

Research on Improving Pathways to Assessment Literacy of Chinese University EFL Teachers under Multidimensional Perspective

Kuncaï Ye, Caihong Chen

College of Foreign Languages, Minnan Normal University, Zhangzhou 363000, Fujian, China

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Abstract: Grounded in a multidimensional framework, this research interrogates the conceptual dimensions, factors and developmental trajectories of assessment literacy among Chinese university EFL teachers. By systematically reviewing domestic and international literature, it distills four core constituents of assessment literacy, conceptions, knowledge, competence and attitudes; further explicates how their dynamic interplay shapes pedagogical progress. The research then constructs a four-layer model of factors that constrain or enable literacy growth: the individual, institutional, regional and technological strata. On this basis, it advances synergistic improving pathways: teachers' lifelong inquiry-oriented learning, evidence based institutional reforms coupled with resource provision, inter-university collaboration and joint standard setting within regions and educators, and university administrators with empirical guidance for cultivating a higher education foreign language assessment ecosystem that is learning centered, ethically regulated and technologically empowered.

Keywords: Assessment literacy; University EFL teachers; Improving pathways

Online publication: August 26, 2025

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, higher education in foreign languages in China has been entrusted with the strategic mission of cultivating internationally competent individuals and intercultural mediators. Assessment, as a vital component of the teaching–learning system, depends for its effectiveness on the assessment literacy of foreign language teachers^[1]. The paradigm shifts from traditional summative assessment to formative, pluralistic, and learning-oriented approaches requires teachers to simultaneously undertake four cognitive and ethical tasks: design, implementation, interpretation, and feedback application^[2].

Empirical studies have shown that teachers with high levels of assessment literacy can accurately diagnose individual student needs based on multidimensional evidence, dynamically adjust task complexity and feedback strategies, and significantly enhance student engagement and language proficiency^[3]. Moreover, assessment activities themselves serve as a “professional laboratory” where teachers integrate knowledge from educational measurement, cognitive psychology, and subject pedagogy. This process enables them to expand their professional knowledge, enhance their sense of efficacy, and strengthen their professional identity through a continuous cycle of theory–practice–reflection.

Currently, China's national initiatives such as the "New Liberal Arts" and "Double First-Class" university construction programs have incorporated competencies such as innovation ability and intercultural communication into talent cultivation standards. This calls for the construction of a new ecology of higher education foreign language assessment that is learning-centered, balances process and outcome, and integrates ethical and technological governance. Teachers' assessment literacy is not only a key independent variable determining the success of this transformation but also a core indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of educational reform^[4]. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of the conceptual dimensions, multidimensional influencing factors, and developmental pathways of foreign language teachers' assessment literacy in Chinese higher education can provide evidence-based support for policy-making, curriculum redesign in teacher education, and innovation in assessment governance. This has significant practical and theoretical value for promoting the high-quality development of higher education.

2. Components of assessment literacy among university foreign-language teachers

The notion of assessment literacy was first coined by the American scholar Stiggins, who defined it as the qualities that teachers cultivate or refine through everyday teaching and assessment acts. With the continuous evolution of educational-assessment theory and practice, the connotation of assessment literacy has been progressively enriched. At present, the academic community generally regards assessment literacy as a comprehensive manifestation of teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in the process of instructional assessment. It covers teachers' understanding and application of assessment purposes, methods, instruments and results.

Conceptually, assessment conceptions constitute the core of assessment literacy, guiding teachers' assessment behaviors and decisions. University foreign-language teachers should adopt a student-centered conception that attends to learners' individual differences and all-round development, emphasizing the diagnostic, formative and developmental functions of assessment, and treating assessment as a vital means of facilitating student learning and growth rather than merely a judgement of learning outcomes^[5,6].

