

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

Richard Spiby, British Council

IATEFL TEASIG webinar
16th December

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
-

Language Assessment Literacy

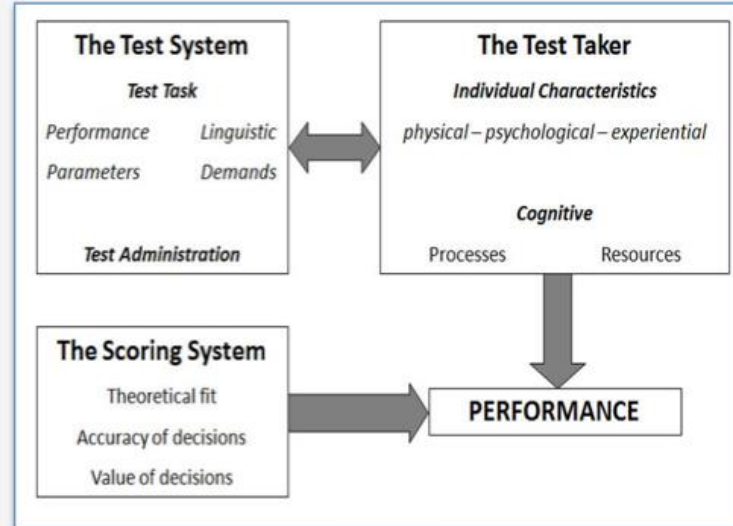
“...the **knowledge, skills and abilities** required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate large-scale standardised and/or classroom based tests, familiarity with test processes, and **awareness of principles and concepts** that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice” (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)

Context of Use

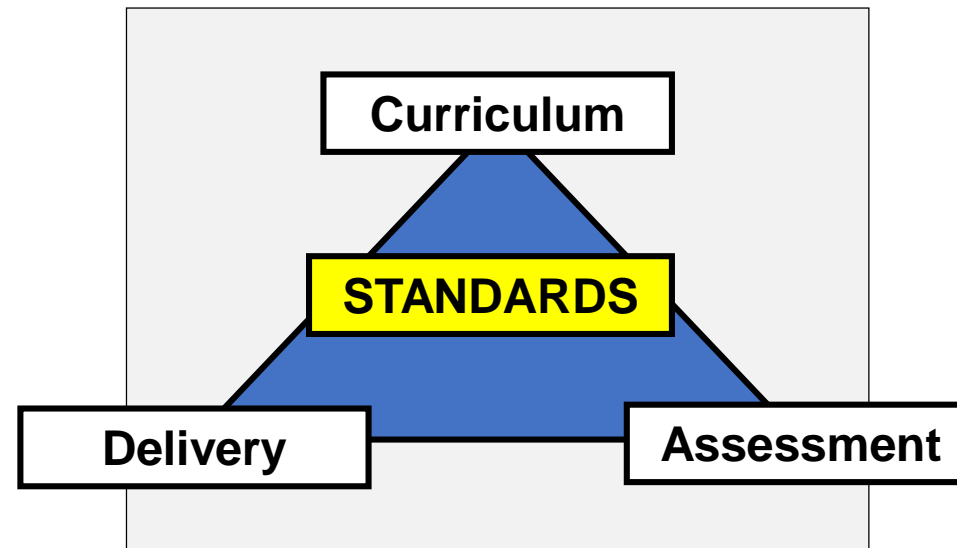


Consequence/Impact

Consequence/Impact

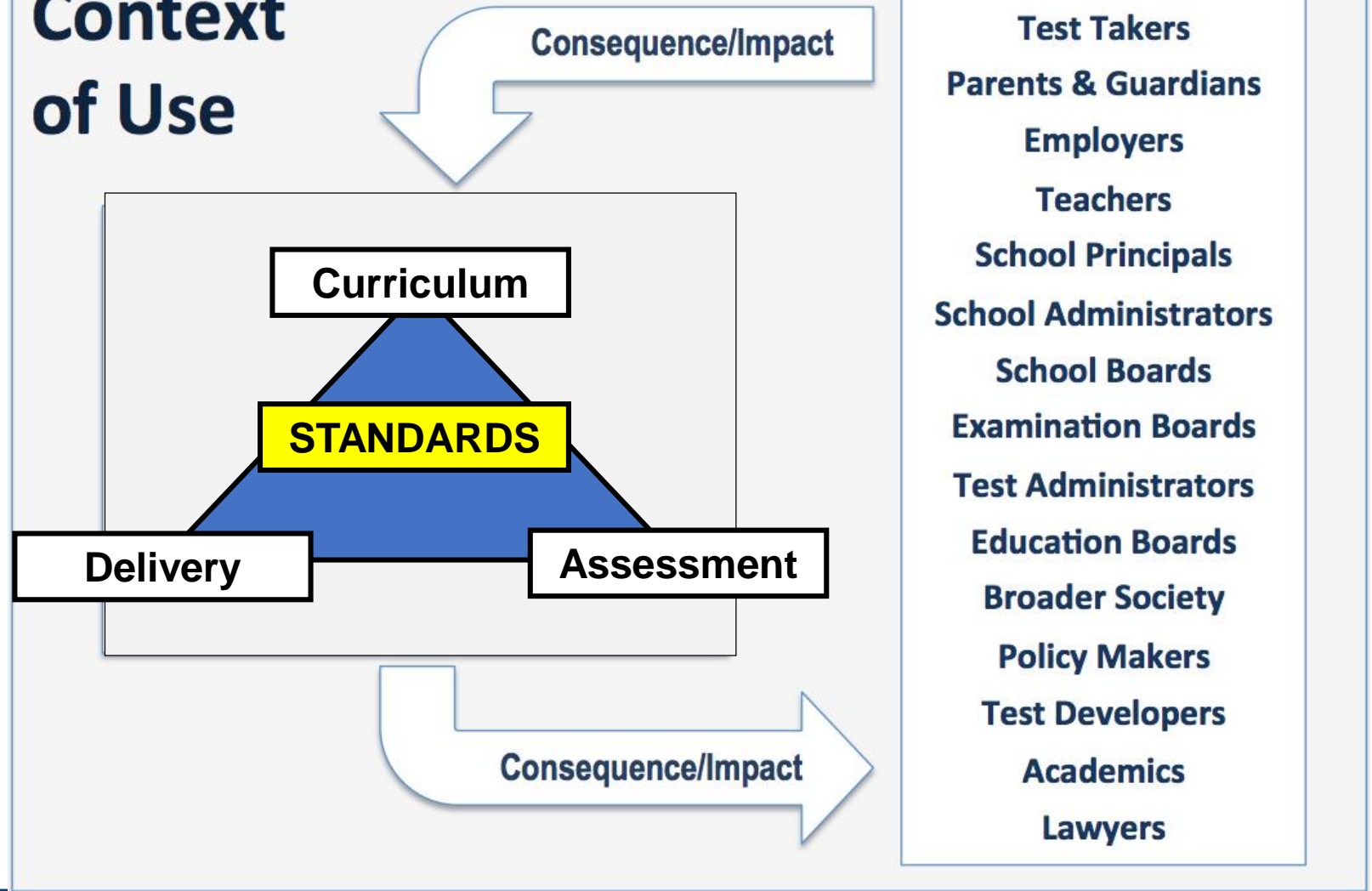
Test Takers
Parents & Guardians
Employers
Teachers
School Principals
School Administrators
School Boards
Examination Boards
Test Administrators
Education Boards
Broader Society
Policy Makers
Test Developers
Academics
Lawyers

THE LEARNING SYSTEM (O'SULLIVAN, 2020)

