A MOOC in a time of corona: language assessment literacy for teacher professional development

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Assessment Research Group

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Outline

- Language Assessment Literacy
- Assessment literacy and the teacher’s role
- MOOCs and Continuing Professional Development
- Language Assessment in the Classroom MOOC
- Feedback from participants
- Conclusions and recommendations
“...the knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate large-scale standardised and/or classroom based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice” (Fulcher, 2012).

Emphasises context, principles and practice.

Teachers spend large amounts of time and bear a large responsibility for assessment (Stiggins, 2007)
SOCIO-COGNITIVE MODEL (O’SULLIVAN 2014)
THE LEARNING SYSTEM (O’SULLIVAN, 2020)
IMPACT WITHIN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF TEST USE

Context of Use

- Curriculum
- Standards
- Delivery
- Assessment

Consequence/Impact

Test Takers
Parents & Guardians
Employers
Teachers
School Principals
School Administrators
School Boards
Examination Boards
Test Administrators
Education Boards
Broader Society
Policy Makers
Test Developers
Academics
Lawyers
THE CLASSROOM LEARNING SYSTEM

- Curriculum
- TEACHERS
- Delivery
- Assessment
Levels of knowledge & skills
Stakeholder needs

- Technical skills
- Principles and concepts
- Language pedagogy
- Socio-cultural values
- Local practices
- Personal beliefs/attitudes
- Scores and decision-making
- Knowledge of theory

(Taylor, 2013)
‘Teachers don’t need to know about assessment’

- Teaching:
  - Nurturing
  - building relationships
  - helping students

- Assessment:
  - threatens positive relationship
  - separate from teaching, no need for involvement

- Assessment + construct => teaching
Some barriers to Assessment Literacy

- Cost
- Location
- Time required
- Availability of courses (and trainers)
- Not many teacher training courses include training on language assessment

(Misra, 2018)
How can teachers become assessment literate?

Language Assessment in the Classroom

Assessment is becoming increasingly important in language education.
Understand it better with this course for language teachers.
What’s a MOOC?

❖ Massive Open Online Course
❖ University driven
❖ Career, education, interests/hobbies
❖ Clear start & finish
❖ Online interaction – peers, educators
What’s a MOOC?

❖ Accessible – no entry requirements
❖ Generally free (payment for certificate/continued access)
❖ Low completion rates (<10-30%)
❖ Most participants drop out early
❖ Completion factors:
  ❖ Course content
  ❖ Engagement with moderators

(Hone & El Said, 2016)
Language assessment in the classroom (3)

• Piloted in April 2018
• Third cycle of the course

• 45000 enrolled
• More than 20000 participants
• 169 countries
Pre-course questionnaire

Q4 Which type of institution do you work in?

Answered: 4,827  Skipped: 53

- Primary education
- Secondary education
- Higher education
- Other
Pre-course questionnaire

Q8 Have you received previous assessment training?

- Yes, in a workshop.
- Yes, as part of a teaching course.
- Yes, in a specialist assessment course.
- Yes, in a Masters in assessment.
- Yes, by self-study.
- No, I haven’t received any training on assessment.

Answered: 4,842   Skipped: 38
Pre-course questionnaire

Q7 Have you developed language tests as part of your work?

Answered: 4,945   Skipped: 35

- Yes
- No
Pre-course questionnaire

Q10 Which skill area are you most interested in learning about?

Answered: 4,847  Skipped: 33

- Listening
- Reading
- Speaking
- Writing
- Grammar
- Vocabulary

- 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Pre-course questionnaire

How familiar are you with the following ideas in assessment?

- Formative assessment
- Summative assessment
- Reliability
- Authenticity
- Integrated skills
- Rating scales
- Validity
- CEFR
- Construct
- Washback
Pre-course questionnaire

Q14 How many hours per week do you intend to spend on this course?

Answered: 4,842  Skipped: 38

- Less than 1
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- More than 5
What are your expectations of the course?

Main themes (4388 comments):
- Improve assessment practices
- Be a better teacher
- Professional/career development
- Student benefit
- Systemic change
- Improve personal language skills
What do teachers want?

“To gain a professional understanding of assessment and then implement and test out what can enhance my students' learning.”

“...I feel like a blind woman when evaluating my students. I hope to get the most out of this course. Thank you for making it possible free of charge for those who like me cannot do it due to lack of financial resources.”

“That it will help me become more familiar with some concepts within assessment and provide me with more of a basis to deal with what I see as historical failings in the approach taken to assessment in my current institution.”
Language assessment in the classroom (3)

What will you achieve?

By the end of the course, you'll be able to...

- Identify the basic principles involved in reliable and valid test design
- Demonstrate an understanding of different types of tests and how they can be used
- Evaluate assessment needs of students within a given context
- Explain some practical techniques for assessing different language skills and knowledge
Language assessment in the classroom (3)

Content elements
- Videos
  - Expert
  - Animated
  - End of week
- Articles
- Audio
- Quizzes
- Polls
- Live Facebook broadcast
- Participant comments (over 60000)
- External resources
Course Design Concerns

- Content selection
  - How much?
  - Which order?

- Consistency of approach
  - Which theoretical framework?

- Choice of context

- Use of terminology
  - Validity? Reliability? Washback?

- Comprehensible language

- Level of interaction
  - Moderator input
  - Participant tasks
Language assessment in the classroom (3)

**Week 1**  
Basic concepts  
- CEFR  
- Washback  
- Construct  
Speaking/writing  
- Tasks  
- Rating & Criteria  
- Feedback

**Week 2**  
Reading/listening  
- Subskills  
- Input  
- Tasks  
- Scoring

**Week 3**  
Grammar/vocab  
- Knowledge types  
- Tasks  
Remote Assessment

**Week 4**  
Test development  
- Design  
- Purpose  
- Integrated skills  
- Young learners  
Test evaluation  
- Item analysis
Post-course questionnaire

Q6 Why did you choose to participate in a MOOC rather than use other professional development opportunities? Choose all the options which apply to you.

