

# Developing Language Assessment Literacy of Pre-Service English Teachers: Frameworks and Cultivation Strategies

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**Abstract:** Assessment is a crucial aspect of the teaching process for teachers. Teachers' assessment literacy is closely related to students' learning outcomes. The language assessment literacy of foreign language teachers is a significant component of both teachers' professional development and students' learning, and it has become a research hotspot in the field of domestic language testing. Based on clarifying the theoretical framework of language assessment literacy, this paper proposes the main cultivation paths for pre-service English teachers' language assessment literacy, aiming to provide inspiration and references for the cultivation, reform, and development of teachers in basic foreign language education.

**Keywords:** Pre-service English teachers; Language assessment literacy; Cultivation strategies

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## 1. Introduction

In October 2020, the government of China officially released the *Overall Plan for Deepening Education Evaluation Reform in the New Era*, marking a milestone in the transformation of assessment as a critical aspect of school quality improvement. When teachers consider “assessment” as an indispensable part of “classroom teaching,” students' meta-cognitive abilities, learning motivation, and classroom teaching effectiveness significantly improve<sup>[1]</sup>. The assessment methods adopted by teachers determine the content and approach of their teaching and students' learning<sup>[2]</sup>. Language assessment literacy has become a hot topic in the field of foreign language and language testing both domestically and internationally. However, the current situation of English teachers' assessment literacy is not optimistic: teachers often overlook understanding assessment standards and principles, lack knowledge and skills related to the development and use of assessment tools<sup>[3,4]</sup>, fail to accurately interpret and convey assessment results<sup>[5,6]</sup>, and have never or rarely received pre-service or formal assessment training<sup>[7,8]</sup>.

The new curriculum standards define classroom assessment as a core element of classroom teaching, explicitly stating that teachers should transition from being “consumers” to “producers” of student academic assessment results, assuming proper assessment powers and responsibilities. Improving teachers’ assessment literacy has become urgent and the importance of enhancing pre-service English teachers’ language assessment literacy is evident.

## **2. Conceptual connotation of language assessment literacy**

### **2.1. Assessment literacy**

Stiggins was the first to introduce the term “assessment literacy,” defining its connotation in terms of knowledge and skills. He believed that assessment literacy refers to the evaluator’s ability to identify the reliability of assessments, understand assessment content, methods, and issues, and know how to avoid problems in assessments<sup>[1]</sup>. Since then, many researchers in the fields have defined the connotation of “assessment literacy,” but none have exceeded the scope initially framed by Stiggins, which focuses on the literacy required for student academic assessment<sup>[9]</sup>. Gee and Willis *et al.* interpreted assessment literacy from a sociocultural perspective, viewing assessment as a dynamic, context-dependent social activity<sup>[10,11]</sup>. Looney *et al.* injected social-emotional factors into assessment literacy, defining it as “teacher assessment identity”<sup>[12]</sup>.

Domestic researchers Gao and Sheng believed that the definition of assessment literacy should be considered from a multidimensional perspective. It refers to teachers’ abilities and qualities regarding correct assessment concepts, assessment knowledge and skills, and how to put assessment results into practice and implement assessment plans<sup>[13]</sup>. Jiang believed that assessment literacy is the knowledge and skills that teachers should possess to evaluate language under the new evaluation paradigm. Some scholars have transcended the traditional views of personal knowledge, skills, and cognition, placing assessment literacy in dynamic practical contexts and conducting critical research on the practice and process of teachers’ assessment literacy<sup>[14]</sup>. Zheng viewed assessment literacy as the key ability and ethical character for teachers to conduct reasonable academic evaluations of students under the concept of promoting learning<sup>[15]</sup>. Wang believed that assessment literacy refers to the concepts, knowledge, skills, and related abilities that teachers should have in various fields of assessment activities<sup>[16]</sup>.

### **2.2. Language assessment literacy**

Besides the assessment literacy defined by Stiggins and others, foreign language teachers also need assessment literacy with characteristics specific to the foreign language discipline. The concept of language assessment literacy originates from assessment literacy in the field of general education. Foreign scholars have conducted systematic research on foreign language teachers’ assessment literacy since the early 21st century.