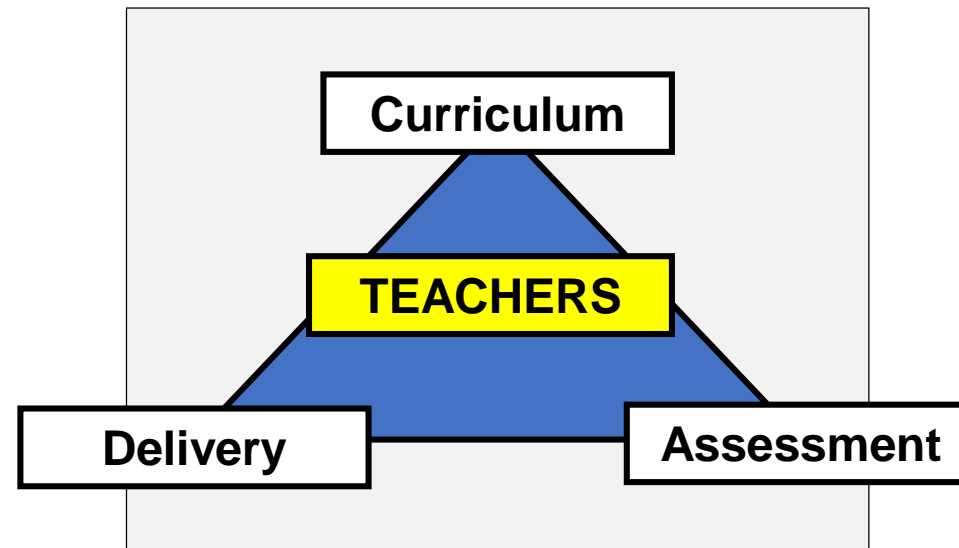


IMPACT WITHIN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF TEST USE

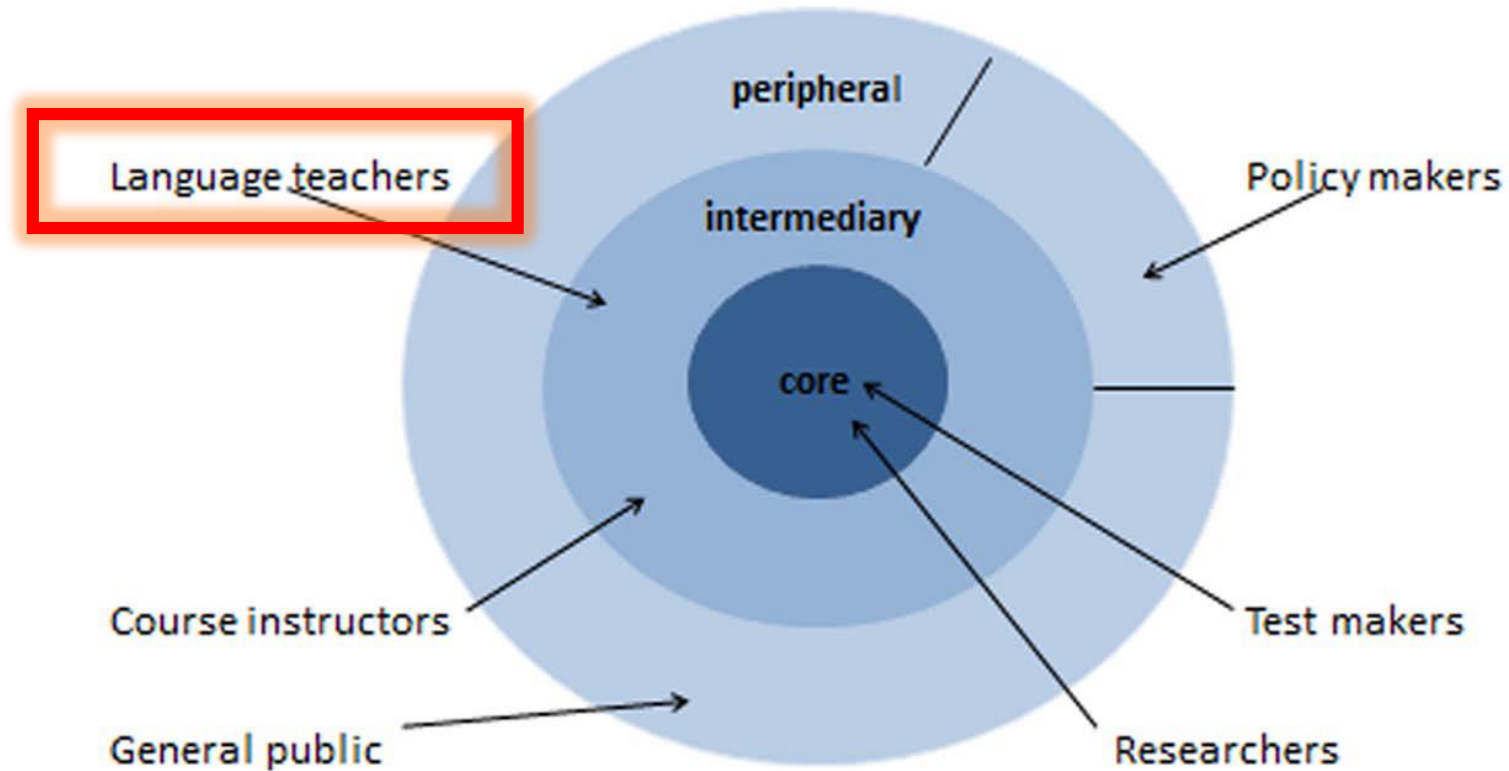
Context of Use



THE CLASSROOM LEARNING SYSTEM



Levels of knowledge & skills



(Taylor, 2013)

Stakeholder needs

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

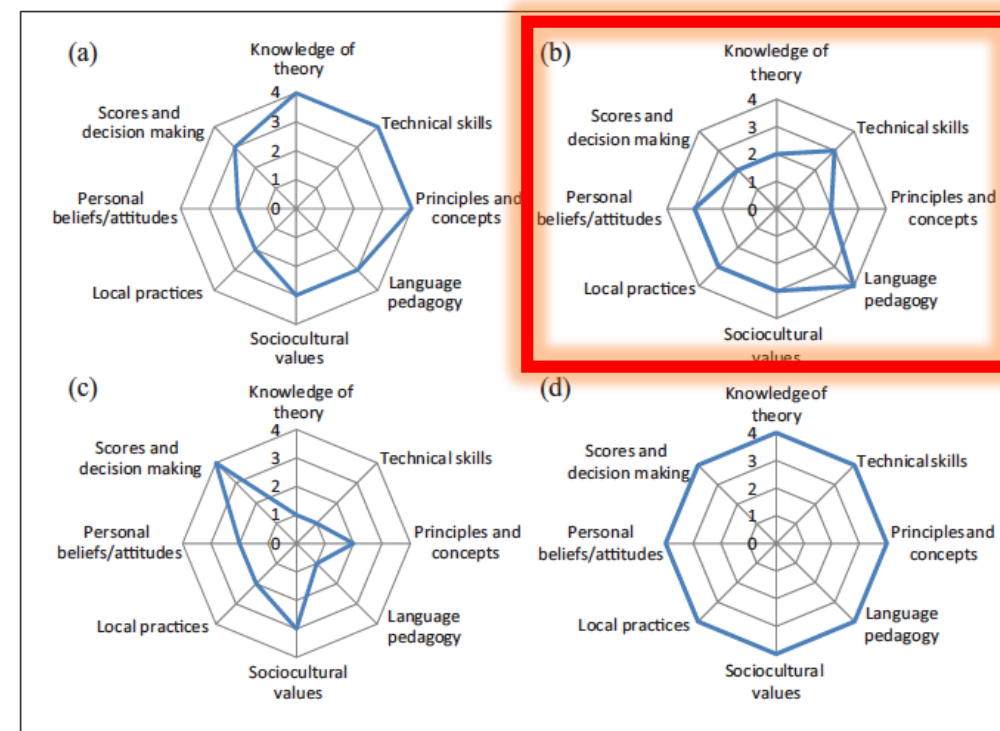


Figure 2. Differential AL/LAL profiles for four constituencies.

(a) Profile for test writers.

(b) Profile for classroom teachers.

(c) Profile for university administrators.

(d) Profile for professional language testers.

(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?

