

A Reflection on Initiatives for Teachers' Professional Development Through Language Assessment Literacy

Una reflexión sobre iniciativas para el desarrollo profesional docente mediante la literacidad en evaluación de lenguas

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In this reflection article I examine language assessment literacy initiatives and their possible impact on teachers, and I discuss the connections that exist between language assessment literacy and teachers' professional development. I explain that training for language assessment literacy may primarily foster teachers' knowledge and skills and, secondarily, principles for language assessment (e.g., fairness). In conclusion, existing language assessment literacy initiatives, while limited in number, have the potential to advance teachers' language assessment literacy overall and contribute to their professional development. Thus, this article may be useful to language teacher educators, particularly in the Colombian context.

Keywords: language assessment literacy, language testing and assessment, professional development programs, teachers' professional development, teacher training

En este artículo de reflexión examino las iniciativas que han surgido alrededor de la literacidad en evaluación de lenguas y su posible impacto en la docencia. Asimismo, establezco la relación entre dicha literacidad y el desarrollo profesional docente, y explico cómo la capacitación en este ámbito se ha enfocado, primero que todo, en el conocimiento y las habilidades y, seguidamente, en los principios de evaluación de lenguas (por ejemplo, la justicia). En conclusión, las iniciativas existentes en la literatura, si bien son pocas, podrían fomentar la literacidad de evaluación de docentes de idiomas y, así, contribuir a su desarrollo profesional. Por ello, este artículo puede ser útil para formadores de profesores, en particular en el contexto colombiano.

Palabras clave: capacitación docente, desarrollo profesional docente, evaluación de lenguas, literacidad en evaluación de lenguas, programas de desarrollo profesional

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Introduction

Language assessment literacy (LAL) is one of the most recent discussions in the area of language testing. Research in this specific aspect of the field has gained increasing attention since Davies's (2008) review of language testing textbooks and what they aim to teach. Davies concludes that textbooks revolve around three components: knowledge, skills, and principles for language testing. Particularly, current discussions in LAL include the need that various stakeholders (e.g., teachers, students, language testers, and others) have to deal with language assessment. An appropriate context-sensitive level of LAL can allow these stakeholders to derive sound interpretations to make appropriate decisions based on scores from assessment. Specifically, LAL is needed across a range of contexts and people because language assessment plays a prominent role in educational and social contexts (Fulcher, 2010). Finally, at a more fine-grained level, scholarly work on LAL has attempted to define what this construct is, and authors have proposed definitions and models to operationalize LAL. Because of the discussions that LAL has triggered, this construct is necessarily expanding, with calls being made to include stakeholders such as students and school administrators (Malone, 2017) and to provide specific competencies of LAL for teachers (Stabler-Havener, 2018).

In fact, language teachers have been a central stakeholder group in the LAL puzzle. The research for these agents of language assessment has, most prominently, examined their practices, received training, and specific needs in LAL (Frodden Armstrong et al., 2004; Fulcher, 2012; Hasselgreen et al., 2004; López Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Authors have also offered insights into what shape LAL should have for language teachers (Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2013b). In synthesis, language teachers' LAL comprises a wide range of knowledge, skills, and principles, some examples of which are presented in the following list:

Knowledge of

- models describing language ability;
- key concepts, (e.g., validity, reliability, and authenticity);
- language pedagogy;
- second language acquisition theories;
- bilingual issues.

Skills in

- the design of instruments for assessing language skills;
- connecting language assessment and instruction;
- statistical interpretation and calculation;
- planning, implementation, and evaluation of assessments;
- reporting interpretations from language assessment to various users.

Principles for

- guarding language assessment against misuses;
- treating students fairly;
- using language assessment data ethically;
- evaluating the quality of language assessment procedures;
- bringing about positive consequences for student learning.