Assessment knowledge is the foundation for effective assessment. It embraces basic theories of educational measurement and evaluation, foreign-language teaching and learning, and language-testing theory^[7]. Teachers need to understand the characteristics, applicability and limitations of different assessment methods and tools, and master the construction of assessment-indicator systems, the setting of assessment criteria, and the collection and analysis of assessment data. For instance, teachers must know how to design a scientifically sound foreign-language test that accurately measures students' linguistic knowledge and skills, and how to employ formative-assessment tools, such as classroom observation, learning journals and peer assessment, to track learning processes and progress.

Assessment ability is the key component of assessment literacy, encompassing the capacity to design, implement, interpret and utilize assessment results^[8]. In terms of design, teachers should be able to select appropriate assessment modes and tools and formulate explicit criteria and indicator systems in line with instructional objectives and student characteristics. During implementation, they must skillfully apply various assessment methods, effectively collect assessment data, and ensure fairness, impartiality and objectivity^[9]. When interpreting and utilizing results, teachers should accurately decode assessment data, analyze students' strengths and weaknesses, provide targeted feedback and suggestions, and adjust teaching strategies and methods accordingly to improve instructional quality.

Assessment attitude, reflecting the importance teachers attach to assessment and their associated values, is also an integral part of assessment literacy. A positive assessment attitude is manifested in teachers' conscientiousness towards assessment, respect and care for students, objectivity and fairness towards results, and an active pursuit of assessment improvement^[10]. Teachers should recognize assessment as an indispensable segment of instruction and an important pathway for promoting both student learning and their own professional development, and thus devote themselves to assessment with a positive mindset.

3. Multidimensional factors influencing assessment literacy

3.1. Individual factors

At the individual level, university foreign-language teachers' affective dispositions, teaching experience, educational background and training history all potentially shape their assessment literacy, which is gradually forged through continuous reflection on practice and proactive acquisition of theoretical knowledge. Research indicates that academic credentials per se are not a decisive determinant; they have not prevented these teachers from remaining active in English instruction or from continuously enhancing their assessment literacy ^[11]. An examination of their careers reveals a persistent thread of multifarious learning and training: study-abroad program, leadership of teaching-research projects, and multiple teaching awards. It is the habit of approaching practice with inquiry, and of using theory to address concrete problems, that underpins their improvement.

3.2. Institutional management factors

At the institutional level, several facets of administrative systems significantly affect the cultivation of teachers' assessment literacy. First, management systems exert orienting and constraining functions. When student examination scores or graduation rates are set as the dominant indices of teacher performance, assessment is narrowed into "score management", depriving teachers of the cognitive impetus to engage in formative or pluralistic evaluation. If appraisal schemes over-emphasize research output and teaching workload while neglecting qualitative scrutiny of assessment design and the use of results, teachers' resource allocation inevitably tilts toward visible products, marginalizing the development of assessment literacy ^[12].

Second, the instructional environment constitutes an external support condition. A vibrant academic culture, characterized by peer assistance, experience sharing and collective reflection, supplies a "community of practice" within which teachers continually update assessment knowledge ^[13]. Meanwhile, digital technologies such as online platforms and learning-management systems can extend embedded, real-time assessment modalities; inadequate investment in such facilities deprives teachers of multimodal data, limiting the precision of diagnosis and feedback.

Finally, training mechanisms serve as crucial mediators, yet fragmented, overly theoretical, one-off lecture models prevail. Lacking needs-based staged courses, school-based practicums and impact tracking, this program hinders the translation of assessment knowledge into situated competence.

3.3. Regional factors

Regional cultural backgrounds and educational traditions exert a subtle yet profound influence ^[14]. In culturally conservative regions, outdated educational outlooks that stress knowledge transmission and memorization, and that prize examination pass rates, lead teachers to focus assessment on knowledge reproduction while neglecting students' innovation, practical skills and comprehensive qualities. In culturally open regions with progressive educational ideals, emphasis on individuality and creativity encourages diversified assessment; teachers more easily access advanced conceptions and are more willing to experiment, thereby facilitating the growth of assessment literacy.