FutureLearn

Edit run


FutureLearn


Categories ▾

Courses ▾

Using FutureLearn ▾

Search online courses




50+ 

Online course in Teaching


Language Assessment in the Classroom

Assessment is becoming increasingly important in language education.
Understand it better with this course for language teachers.

BRITISH COUNCIL

Go to course – started 3 Jun

OverviewTopicsStart datesRequirementsEducatorsMore courses

A photograph showing a group of students in a classroom. In the foreground, a young man with glasses is looking down, focused on his work. Behind him, several other students are visible, some looking at their phones or papers.

What's a MOOC?

- ❖ Massive Open Online Course
 - ❖ University driven
 - ❖ Career, education, interests/hobbies
 - ❖ Clear start & finish
 - ❖ Online interaction – peers, educators
-

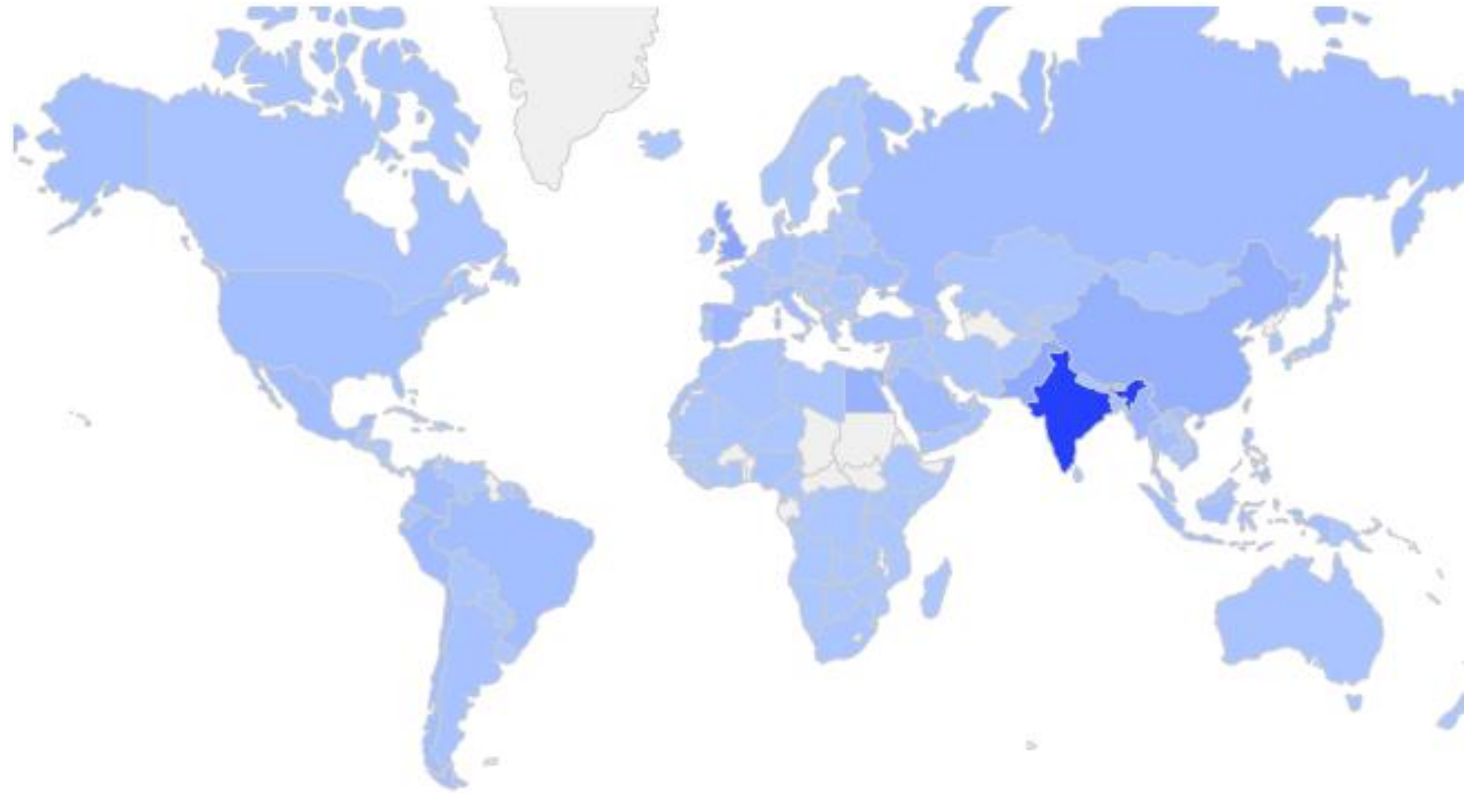
What's a MOOC?

- ❖ 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)

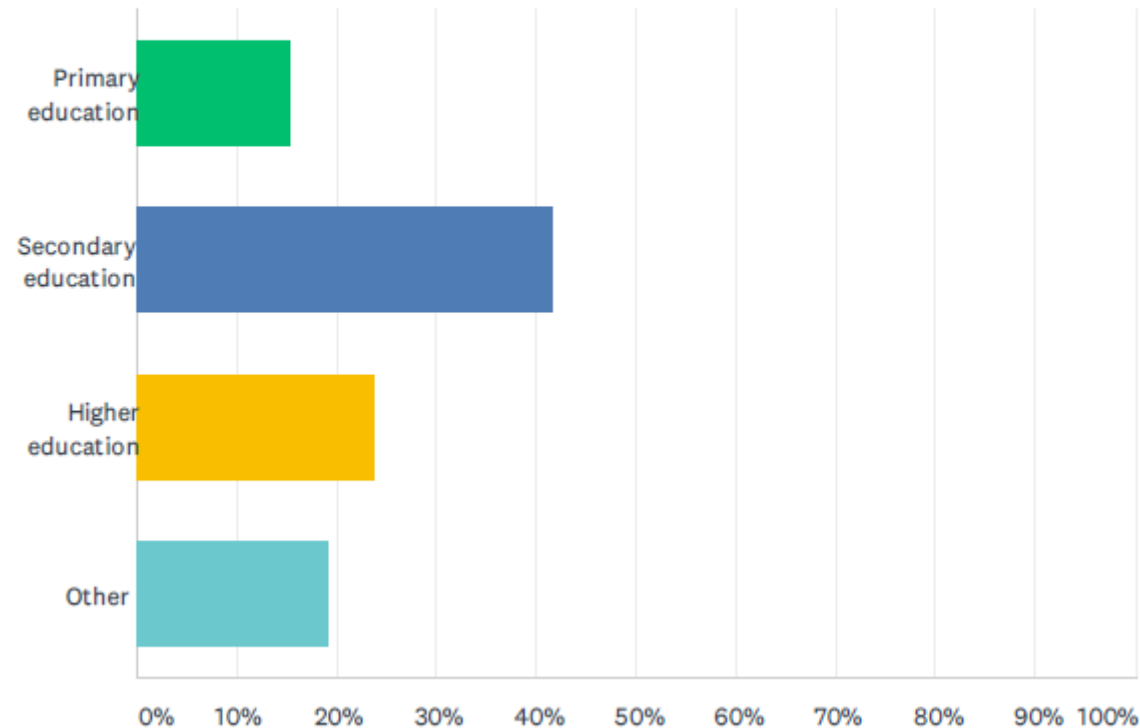
- Piloted in April 2018
- Third cycle of the course
- 45000 enrolled
- More than 20000 participants
- 169 countries



Pre-course questionnaire

Q4 Which type of institution do you work in?

Answered: 4,827 Skipped: 53



Pre-course questionnaire

Q8 Have you received previous assessment training?

Answered: 4,842 Skipped: 38

Yes, in a workshop.