Starting from the training of teachers’ assessment literacy, Brindley constructed a content framework for foreign language teachers’ assessment training, including five modules: social background, definition and description of abilities, compilation and evaluation of language tests, evaluation in foreign language courses, and evaluation practices. These modules directly point to the assessment literacy of foreign language teachers<sup>[17]</sup>. Boyles believed that language teacher assessment literacy refers to the ability of language teachers to understand the principles and practices of language testing, analyze different evaluation methods and results, and use evaluation results to improve teaching<sup>[5]</sup>. Based on his long-term experience in language testing

research and practice, Davies provided a concise and clear definition of language assessment literacy from three dimensions: principles, knowledge, and skills. “Principles” refer to the theoretical foundation and ethics that guide the development and use of examinations; “Knowledge” is the language ability and the knowledge system of educational measurement that supports examination practice; “Skills” represent practical abilities in test design, scoring, data analysis, and performance reporting<sup>[18]</sup>. Postmodernists, represented by Inbar-Lourie, understand language assessment literacy from a social constructivist perspective, emphasizing the co-construction of knowledge and meaning in a social environment, thus forming a more comprehensive and dynamic view of language assessment literacy. Inbar-Lourie reviewed research literature on assessment literacy in the fields of education, language teaching, and testing, proposing that language assessment literacy consists of three core modules: “why to evaluate,” “what to evaluate,” and “how to evaluate”<sup>[19]</sup>. Fulcher expanded the concept of assessment literacy based on empirical research. He systematically described the language assessment literacy system, believing that language assessment literacy refers to the ability of language teachers to design and develop language tests, be familiar with the language testing process, understand the concepts and principles of evaluation practices, and place knowledge, skills, processes, principles, and concepts within a broader historical, social, political, and philosophical framework<sup>[20]</sup>.

Peng defined language teacher assessment literacy as the degree of language teachers’ understanding of foreign language testing and their ability to proficiently master relevant knowledge of foreign language testing<sup>[8]</sup>. Jin believed that language assessment literacy is a multidimensional and complex concept that should be approached from various levels such as evaluation environment, evaluation process, principles and concepts, as well as evaluation knowledge, skills, and abilities. These knowledge and skills should be learned to varying degrees according to the evaluation tasks<sup>[21]</sup>. Lin provided a more detailed and specific definition of language assessment literacy. He pointed out that “language assessment literacy refers to teachers’ comprehensive and profound understanding of the language they teach and language learning, possessing basic knowledge, skills, and abilities to design, develop, or evaluate language classroom assessments. They are familiar with the language evaluation process, aware of the principles and concepts behind language evaluation practices, can actively involve learners in the language evaluation process, use appropriate feedback to effectively help learners set and achieve learning goals, and have a good understanding of the role and function of language evaluation in a specific teaching environment”<sup>[22]</sup>.

Language assessment literacy “is derived from the field of general education and possesses unique attributes of language disciplines, such as emphasizing teacher-student interaction, highlighting language and cultural communication, and focusing on humanistic development”<sup>[23]</sup>. Gao and Sheng believed that language teacher assessment literacy actually refers to teachers’ ability to understand the principles of language testing and evaluation, design and develop language tests and classroom evaluation tools, be familiar with their operating principles and processes, master the codes of conduct for their implementation, and understand their social impact<sup>[13]</sup>.

### **3. Framework for evaluating language assessment literacy**

#### **3.1. Analysis of foreign language assessment framework construction**

From the perspective of systems theory, Fulcher redefined the concept of language assessment literacy through an analysis of the needs of language teachers for test training via online closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended questions. This redefined concept not only includes knowledge, skills, and principles related

to assessment literacy but also covers the reasons and impacts of assessment practices from historical, social, political, and philosophical perspectives. Based on this, he constructed a three-dimensional language assessment literacy system, namely, practical abilities in language testing (knowledge, skills, and abilities to develop, implement, and use language assessments); guidelines for language assessment practices (evaluators need to be familiar with the assessment process, principles, and concepts); and environmental factors (evaluators need to conduct evaluations in the context of historical, social, political, and philosophical backgrounds) <sup>[20]</sup>.