The regional policy environment also plays a steering role. Policies that advocate quality-oriented education and all-round development, and that foreground process-oriented and pluralistic assessment, prompt institutions and teachers to prioritize the enhancement of assessment literacy and to explore new methods and technologies. Conversely, policies dominated by traditional examinations reinforce conventional mind-sets and constrain development. Moreover, the distribution of educational resources matters: resource-rich regions can offer abundant training, learning materials and practice platforms, whereas resource-poor regions leave teachers with few opportunities for learning or exchange, resulting in slower improvement.

3.4. Technological factors

With the rapid advance of information technology, online instruction has become widespread, furnishing teachers with

abundant assessment tools, online testing platforms, learning-management systems, interactive software and so forth ^[15]. These tools collect real-time data on study time, progress, assignment completion and discussion participation, supplying evidence for comprehensive and objective judgement. Teachers can thus diagnose problems promptly and give targeted feedback. For example, online tests instantly reveal mastery levels and auto-generated analytics visually expose strengths and weaknesses.

However, some teachers' inadequate familiarity with these tools prevents full exploitation, limiting the enhancement of assessment literacy. Online modes demand information-technology (IT) competence, basic computer operations, mastery of platforms and assessment software, and data-analysis skills ^[16]. Technologically unconfident teachers struggle to integrate new tools into daily assessment; they may be unable to design diversified online assessment activities or to interpret collected data effectively, thereby impairing assessment quality. Raising teachers' IT proficiency so that they can skillfully deploy technology in assessment is therefore a crucial task for promoting assessment literacy ^[17].

4. Strategies for enhancing the assessment literacy

4.1. Individual strategies

University foreign-language teachers should embrace lifelong learning, recognizing that the enhancement of assessment literacy is an ongoing process. They should actively monitor the latest research findings and developments in educational assessment, and acquaint themselves with advanced conceptions, methods and technologies. Updating their knowledge base and broadening their assessment horizons can be achieved by reading professional books and journals, attending academic conferences, and enrolling in online courses. Teachers ought to delve into theories of educational measurement and evaluation, language testing, and foreign-language pedagogy, so as to grasp the essence and purposes of assessment and to master the characteristics, applicability and limitations of diverse methods and tools, thereby furnishing a solid theoretical grounding for practice.

Participation in varied training activities constitutes a major pathway. Institution or authority sponsored training program, usually delivered by specialized experts, offer systematic knowledge, practical opportunities and hands-on experience. Teachers may also join seminars and workshops to exchange experiences, share cases and collectively solve problems, thereby gaining multiple perspectives, stimulating innovative thinking and improving assessment competence.

Reflective practice is equally vital. After each assessment event teachers should scrutinize the data, question the appropriateness of indicators, the efficacy of methods and the validity of results, and identify weaknesses in their own literacy. Reflection enables timely adjustment of strategies and improvement of practice. Communicating with students to elicit their perceptions of assessment can further refine the system and enhance quality.

4.2. Institutional strategies

Universities should refine their teaching-assessment management by establishing scientifically sound teacher-evaluation systems. When appraising teaching quality, student achievement, process performance and comprehensive development should all be considered; sole reliance on examination scores must be avoided. Including teachers' assessment literacy and performance in promotion and appraisal schemes can incentivize earnest engagement with assessment. Institutions should also increase resource allocation, earmarking adequate funds for assessment training and purchasing advanced tools, to create enabling conditions.

A positive academic culture should be fostered. Organizing peer observation allows teachers to learn from exemplary assessment practices; establishing communities of practice centered on assessment encourages collaboration on projects and research, nurturing mutual support and collective advancement. Infrastructure investment should introduce sophisticated technologies, online platforms, learning-management systems. To automate data collection and analysis, thereby raising efficiency and accuracy. Class sizes and teaching loads should be rationally controlled to afford teachers the time and energy to attend to individual learners and to improve assessment quality.