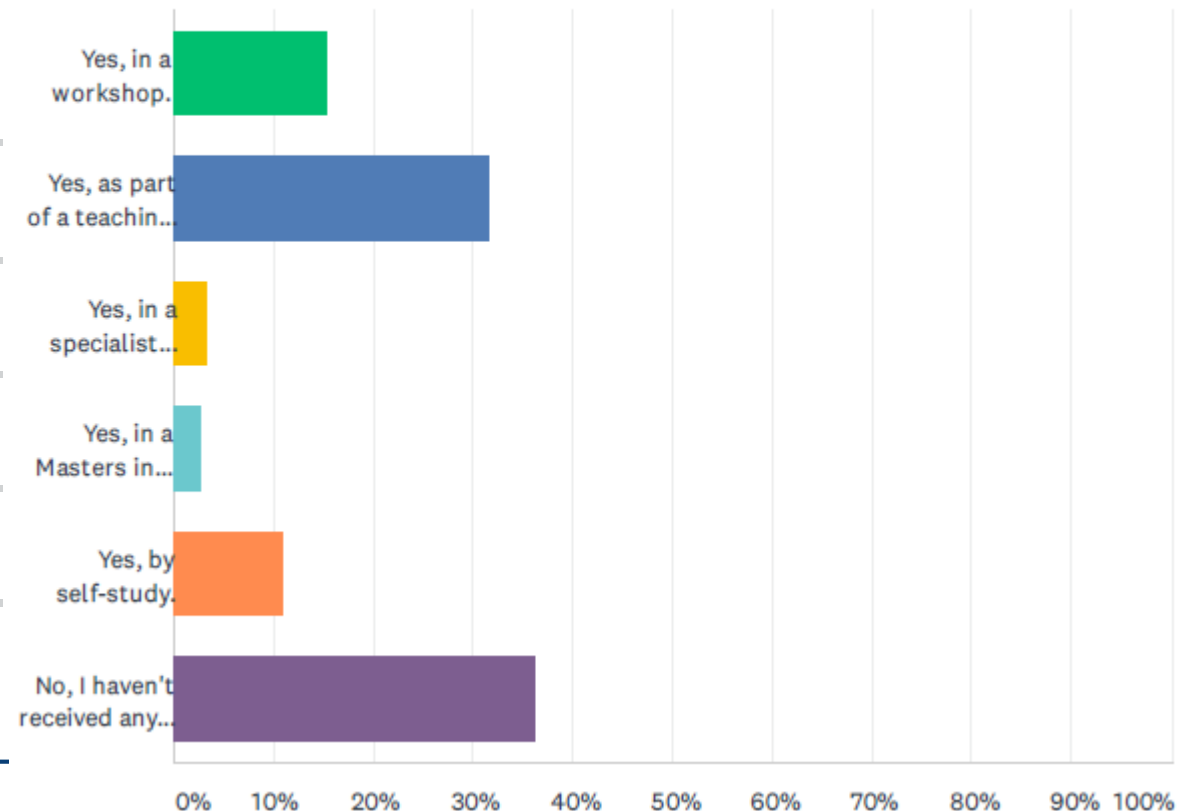
Yes, as part of a teaching course.

Yes, in a specialist assessment course.

Yes, in a Masters in assessment

Yes, by self-study.

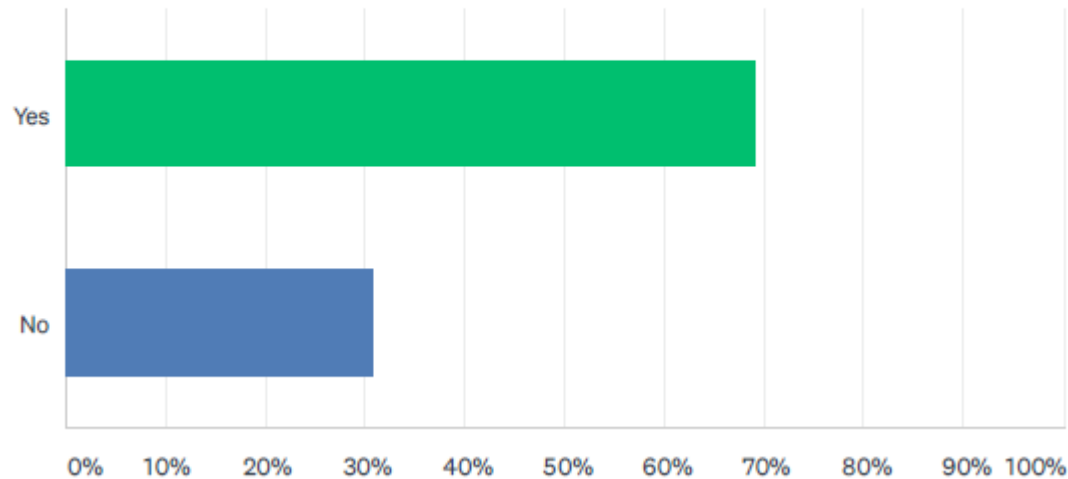
No, I haven't received any training on assessment.



Pre-course questionnaire

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

Answered: 4,845 Skipped: 35

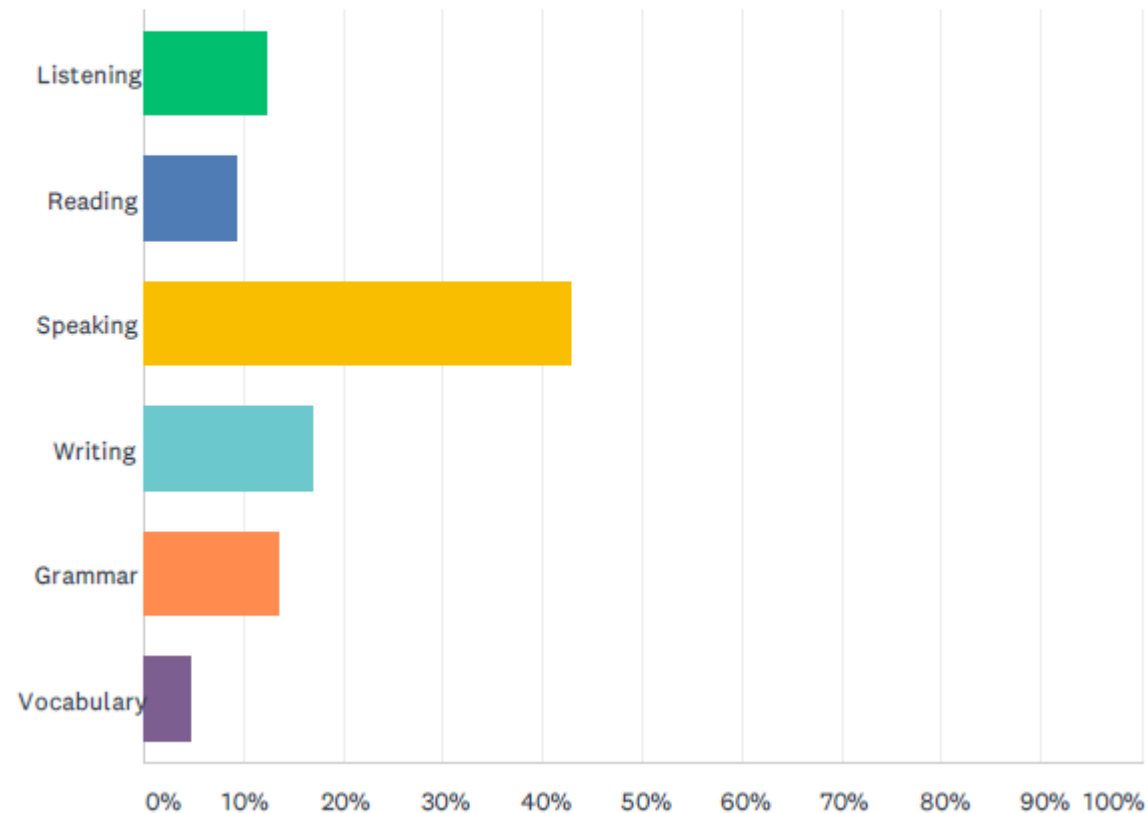


<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160303-what-is-the-meaning-of-the-scream>