Based on a five-level classification of language assessment literacy, Taylor constructed an eight-dimensional model of language assessment literacy. This model distinguishes the language assessment needs among the various interest groups. The various interest groups have different needs for language assessment literacy and their levels of mastery of assessment knowledge also differ <sup>[24]</sup>. From the core to the intermediary and then to the peripheral, different interest groups should “find their seat” based on actual needs and identify the language assessment literacy that suits their specific context. For classroom teachers, language assessment literacy first requires a mastery of pedagogical knowledge, followed by evaluation techniques, local practices, personal beliefs and characteristics, socio-cultural values, and finally, evaluation of theoretical knowledge, scores and decision-making, principles, and concepts.

Through a review of the literature, Giraldo found that among the many interest groups in language assessment literacy, teachers are the core members of this group, but their assessment literacy is generally low <sup>[25]</sup>. He proposed the core components of teachers’ language assessment literacy: knowledge, skills, and principles. These three dimensions are ranked in order of importance, with each sub-dimension containing 66 descriptors. These descriptors are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, working together to form a cohesive framework. Language assessment literacy knowledge refers to relevant theories and concepts in applied linguistics, as well as contextual knowledge of language assessment. Skills include teaching skills, language assessment design skills, educational measurement skills, and technical skills. Principles involve awareness and action on key issues in language assessment.

### **3.2. Analysis of domestic foreign language assessment framework construction**

The domestic scholar Lin’s model of language assessment literacy consists of three structural dimensions: principles, knowledge, and skills. These three dimensions collectively determine a teacher’s language assessment literacy. Among them, “under the guidance of principles, considering the sociocultural environment of teaching, and taking into account fairness and ethical issues, can we ensure the correct use of language assessment” <sup>[22]</sup>. “Knowledge” refers to the basic concepts of measurement, knowledge of the language system, and relevant applied linguistics that teachers should master. “Skills” include the process of teachers applying their understanding of language assessment knowledge under the guidance of principles to practical operations.

Gao and Sheng’s framework for language teacher assessment literacy comprises three dimensions: “assessment philosophy,” “assessment knowledge,” and “assessment skills.” The assessment philosophy of foreign language teachers consists of their understanding of assessment subjects, methods, principles, and other dimensions, which is represented through teachers’ discourse and behavior, reflecting their value orientation in assessment. Assessment should also be integrated with the teaching context and social emotions, reflecting the dynamism of the assessment literacy framework. Assessment philosophy includes assessment cognition, assessment attitude, assessment principles, and social emotions. Language assessment



knowledge covers assessment theory, assessment practice, and assessment environment knowledge. Language assessment skills should include selecting assessment methods, interpreting assessment results, and applying assessment results <sup>[13]</sup>.

#### **4. Cultivation strategies for pre-service English teachers' language assessment literacy**

Research on teacher language assessment literacy in China mainly focuses on topics such as the construction of teacher assessment literacy frameworks, the overall level of assessment literacy among teachers in different regions, and language testing and assessment courses. However, there is a lack of research on methods for developing the language assessment literacy of pre-service English teachers. Due to the urgent need to enhance teachers' assessment literacy, it is clear that improving the language assessment literacy of pre-service English teachers is of significant importance.

This paper proposes specific strategies to develop the language assessment literacy of pre-service English teachers in China from several aspects. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of investigation and research to understand the current status and needs of these teachers. Secondly, the author highlights the curriculum development to create a multi-level curriculum system. Lastly, it encourages pre-service teachers to design simple and practical language assessment systems or tools, leveraging advancements in technology to improve their assessment skills and better understand teaching and learning situations.

##### **4.1. Emphasizing investigation and research to understand the current status and needs of pre-service English teachers' language assessment literacy**

Currently, the level of language assessment literacy among pre-service English teachers in China is relatively low, making it urgent to understand their actual situation regarding assessment literacy. It is particularly crucial to ascertain the current status and needs of pre-service English teachers' language assessment literacy through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. Questionnaires can provide a large sample of relatively authentic and comprehensive data on language teachers' assessment literacy, providing a basis for accurately developing plans to improve teachers' language assessment literacy. To gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic development of pre-service English teachers' language assessment literacy, one or several sub-dimensions from the assessment framework can be selected as research perspectives, integrating questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations to conduct case studies on teachers' assessment literacy. This allows for longitudinal tracking of their development trajectories, paths, or change patterns <sup>[26]</sup>.