Because of its width and depth, a major impetus in researching teachers' LAL is warranted in the near future. For example, the field is still debating what exactly the LAL for teachers can and should be (Stabler-Havener, 2018). Thus, construct operationalization is ongoing, specifically because language assessment is naturally responsive to the contexts where teachers do their work (Hill, 2017; Scarino, 2013). Notwithstanding the need for further research, a trend is evident in the literature: Scholars in language testing suggest and expect that teachers have a wide repertoire in LAL, and language teachers themselves have reported burning needs in a wide variety of issues for professional development in language assessment, as I discuss below.

The call for teachers to have appropriate levels of LAL is sensible. They are the ones most directly and frequently involved in collecting data about their

students' language ability. As commented, they claim they need to increase their LAL across the board, and the call for this to happen is constant. Thus, the need for professional development in LAL is ever present.

My purpose with the present reflection, then, is to offer language teacher educators in Colombia a reflection and synthesis of existing initiatives for language teachers' LAL and, especially, focus on how they seem to help language teachers develop professionally in the area of language assessment. To make the analysis useful to teacher educators, I have divided the reflection into five sections. The first part is about the meaning of professional development in language teaching and its relation with LAL. Then, I review particulars of how assessment literacy and LAL have been defined, and I provide a synthesis of LAL specifics for language teachers. In the third section I examine studies that report teachers' needs in language assessment, followed by a review of trends in LAL initiatives to foster this construct. I end the paper by explaining how initiatives for LAL and language teachers' professional development intersect.

Professional Development in Language Teaching

In general terms, professional development is considered a reflection-based approach to teachers' improvement in language education. Various authors (Díaz-Maggioli,

2004; Farrell, 2013; Freeman, 1989) generally contrast professional development with training, arguing that the former seeks to empower teachers to become reflective and proactive towards their work as teachers; training, on the other hand, is related to specifics and technicalities of the teaching profession (Farrell, 2013; Richards & Farrell, 2005). More recently, Farrell (2013) warns that teachers should not be recipients of top-down professional development by outside experts but become engaged in what he calls bottom-up professional development; this approach is more akin to teachers' context of teaching. Farrell defines professional development as "a continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth of teachers" (p. 22). In conclusion, the consensus seems to be that professional development, rather than training, is the goal of teacher education. However, as might become apparent later in this article, teachers in LAL initiatives have been recipients of training, which may also involve professional development.

To promote professional development, authors have agreed on a number of principles upon which professional development programs are designed and their types. Table 1, by no means an exhaustive list, includes features that scholars have suggested for effective professional development (Atay, 2008; Cárdenas et al., 2010; Castañeda-Londoño, 2017; Clarke, 2003; Díaz-Maggioli, 2004; González, 2007; Johnston, 2009).

Table 1. Principles and Types of Professional Development Programs

Principles	Types
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • based on context-specific needs of teachers; • based on reflection, collaboration, observation, feedback, and change; • responsive to and respectful of teachers' voices; • receiving explicit and sustained institutional support (e.g., time to be in workshops). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • study groups; • collaborative action-research; • reflective writing, (e.g., in journal entries or narrative inquiry); • group discussions; • formal professional development programs administered by institutions; • narrative inquiries; • blended learning.

Undoubtedly, the task of doing language assessment is part of teachers' practices. Thus, furthering their professional development must also involve close attention to how and why teachers do language assessment (Giraldo, 2020; Hill, 2017; Scarino, 2013). In fact, principles such as delivering professional development programs based on teachers' needs and providing sustained support are echoed in LAL discussions (Brindley, 2001; Inbar-Lourie, 2008). Importantly, for LAL programs to happen, the construct of LAL needs to be operationalized. Next, then, is an overview of what assessment literacy and LAL mean.

Assessment Literacy, LAL, and Language Teachers' LAL

In general education, the term assessment literacy is attributed to Stiggins (1991). He defined assessment literacy as the knowledge and ability necessary to use and evaluate assessments effectively to account for student learning. More specifically, teachers' general assessment literacy has been operationalized through standards proposed by the American Federation of Teachers et al. (1990). The standards cover a range of issues in assessment, from using and designing assessments and their results, to criticizing uses and misuses of assessment.