Pre-course questionnaire

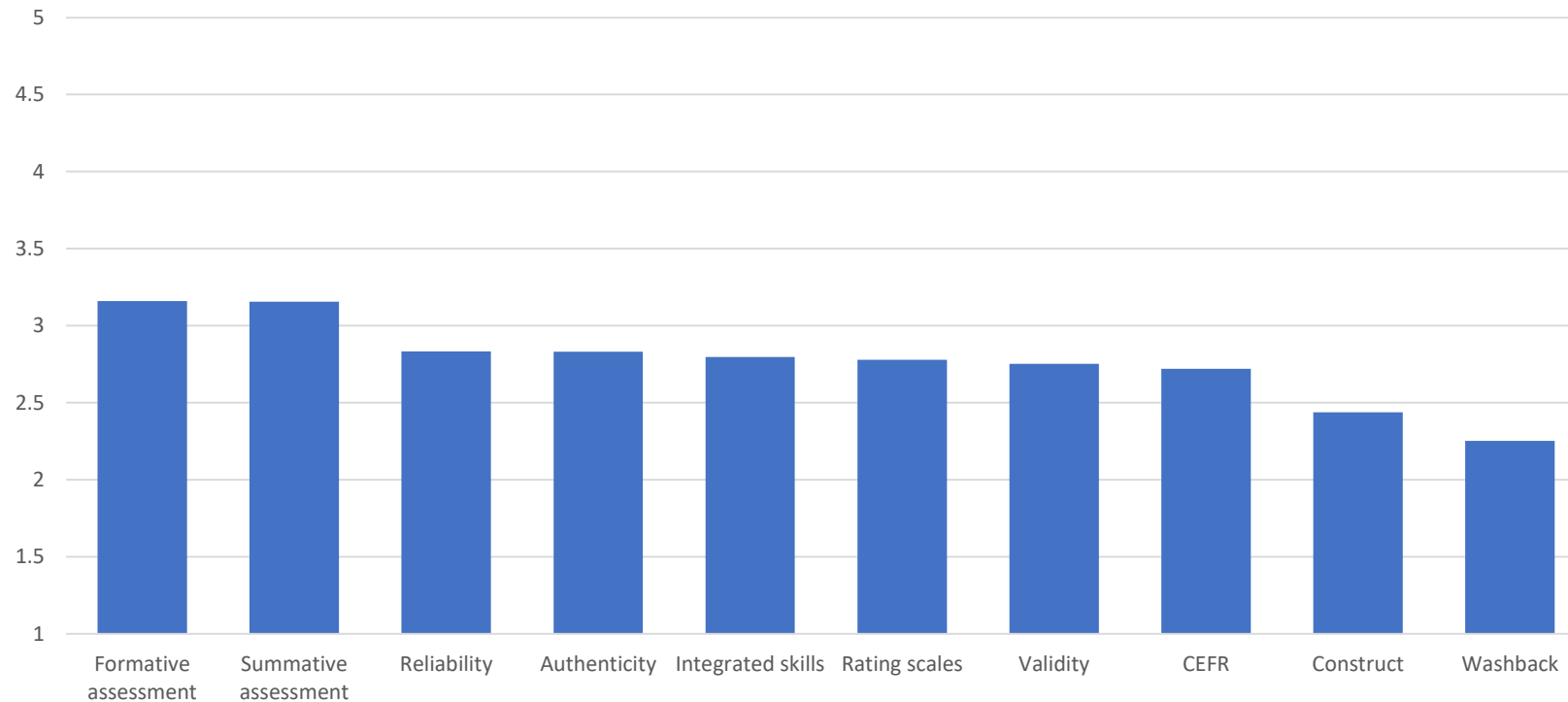
Q10 Which skill area are you most interested in learning about?

Answered: 4,847 Skipped: 33



Pre-course questionnaire

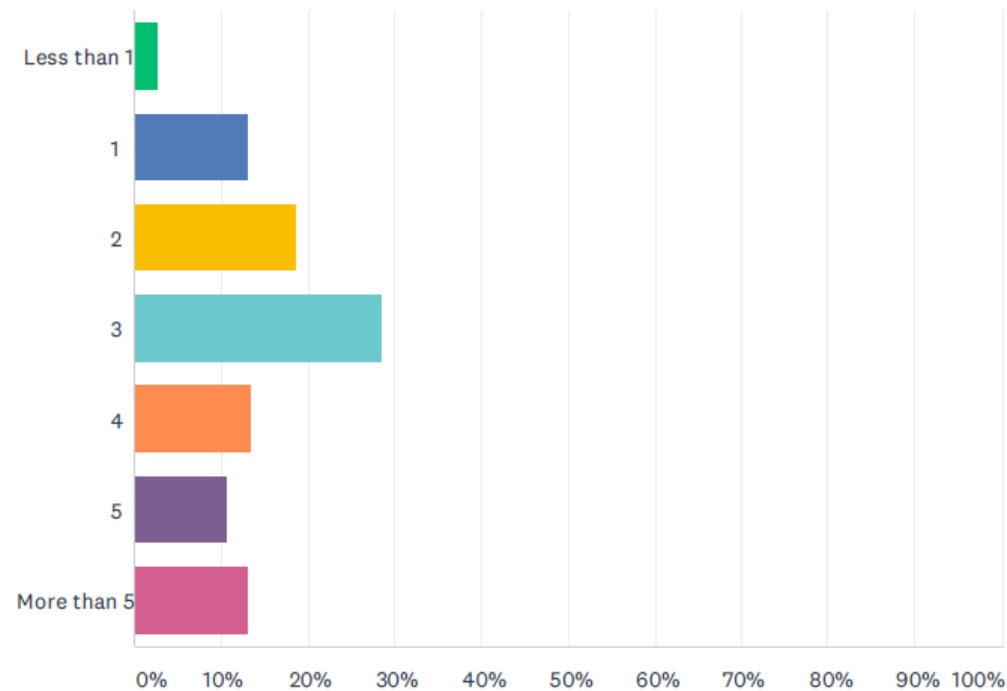
How familiar are you with the following ideas in assessment?



Pre-course questionnaire

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

Answered: 4,842 Skipped: 38



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?

“...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.**”

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



“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
- ✓ Evaluate assessment needs of students within a given context
- ✓ Demonstrate an understanding of different types of tests and how they can be used
- ✓ Explain some practical techniques for assessing different language skills and knowledge



Richard Spiby

I work with the Assessment Research Group at the British Council in London. I work on a variety of test development and research projects, including the Aptis test.



Carolyn Westbrook

Now a member of the Assessment Research Group at the British Council, I was previously an Associate Professor in EFL, focusing on teaching & testing Business English, EAP & ESP, and a teacher trainer.



Jonathan Dixon

Hi! I currently work as an Assessment Solutions Consultant in Beijing for the British Council. I've been involved in the ESL industry for 18 yrs, working as a teacher, trainer, manager, and assessor.



Radosveta Valkova

I am an Assessment Solutions Consultant with the EAAST team at the British Council in China. My work experience is quite varied: a project manager, financial consultant, and an English teacher.

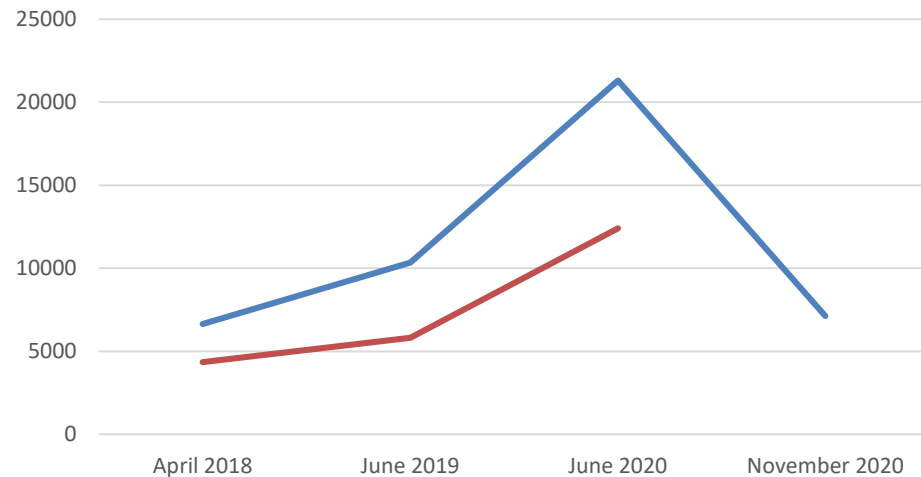


Sheryl Cooke

I work in the area of language assessment for the British Council with a focus on the East Asia region. I'm usually based in Shanghai, China.

