprehend, interpret and infer meanings in order to shape pedagogical and assessment-related thought processes and decision-making while interacting with the various dynamics of the teaching-learning environment (Borg, 2013). Brown (2008b) states that there are two aspects of teachers' assessment-related beliefs and theories, which have both cognitive and personal nature involving emotional inclinations. In particular, these aspects get framed and organised by comprehensive interpretations pertaining to epistemology, in general, and classroom pedagogy. The cognitive dimensions of teacher conceptions about assessment and teacher training, in this regard, are concerning what they view of the different aspects of assessment considered as good or bad practice. Teachers' acceptance or rejection of any novel assessment idea or a piece of knowledge during their exposure to professional development process depends on their belief system; those ideas aligned with what they believe in are readily accepted whereas those that clash with their belief systems are discarded.

On the other hand, teacher beliefs' personal aspect relates to certain assessment-related feelings and sentiments developed by teachers overtime after having experienced multidimensional assessment practices in their educational careers. These assessment-related emotions may be deeply entrenched or less deeply entrenched, positive or negative. (Crossman, 2007). In addition to these cognitive and personal aspects of teachers' belief systems, macro-, meso- and micro-level contextual variables influence teachers' thought processes and views regarding professional development in assessment and testing (Vogt, Tsagari, & Spanoudis, 2020). Here, macro contextual dynamics relate to regional or national level educational policies, assessment cultures and systemic factors, i.e., teacher professional

training culture, resources and institution types. Mesolevel contextual variables refer to a particular institutional level teacher professional development dynamics, whereas micro-level contextual factors are related to teachers' decision-making process regarding instructional and assessment practices at the classroom level. This shows that it is a combination of different dimensions of teachers' belief systems at both cognitive and personal level as well as the various socio-cultural and educational dynamics of the context that contribute in shaping up teachers' views, conceptions and personal theories regarding teachers' language assessment and testing-related professional development.

The study's findings suggest that teacher professional development in assessment and testing is believed to be somewhat neglected. Teacher training related to the use of formative assessment is considered the most ignored area. This implicates the importance of appropriately planned continuous teacher professional development based on rigorous needs analysis related to the various aspects of language assessment and testing. The main focus is formative assessment, which is important for developing higher-order thinking skills and deep learning approaches. In addition to formative assessment, test item writing, scores' evaluation and interpretation, and post-assessment feedback techniques were expressed as the predominant professional training need areas. These results are somehow in line with the findings of a recently conducted study by Zulaiha and Mulyono (2020), which reveals test washback, reliability and validity issues. Teacher professional training needs areas apart from the training need areas identified in the present study. Similarly, the views regarding the neglect of teacher professional training in the area of assessment and testing are endorsed by Tsagari and Vogt's (2017) findings.

Another major theme identified based on the interpretation of the findings is the importance of teachers' voice and inclusion in the decision-making processes concerning the planning and design of PD activities. Since power and authority should not be centralised in a few factions only, the powerful voice and authority must be dialogically challenged by the voice that is internally convincing to the individual to ensure sound individual, institutional, and societal level development (Bakhtin, 1981). The research on teacher PD highlights that the process of setting short, as well as long term goals for any PD program, must be grounded on horizontal policy and decision-making (Sparks, 2002). Diaz-Maggioli (2003) states, "Programs which involve participants in the planning, organisation, delivery and evaluation of all actions in which they are expected to have more chances of success than those planned using a top-down approach, where administrators make decisions in lieu of teachers" (p. 4). The emphasis on more teacher autonomy and the recognition of teacher agency in the assessment-related decision-making process, which is directly connected with and mediated by the power relations around teachers, is consistent with the implications of the critical studies of Xu and Liu (2009) and Troudi, Coombe, and Al-Hamily (2009). This is in line with the constructivist teacher PD models that follow the bottom-up approach based on the assumption that teacher PD is not something imposed and controlled by others marginalising teachers' voice and participation in the design and implementation of PD activities. Rather, according to Hargreaves and Fullan (1992), it should encourage teachers to "articulate their voice as a way of constructing and reconstructing the purposes and priorities in their work, both individually and collectively" ensuring a balanced approach towards organisational PD policies grounded on the vision of skills and knowledge-based approaches to teacher development (p. 5).

The third identified theme based on the findings' analysis is the teachers' belief in the multiplicity and diversity of approaches to teacher learning under a rigorously researched, planned and organised PD program. Cooper and Boyd (1998), however, emphasise that the philosophies of adult learning, which are based on a strong connection between adults' development and the recognition of their self-esteem, efficiency, current understanding and their active participation in the learning process for the constant development and re-development of self-identity, are mostly ignored in traditional models of teacher development. Therefore, they underscore the significance of recognising teacher agency by providing useful self-directed and collaborative learning opportunities facilitated by necessary administrative and personal support. From a constructivist perspective, teacher development can occur in collaborative and self-directed ways, although the self-directed approach is mainly emphasised for being more democratic, autonomous, and participatory. Involving teachers in collaborative learning projects, critical reflection, and helping them how to adjust knowledge and skills as per the requirements of a specific context can enhance the teacher development process. Regarding self-directed teacher learning, the activities such as self-monitoring, journal writing, teaching portfolios, action research and critical incidents can be greatly effective in turning teachers into critical reflective practitioners (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The teachers' belief in diverse approaches to professional development is consistent with Munoz et al. (2012) findings.