##### **4.2. Emphasizing curriculum development to create a multi-level curriculum system for pre-service English teachers' language assessment literacy**

The insufficient and non-standardized professional courses focusing on "language assessment" are significant factors hindering the improvement of pre-service English teachers' language assessment literacy. Increasing the content and specificity of "language assessment" courses in the talent training programs for pre-service English teachers and normal university students is important to address the deficiency in their language assessment literacy.

Firstly, emphasis should be placed on theoretical teaching. Based on offering language assessment courses on campus, we should fully utilize online courses from platforms such as China's foreign language

MOOC platform and China MOOC to complement the inadequacies of professional courses on campus. This will effectively enhance and consolidate pre-service English teachers' assessment philosophy and knowledge.

Secondly, applied teaching should be strengthened by offering corresponding short-term courses and workshops. These courses and workshops should interpret the *China Standards of English Language Ability* and the *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)*. By interpreting these scales and curriculum standards, theoretical learning can be applied to practical situations, training pre-service English teachers in various aspects of assessment literacy, including assessment philosophy, knowledge, and skills. It is also necessary to offer corresponding short-term courses and workshops to help pre-service English teachers understand the writing philosophy and framework of various English textbooks for basic education stages.

Finally, practical teaching should be reinforced. In micro-teaching practice courses, pre-service English teachers' language assessment skills should be strengthened through simulated classroom teaching. During "educational internships," pre-service English teachers can observe real classrooms to understand the application of language assessment skills both inside and outside the classroom by in-service teachers. In "educational seminars," instructors guide pre-service English teachers to experience real classrooms and further enhance the practice of language assessment skills in classroom teaching through methods such as teaching discussions, self-reflection, and peer support. During the "graduation internship" stage, pre-service English teachers gain a deeper understanding of specific teaching content and teaching evaluation processes through more in-depth and authentic school English teaching experiences and observations. They can practice language assessment philosophy, knowledge, and skills more broadly, gradually improving their language assessment literacy in this process.

### **4.3. Enhancing practical application to encourage pre-service English teachers to design simple and practical language assessment systems or tools**

With the continuous advancement of computer technology and artificial intelligence, language assessment systems have become crucial tools for evaluation. The opening and application of "technology-enabled" language assessment systems have a significant impact on language learning for teenagers. Feedback from diagnostic assessment systems helps teachers and students understand teaching and learning situations, promotes student learning, and improves classroom teaching<sup>[27]</sup>. Information and communication technology has had a positive impact on teachers in the process of planning, implementing, regulating, and reflecting on assessments.

Although pre-service English teachers have some exposure to language assessment courses, internships, and practical training, most of the focus is on introducing macro evaluation concepts and knowledge. There is little training on systematic and scientific classroom evaluation design and the development of assessment system tools. Pre-service English teachers have a significant lack of ability to design and select simple and easy-to-operate classroom assessment scales for different language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation). In the future, English language teacher training may focus on the "evaluation skills" module in the assessment literacy framework, and conduct training based on the development of assessment scales for different stages and language skills.

## **5. Conclusion**

This article analyzed the basic concepts and theoretical frameworks of language assessment literacy,

reviewed the main content and directions of language assessment literacy research, and proposed reflections on the cultivation of language assessment literacy for pre-service English teachers. It aims to contribute to the improvement of language assessment literacy among pre-service English teachers in China.

Research on language assessment literacy for foreign language teachers at home and abroad is still emerging, and there is still considerable room for expansion in terms of breadth and depth. Inbar-Lourie pointed out in the editor's note of the *Language Testing* special issue that research and development tasks of language assessment literacy are arduous<sup>[28]</sup>.

Firstly, to develop the language assessment literacy of foreign language teachers, more related research is needed to build a theoretical system suitable for the development of language assessment literacy among Chinese foreign language teachers. Secondly, research on the interactive relationship between teachers' language assessment literacy and students' assessment literacy is needed. Both language teachers' and students' assessment literacy have attracted great attention in the academic community, but it is rare to reveal what kind of interactive relationship exists between the two, that is, to explore whether and how teachers' assessment literacy affects students' assessment literacy. Finally, it should be noted that this article only focuses on the group of pre-service English teachers, and the language assessment literacy of in-service English teachers and teachers of other languages is also worthy of further study.

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