Language assessment in the classroom (3)

MOOC Participation



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

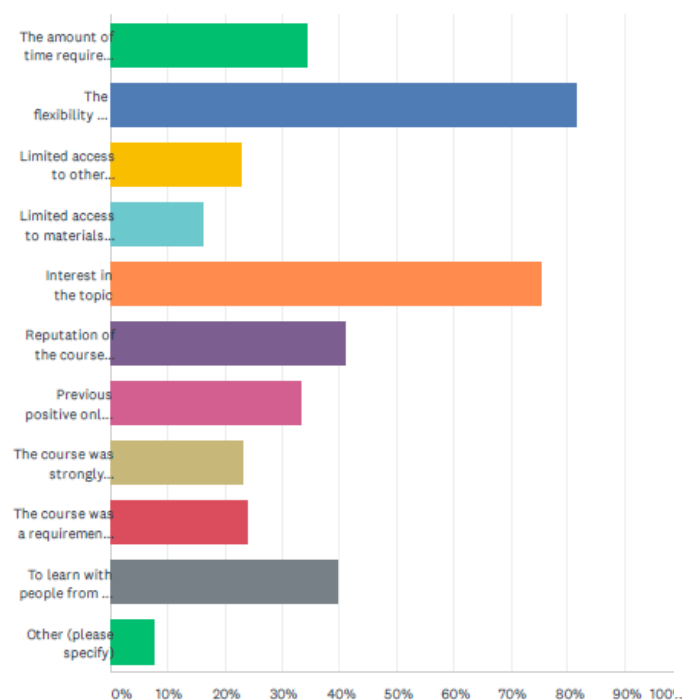
Test evaluation

- 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.

Answered: 1,208 Skipped: 8



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

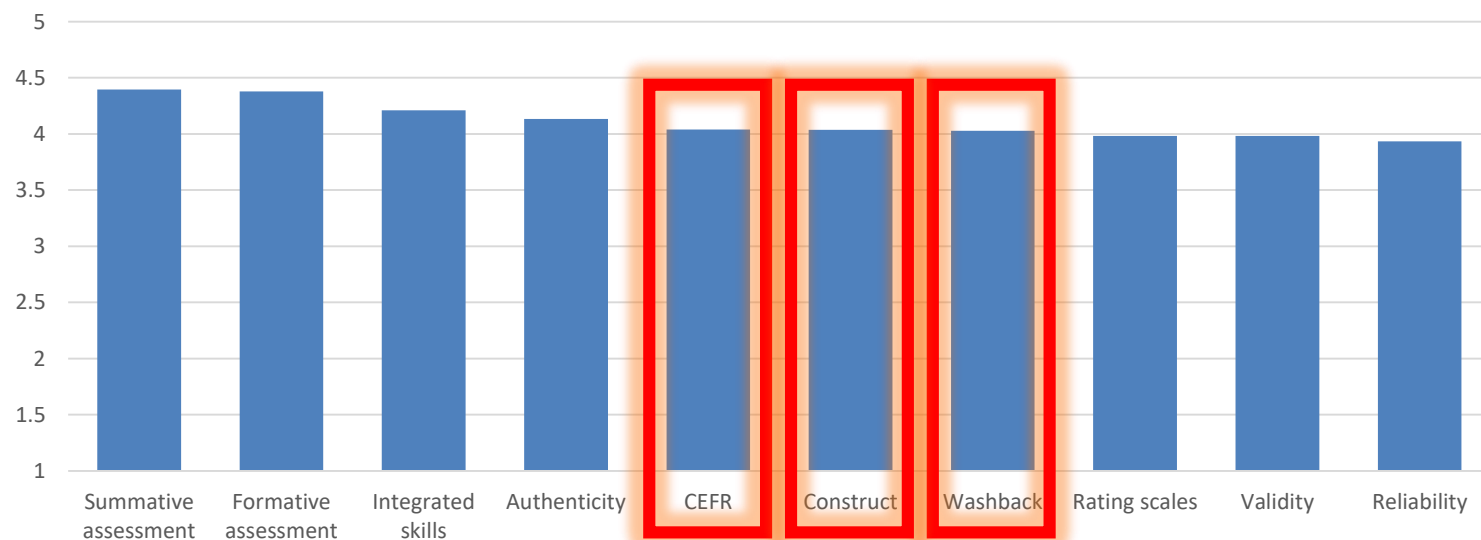
The course was a requirement of my job

To learn with people from 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?



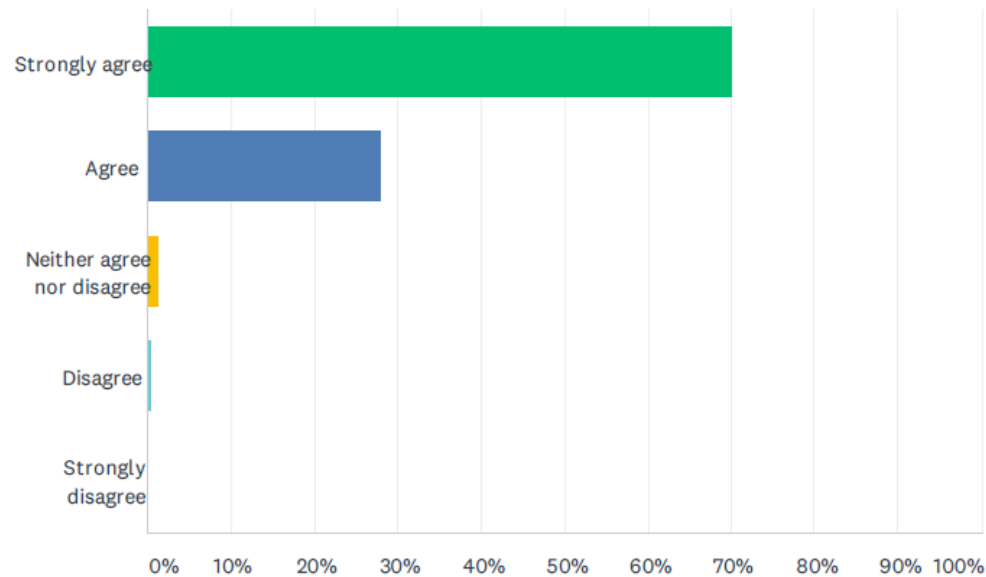
Pre-course
1 Formative assessment
2 Summative assessment
3 Reliability
4 Authenticity
5 Integrated skills
6 Rating scales
7 Validity
8 CEFR
9 Construct
10 Washback

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

Post-course questionnaire

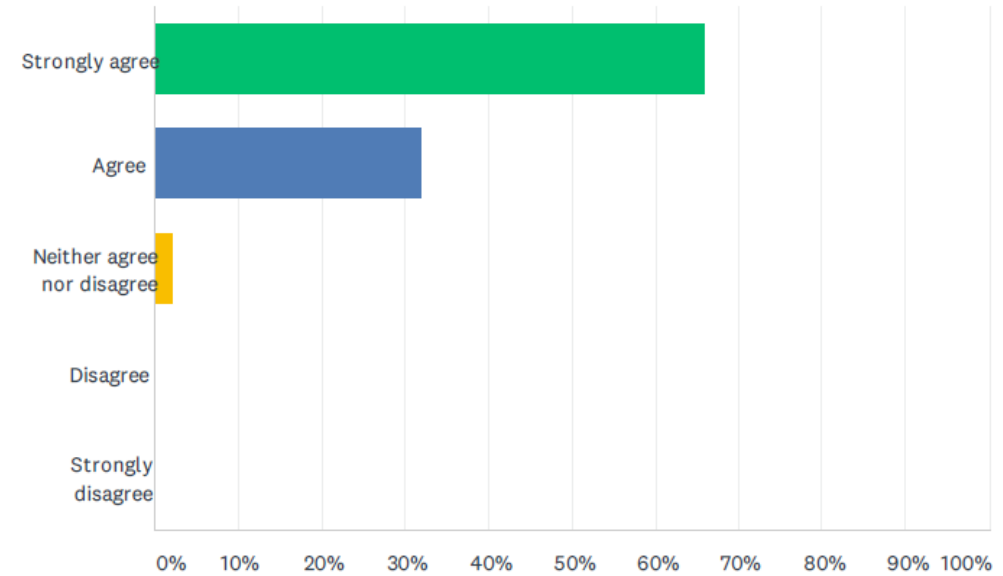
Q8 The language of the course was easy to understand.