The last theme emerged as a result of the interpretation of the findings is teachers' belief in the significance of classroom assessment as a source of teacher professional growth. The belief in classroom assessment for teacher professional development is consistent with some previous studies (e.g., Ash & Levit, 2003; Lam, 2015; Rea-Dickens, 2007).

The classroom challenges abound, so the teachers have to constantly evaluate their “teaching based on student reaction, interest, motivation, preparation, participation, perseverance, and achievement” (Chastain, 1988 as cited in Jabbarifar, 2009, p. 7). Teacher scaffolding as a result of such evaluation serves a twofold purpose, i.e., enhancing students’ performance standards, on the one hand, and developing teachers’ professional skills and understanding, on the other (Ash & Levitt, 2003; Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009). However, despite the fact that teacher classroom-based assessments carry great potential to augment teacher professional capacity, a teacher must possess strong pedagogical and assessment knowledge and skills for their productive execution. An efficacious implementation of formative assessments requires four fundamental components of teacher knowledge, i.e., knowledge about the main domain, pedagogical content, learners’ previous achievements, and assessment essentials (Heritage, 2010). This necessitates appropriate teacher training and continuous teacher PD in assessment and testing during pre-service and in-service phases of a teacher’s professional life.

## 7 Conclusion

The findings of the present qualitative study based on mainly interview data collected from EFL practitioners suggest that teacher professional development in assessment and testing is inevitable because of its pedagogical significance; classroom-based assessments are the area where the professional development was needed the most. The findings also reveal teachers’ beliefs that a quality PD program based on rigorous needs analysis in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude at the individual teachers’ level and in terms of vision, mission and goals at the institutional level is key to better education as it aims at bringing positive transformation in teachers’ overall pedagogical beliefs, attitudes and practices (Guskey, 2002; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

The principles of effective teacher PD outlined by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) persist applicability even today, especially regarding teacher learning in assessment and testing (Scarino, 2013). An effective PD program follows the bottom-up approach, emphasising teachers’ learning by engaging in pedagogical and assessment activities based on observation and reflection. It supports and encourages exploratory practice through participant-driven inquiry, reflection, and research. Furthermore, it believes in the significance of teachers’ knowledge construction through collaborative and self-directed learning approaches. Importantly enough, it stresses the continuity of intensive PD initiatives sustained through modelling, training, and the collective solving of assessment testing-related issues. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), since teachers and teacher trainers serve as vital change agents, they need to be well-aware of their respective roles and responsibilities. To Kennedy (1999), teacher development does not imply a change in teachers’ pedagogical understanding and knowledge only, but rather it means a transformation in their beliefs and attitudes, too.

Overall, the study despite having limitations such as limited scope, qualitative nature, small sample size and the findings that cannot be generalised to larger populations has important implications in the field of assessment and testing. Further research in this area, at the institutional level or in different EFL/ESL contexts, involving multiple data collection instruments is recommended to corroborate the results of this study.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

1. What are your beliefs about teachers' professional development?
2. What, in your opinion, is the most motivational factor in an EFL teacher's professional development?
3. What are your beliefs about the management of such PD Programs?
4. In what ways do you think this has influenced your teaching?
5. What is your college current policy about teachers' professional development?
6. In what areas of classroom pedagogy does the current PD Program in your work place mainly focus?
7. What are your beliefs about teachers' PD in the area of assessment and testing?
8. Can you identify some of the assessment and testing related challenges the teachers have to encounter? And how do the teachers cope with these challenges?
9. How do the teachers mainly develop their skills in the area of assessment and testing?
10. What forms of assessment and testing (Formative vs Summative) do the PD Programs need to focus more? Which areas?
11. What is your approach as a teacher to develop yourself in the area of assessment and evaluation? Individual; collaborative; reflective practice-based; research-oriented; or any other
12. What are your suggestions with regard to the improvement of teacher PD programs?

**An Example of Coding Procedures**

Themes/Sub-themes	Codes	Examples
Beliefs about the inevitability of teacher PD in assessment and testing	<p>Many teachers- not familiar with the basics</p> <p>Teaching and testing- inseparable relationship</p> <p>Confusion/ misunderstanding about the difference between the formalised/standardised tests and the classroom assessments</p> <p>Awareness and knowledge about test development and test writing- key to teachers' success</p>	<p>"...it is a very important area. Many teachers are not familiar with the basics. Since teaching and testing go hand in hand, so every teacher has to be well-aware and skilful in writing tests. Many people when they think of testing and assessment, they think of standardised and formalised tests, but it is not really only about that- the kind of assessment we are doing in the class on daily basis too- a kind of informal assessment going on continuously, so I think learning about assessment and testing is essential"</p> <p>(Ryan)</p>
<p>Multifaceted/ varied approach to teacher development</p> <p>Opportunities to teacher PD through the implementation of classroom- based assessments</p>	<p>Teacher PD in assessment and testing- variety of ways at their disposal</p> <p>teaching and testing- two sides of the same coin</p> <p>teaching- an opportunity to improve assessment skills through reflection</p>	<p>"There are a variety of different ways you as a teacher can improve your testing and assessment skills; you need to identify the challenging part of your teaching and since teaching and testing go together you basically learn about testing on daily basis; sometimes, reading about what's new in the field of testing and assessment is not enough; while teaching, you have to naturally assess as well, so there are opportunities for you to improve your testing skills if you are ready to think and reflect"</p> <p>(Oliver)</p>

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**Competing Interests**

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