Similarly, LAL comprises these generic competencies but, clearly, the term *language* differentiates LAL from assessment literacy (Inbar-Lourie, 2012). Because LAL is an ongoing issue in language testing, the construct has embraced multiple shades of meaning. For instance, it is agreed that LAL includes knowledge, skills, and principles for language assessment (Davies, 2008; Inbar-Lourie, 2008). However, teachers' LAL has taken a rather granular level. Inbar-Lourie (2013b) claims that their LAL should include the following elements:

1. Understanding of the social role of assessment and the responsibility of the language tester. Understanding of the political [and] social forces involved, test power and consequences. (p. 27)

2. Knowledge on how to write, administer and analyze tests; report test results and ensure test quality. (p. 32)
3. Understanding of large scale test data. (p. 33)
4. Proficiency in Language Classroom Assessment. (p. 36)
5. Mastering language acquisition and learning theories and relating to them in the assessment process. (p. 39)
6. Matching assessment with language teaching approaches. Knowledge about current language teaching approaches and pedagogies. (p. 41)
7. Awareness of the dilemmas that underlie assessment: formative vs. summative; internal external; validity and reliability issues particularly with reference to authentic language use. (p. 45)
8. LAL is individualized, the product of the knowledge, experience, perceptions, and beliefs that language teachers bring to the teaching and assessment process (based on Scarino, 2013). (p. 46)

As can be discerned from the list above, language assessment is far-reaching in teachers' professional development, so it cannot be understudied in language teacher education, as research has shown (López Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009; Sultana, 2019; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Additionally, LAL may be a catalyst of reflection in professional development, especially because it can have an impact on technical aspects (i.e., design of assessments), people, and institutions. In fact, Fulcher's (2012) empirical definition of LAL for language teachers highlights these areas:

The knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardized 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. The ability to place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order to understand why practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals. (p. 125)

As the definitions above clearly suggest, much is expected of language teachers. Most importantly, perhaps, is that these authors do not conceive assessment as an afterthought but rather something that underlies language teachers' professional development. For instance, both authors agree that teachers need to be aware of and evaluate how assessment impacts society; I argue that this implies a reflective stance natural to professional development. However, the authors also highlight the technical aspect of assessment (e.g., the act of design) as a fundamental part of LAL. This, as I will show, reflects the training aspect of LAL: One that requires detailed knowledge and skills for sound practices. It seems then that LAL for teachers should conceive both training (i.e., study of operational skills for assessment) and development (e.g., reflection upon the impact testing can have). Studies that have tapped into language teachers' needs for LAL have suggested this dual approach. In the next section, then, I review studies that support this contention.

Teachers' Perceived Training and Needs in LAL

Most of the research to date on teachers' LAL has focused on describing their perceived training and needs. Consistently, studies have indicated that these stakeholders feel unprepared for doing language assessment and this has remained a trend in the literature (Berry et al., 2017; Hasselgreen et al., 2004; Lam, 2015; Lan & Fan, 2019; Tavassoli & Farhady, 2018; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). Considering their lack of LAL, when asked about further training, teachers express needs regarding theoretical and technical aspects, with secondary attention to critical issues such as the impact of testing on social communities (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018; Fulcher, 2012; Lam, 2015; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). Overall, their needs reflect Davies's (2008) components: knowledge, skills, and principles. The studies also remark, perhaps naturally, on the need for emphasis on classroom-based language assessment, as opposed to large-scale

testing. However, as Vogt and Tsagari (2014) argue, teachers should become critical towards the power that large-scale tests have and their impact on the language classroom; here it is worth remembering that Fulcher's (2012) definition of LAL also connects language teachers to evaluating large-scale testing.