Answered: 1,207 Skipped: 9



Q9 The content of the course was easy to understand.

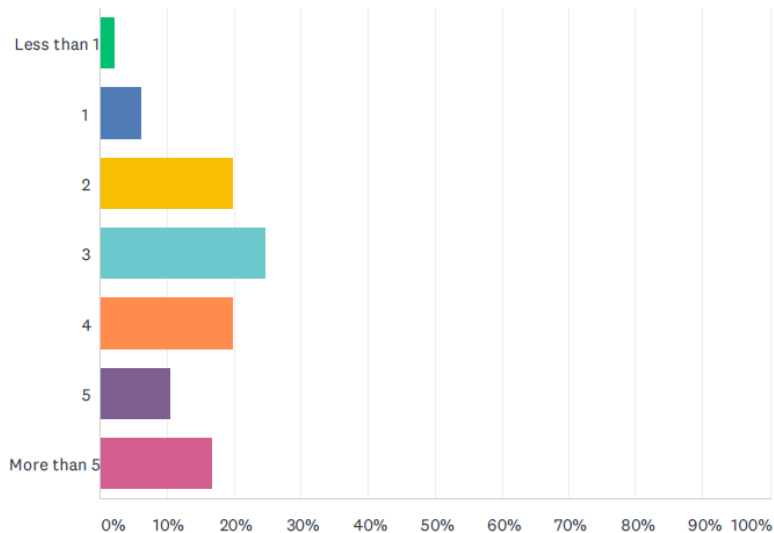
Answered: 1,203 Skipped: 13



Post-course questionnaire

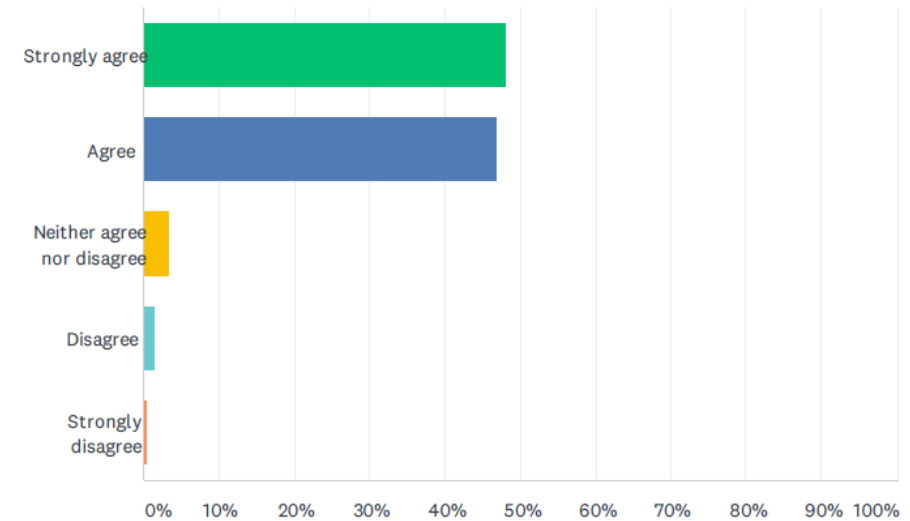
Q12 On average, how many hours per week did you spend on the 4 weeks of this course?

Answered: 1,203 Skipped: 13



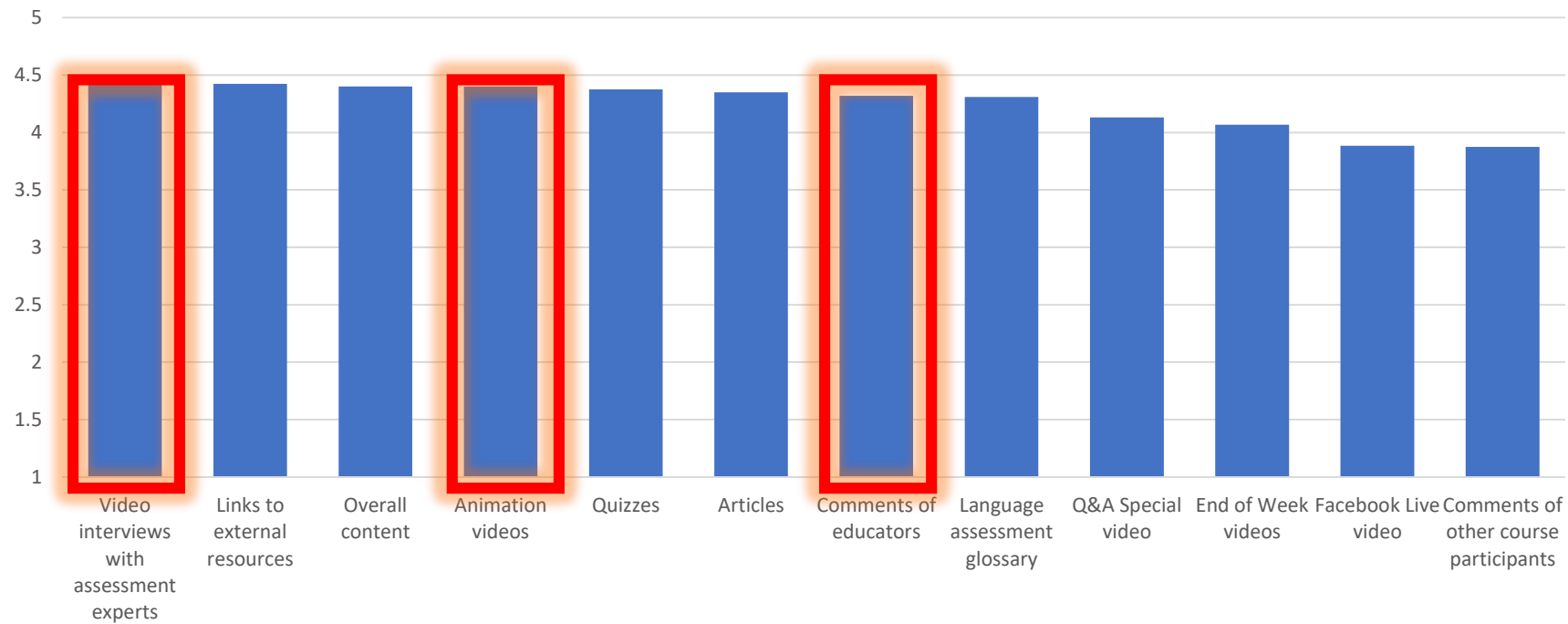
Q13 The amount of time I needed to spend on this course was acceptable to me.