Systematic, sustained training programs are essential. Content must align with real teaching needs, integrating theoretical input with hands-on practice and case analysis. Delivery should be varied, lectures, group discussions, case studies, simulated assessments, to enhance interactivity and effectiveness. Follow-up and feedback mechanisms should track application and impact, allowing continuous refinement of content and modality to ensure that training durably promotes assessment literacy.

4.3. Regional strategies

Regional education authorities should strengthen inter-university cooperation by creating shared platforms for the development of assessment literacy. Joint training programs can pool high-quality resources and invite renowned experts to raise quality. Regular forums for sharing experiences, successful cases and innovative practices can stimulate mutual learning and collective improvement.

Collaborative projects should be launched, joint research into assessment models suited to the region, cooperative development of tools and resources to achieve sharing and efficiency and to foster deep inter-institutional exchange, shaping a regionally synergistic developmental landscape and elevating overall literacy.

Authorities should also issue unified standards and requirements, guiding universities to prioritize assessment literacy. A monitoring mechanism should be instituted to conduct periodic evaluations, diagnose problems and propose improvements. Universities and teachers demonstrating outstanding progress should be publicly recognized and rewarded to exert demonstrative and leading effects, propelling region-wide advancement.

4.4. Technological strategies

Authorities and institutions should intensify IT training to raise teachers' capacity to use technological tools for assessment. Training should cover basic computer operations, platform navigation, assessment software, and data analysis. Courses that integrate IT with assessment literacy should demonstrate how big-data analytics can personalize evaluation and how AI can automate marking and intelligent assessment, thereby enhancing efficiency and accuracy.

Investment in advanced tools such as online platforms, learning-management systems, assessment software should be increased. Teachers should be encouraged to explore and apply emerging technologies, and supported in conducting technology-based assessment research. A dedicated technical-support team should be established to troubleshoot problems, ensuring reliable operation and powerful backing for teachers' assessment work. Through technology enablement, teachers' assessment capabilities and efficiency can be upgraded, furnishing scientific, comprehensive and precise support for university foreign-language assessment.

5. Conclusion

This study has dissected the connotation of university foreign-language teachers' assessment literacy, clarifying that it embraces four intertwined dimensions, conceptions, knowledge, ability and attitude, which together constitute an organic whole. In examining the factors that influence its development, we adopted a four-layer lens: teacher individuality, institutional management, regional culture and technological support. Teachers' cognitive level, affective disposition and training experience play a foundational role; institutional policies, instructional climate and professional-development mechanisms exert orienting and constraining effects; regional cultural traditions, policy environments and resource distributions shape literacy in subtle ways; meanwhile, the rise of information technology presents both opportunities and challenges, with teachers' technological competence mediating the translation of digital tools into assessment practice.

Grounded in these findings, this study has proposed a multi-pronged set of strategies. At the personal level, teachers should espouse lifelong learning, actively participate in training and engage in sustained reflective practice. At the institutional level, universities should refine assessment-management systems, cultivate a supportive academic culture and provide rigorous, practice-embedded training. At the regional level, education authorities should foster inter-university

collaboration, initiate joint projects and institute monitoring-and-incentive mechanisms. At the technological level, systematic IT training and increased investment in assessment technologies are imperative.

It is hoped that these strategies will furnish useful reference for future developmental pathways of university foreign-language teachers' assessment literacy, and will ultimately contribute to the construction of a learning-centered, ethically and technologically sound assessment ecology in China's higher-education foreign-language program.

Funding

Fujian Provincial Social Science Fund Project "A Study on the Development of Normal University Students' Assessment Literacy under the Background of the New Era Education Evaluation Reform" (Project No.: FJ2025B203); High-Level Talents Introduction Project of Zhangzhou City, Fujian Province "A Study on the Development of Foreign Language Teachers' Assessment Literacy" (Project No.: L12141)

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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