While the trends above—especially lack of training—are common to LAL research across various regions in the world, studies have also shown some specificities. For example, Xie and Tan (2019) studied the perceived needs of both practicing and preservice teachers on the verge of becoming in-service ones. The results in this study indicated that preservice teachers felt prepared for assessing speaking and writing and for adapting their assessment practices based on students' needs. The authors, citing DeLuca and Klinger (2010), claim that this attitude could be considered unrealistic optimism and that perhaps the preservice teachers did not really envision the complexities of doing assessment in context. Further, in a study on teachers' assessment literacy related to assessing writing, Crusan et al. (2016) found that teachers generally reported themselves as being able to deal with the task of assessing writing; however, they expressed specific needs in rubric creation. Lastly, Giraldo and Murcia's (2018) study with preservice teachers pointed towards a specific aspect that may impact LAL. When asked about what to learn in a language assessment course, these stakeholders expressly expected attention to general assessment policies in Colombian education.

Two crucial aspects about the findings in these studies warrant analysis. Clearly, language teachers and LAL researchers agree on the burning need to foster higher levels of LAL. More importantly—and I believe this marks a central call—the studies emphasize the need for language assessment courses to be foundational in language teacher education programs. Authors have repeatedly called for this emphasis (Herrera & Macías, 2015; Lam, 2015; López Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009). Language assessment should not be studied

superficially; if such is the case, teachers might have to resort to learning about language assessment on the job through experience and contextual factors (Berry et al., 2017; Vogt & Tsigari, 2014; Xie & Tan, 2019; Yan et al., 2018). I would like to think language education programs in Colombia are increasingly becoming more adept towards embracing core courses for language assessment; if so, then they should disseminate their practices for interested stakeholders to learn from these experiences.

The other crucial aspect is that the studies above suggest the need for training more than the need for professional development. In other words, teachers seem to want more LAL for operational purposes rather than for reflective ones. For instance, quantitative surveys consistently show higher percentages when it comes to tasks such as designing language assessments or knowledge of theoretical aspects (e.g., validity and reliability; Brown & Bailey, 2008; Fulcher, 2012). However, teachers do not explicitly report the need to study ethics and fairness in language assessment (Giraldo & Murcia, 2018; Harding & Kremmel, 2016; Vogt & Tsigari, 2014); arguably, these topics may spark more reflection than technicalities and therefore be more aligned with what professional development represents. Perhaps teachers take these issues as relevant to their teaching in general, and this is why they do not report any need in these aspects for language assessment. Additionally, ethics and fairness are mostly discussed in large-scale testing and are under-researched in classroom language assessment. Thus, these two principles could lead to interesting discussions if included in professional development programs for teachers' LAL, but this may imply a judgment call by teacher educators.

Since teachers report various needs in language assessment, this represents a challenge and an opportunity for teacher educators to foster LAL. The next section, then, discusses trends in initiatives that seek to help language teachers to improve their LAL. The section focuses on proposed foci for LAL programs

to help teachers learn about language assessment; an overview of self-access materials; and finally, a review of formal programs (e.g., workshops) for teachers.

LAL Initiatives

Self-Access Materials

Self-access materials for fostering LAL can be divided into three kinds: textbooks for language testing, scientific journals, and other online resources. On the one hand are textbooks for language testing. Some of these resources can be somewhat theoretical but there is an increasing call to make them more practical for language teachers. For example, Fulcher's book (2010) is based on feedback given by language teachers as to what they would expect from a language testing book. The practical book by Carr (2011) offers practitioners the opportunity to study basic measurement with the use of Excel; Brown's (2011) has a similar approach. Of course, these resources explore common theoretical aspects such as validity and authenticity. Finally, these textbooks also include guidelines for constructing assessments and they explore the social aspect of language testing, particularly the works by Fulcher and Carr. (For reviews on textbooks for language testing, see Brown & Bailey, 2008; Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; and Malone, 2017.)

While many of these textbooks include practical exercises with answer keys, a challenge may be that teachers do not get feedback from more knowledgeable peers. Teachers get what is offered in the book only. Another possible challenge is the books' relatively high cost, but this of course depends on personal budget. Besides, various textbooks can be bought online, so the problem of not having access to specialized bookstores can be overcome.