Answered: 1,201 Skipped: 15



Post-course questionnaire

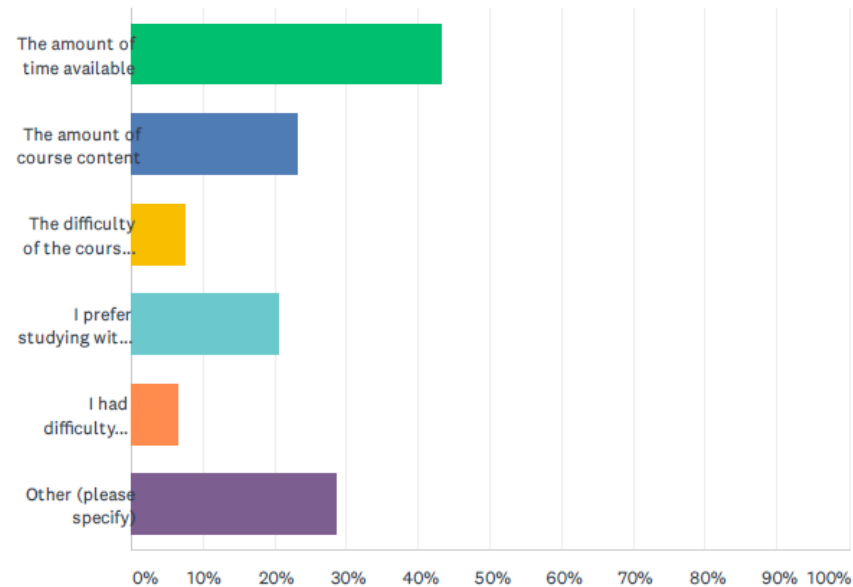
How useful did you find the following aspects of the course?



Post-course questionnaire

Q22 What were some of the challenges that you faced on the course?
Choose all the options which apply to you.

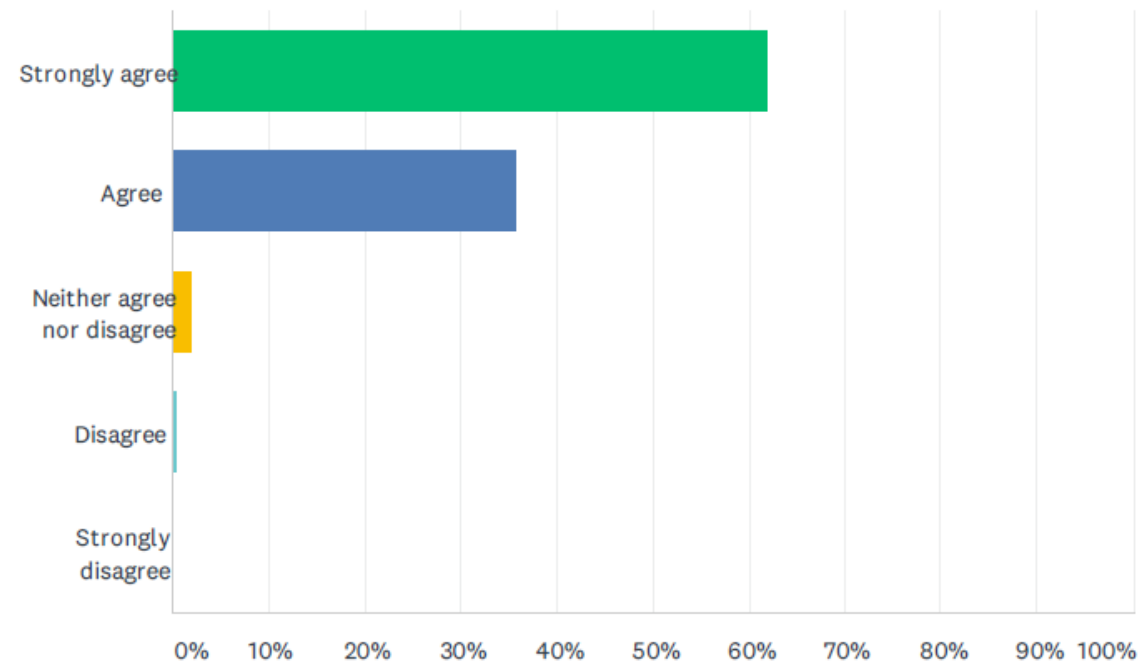
Answered: 1,138 Skipped: 78



Post-course questionnaire

Q17 I found the course interesting overall.

Answered: 1,202 Skipped: 14



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?

“Maybe separate courses for primary and secondary assessments (lots of the information was too detailed for what I require at primary level)?”

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)
-



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 see them being read and replied.”



Few comments explicitly about the pandemic

“Had time on my hands during Covid-19, this course sounded good - and it is!

“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 not know before) with my teaching via learning platform and power point presentations”



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 ...

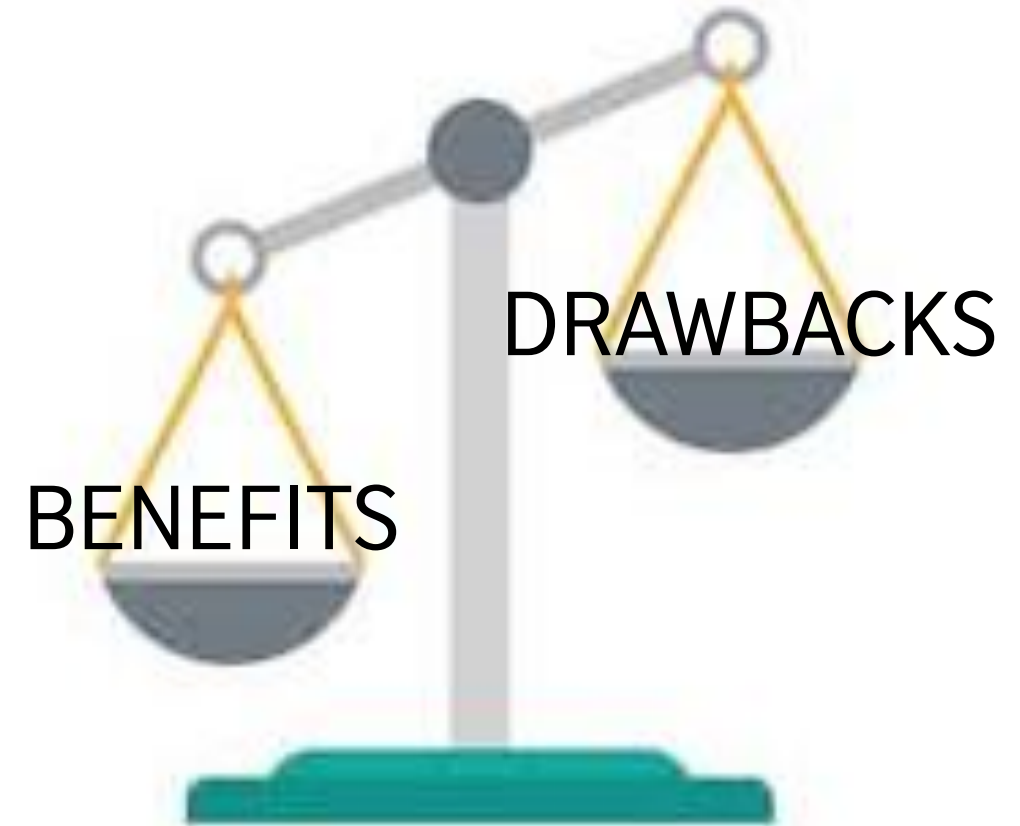


- ❖ ... cost a lot of time and effort on the part of the moderators

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!

Richard Spiby richard.spiby@britishcouncil.org

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/assessment-group>

LAL at the British Council



How
Language
assessment
works

$$\alpha = \frac{n}{n-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n S_i^2}{S_t^2} \right)$$

How Language Assessment Works

Assessing Speaking

Participant Notes



 **LEARN HOW TO DESIGN RELIABLE CLASSROOM TESTS** 



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LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT IN THE CLASSROOM**

**AN A TO Z OF SECOND LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT:
HOW LANGUAGE TEACHERS UNDERSTAND ASSESSMENT CONCEPTS**

Edited by Christine Coombe



LAL at the British Council



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The 8th TALE meeting – Nicosia
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The 7th TALE meeting – Heidelberg



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.



Supported by
the Erasmus+ programme
of the European Union

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