- The amount of time required to do the course
- The flexibility of learning at my own pace
- Limited access to other professional development opportunities
- Limited access to materials for self-study
- Interest in the topic
- Reputation of the course provider/educators
- Previous positive online learning experiences
- The course was strongly recommended to me
- The course was a requirement of my job
- To learn with people from...
- To learn with people from all around the world
- Other (please specify)
Post-course questionnaire

After completing the course, how familiar are you now with the following ideas in assessment?

Pre-course
1. Formative assessment
2. Summative assessment
3. Reliability
4. Authenticity
5. Integrated skills
6. Rating scales
7. Validity
8. CEFR
9. Construct
10. Washback

Post-course
1. Summative assessment
2. Formative assessment
3. Reliability
4. Authenticity
5. Integrated skills
6. Rating scales
7. Validity
8. CEFR
9. Construct
10. Washback
Post-course questionnaire

Q8 The language of the course was easy to understand.
Answered: 1,207  Skipped: 9

Q9 The content of the course was easy to understand.
Answered: 1,203  Skipped: 13
Q12 On average, how many hours per week did you spend on the 4 weeks of this course?

Q13 The amount of time I needed to spend on this course was acceptable to me.
Post-course questionnaire

How useful did you find the following aspects of the course?

- Video interviews with assessment experts: 4.5
- Links to external resources: 4
- Overall content: 4.5
- Animation videos: 4.5
- Quizzes: 4
- Articles: 4
- Comments of educators: 4.5
- Language assessment glossary: 4
- Q&A Special video: 4
- End of Week videos: 4
- Facebook video: 4
- Comments of other course participants: 4
Q22 What were some of the challenges that you faced on the course? Choose all the options which apply to you.

- The amount of time available
- The amount of course content
- The difficulty of the course
- I prefer studying with... [omitted options]
- I had difficulty... [omitted options]
- Other (please specify)

Answered: 1,138  Skipped: 78
Post-course questionnaire

Q17 I found the course interesting overall.

Answered: 1,202   Skipped: 14

- Strongly agreed
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
What changes would you recommend to improve the course?

Main themes (1024 comments):
- Nothing
- Allow more time
- Shorter (and more) videos
- More practical activities & examples
- More formative/alternative assessment
- Free certificates
- More specific context
What changes would you recommend to improve the course?

This is my favourite MOOC and I feel bad about criticizing some aspects. However:

1. More time to finish the course would be excellent.
2. The comments of other learners aren't as useful as they could be. Nobody has enough time to read hundreds of comments...
3. I found many videos not that informative, being too general ("It depends", too abstract)

“Maybe separate courses for primary and secondary assessments (lots of the information was too detailed for what I require at primary level)?”
What were the most interesting or useful parts of the course?

Main themes (1078 comments):

❖ Coverage of 4 skills
❖ Expert & animated videos
❖ Resources
❖ Explanation of concepts, esp. washback
❖ Task types
❖ Quizzes
❖ Comments (from educators)
What were the most interesting or useful parts of the course?

“I enjoyed reading the variety of comments. There is always someone you can learn something from.”

“It enabled me to learn at my own pace and also offer my viewpoints through comments. It was motivating to seem them being read and replied.”
"Online teaching for the first time because of Corona; I did the course with the students in my seminar and we all wrote learning logs about the four weeks. It was very interesting to connect the course (which I did no know before) with my teaching via learning platform and power point presentations"

"Had time on my hands during Covid-19, this course sounded good - and it is!"
Benefits
❖ Flexibility
❖ No cost to participants
❖ Raises the profile of the organisation

Drawbacks
❖ Huge time commitment by trainers, course designers and moderators
❖ Don’t know who you are reaching
❖ Don’t know real impact in classroom
Opportunities
❖ Intercultural / educational exchange – working with colleagues from around the world and learning about other teaching and testing contexts

Challenges
❖ Managing the time commitment from participants
❖ Promoting informed interaction between course participants
Implications and lessons learnt

❖ Frequency of courses - balancing act between demand and resources available
❖ Level of technicality - pre-course questionnaire to assess participants’ level; glossary
❖ End of week videos / Facebook Live sessions – bring along the big guests!
❖ Make sure you have a good back-of-house team
Conclusions

MOOCs ...
- cost a lot of time and effort on the part of the moderators

but they ...
- raise the profile of the organisation and the trainers
- bring huge benefits to the people who have least access to CPD
Thank you!

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https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/assessment-group
How Language Assessment Works

Assessing Speaking

Participant Notes

LAL at the British Council

How language assessment works

\[ \alpha = \frac{n}{n-1} \left( 1 - \frac{1}{S^2} \sum_{i=1}^{n} S_i^2 \right) \]
LAL at the British Council
Teachers' Assessment Literacy Enhancement

The Teachers' Assessment Literacy Enhancement (TALE) Project aims at creating an efficient and sustainable training infrastructure for English Language Teachers (ELTs) who wish to develop their skills with regard to language assessment. To this end, emphasis is placed on how one can create high-quality assessment materials and adopt appropriate assessment procedures in his or her teaching context.

The TALE Project offers 8 separate Courses on language assessment.

Open access to these Courses is available after logging in.

Besides ELTs, the TALE Courses can be of benefit to other language teachers as well.
References