Publications such as journal articles or research reports, though in many cases technical, can be a second source for LAL. Publications such as *Language Testing*, *Language Assessment Quarterly*, *Papers in Language Testing and Assessment*, and *Studies in Language Testing*

are particularly written for an expert audience of language testers and applied linguists. Occasionally, they have articles with a more practical approach. However, more general journals in language education include language assessment articles that have teachers as their audience. Table 2 lists some journals that include articles on language assessment that do not generally require advanced knowledge of the field.

To find articles in these journals, teachers can access the links and use a search bar. Then, they can type keywords (or combinations thereof) to find relevant articles, for example: *assessment*, *portfolio*, *peer assessment*, *testing reading*, *exam*, and so on. Many universities pay to have access to journals, so if teachers have an official university email account, they may be

able access their universities' paid online databases to find the journals above and others.

A last type of self-access materials in this review are those delivered online. Some of these require teachers to pay a fee, but there are others that teachers can access for free. I will focus on four that can be used at no cost.

The British Council's *How Language Assessment Works* (<https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/assessment-literacy>) is a video-based exploration of key qualities and issues in language assessment like test development and validity, the assessment of language skills, and others. This resource also includes a PDF for teachers to study the glossary about language assessment (Coombe, 2018). This resource can be used to target the *knowledge* side of LAL (Davies, 2008).

Table 2. Some Journals With Teacher-Oriented Articles on Language Testing and Assessment

Journals	Fee required	Open access
<i>ELT Journal</i> (https://academic.oup.com/eltj)	X	
<i>TESOL Quarterly</i> (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/15457249)	X	
<i>TESOL Journal</i> (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/19493533)	X	
<i>The Journal of Asia TEFL</i> (http://journal.asiatefl.org/)		X
<i>English Teaching Forum</i> (https://americanenglish.state.gov/forum)		X
<i>Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura</i> (http://aprendeenlinea.udea.edu.co/revistas/index.php/ikala)		X
<i>Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development</i> (https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile)		X
<i>HOW Journal</i> (https://www.howjournalcolombia.org/index.php/how)		X
<i>Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal</i> (https://revistas.udistrital.edu.co/index.php/calj)		X

Understanding Assessment (<http://www.cal.org/flad/tutorial/>), developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics, is a resource where teachers can explore language testing issues such as practicality and reliability. It includes an online glossary and a link to external resources for LAL. However, some of these external materials no longer exist. The information is presented through examples and has an interactive component that asks users to reflect on questions before they see suggested answers. This resource may also be considered on the *knowledge* side of LAL.

The *Teachers' Assessment Literacy Enhancement Project* (TALE) is a comprehensive resource for teachers which has a downloadable handbook (Tzagari et al., 2018) that teachers and teacher educators can print and refer to whenever needed. The handbook covers issues such as purposes, methods, and constructs for assessment. It also provides sample items and tasks for teachers to evaluate and extra suggested sources for LAL. Importantly, the handbook also engages users in examining test impact as it underlies assessment practices. Thus, the handbook targets LAL at large: knowledge, skills, and principles.

Additionally, TALE provides users with eight open courses for language assessment. To access them, teachers need a user account. The courses cover the same areas as the handbook but teachers can provide feedback to course tasks. Another advantage is that the courses include embedded videos that illustrate topics in assessment. The TALE project is arguably one of the most complete free resources for practitioners to thoroughly learn about language assessment at large (<http://taleproject.eu/>).

Glenn Fulcher's *Language Testing Resources Website* (<http://languagetesting.info/>) can also aid in developing LAL. This website offers numerous articles about language testing and includes videos and podcasts in which scholars offer definitions for concepts such as test impact, validity, integrated skills, and others. Although the contents may be

theoretical for practicing language teachers, the materials are curated by an expert (Fulcher) and thus offer reliable information. Finally, Fulcher frequently updates the site with relevant news articles and recent publications.

To date, there are no published reports that trace the effect of these free online resources on their users. Thus, the extent to which they impact teachers' LAL, and their professional development, is currently unknown. However, Tzagari et al. (2018) explain that, by accessing TALE's courses, teachers express their consent on data usage for research purposes. This means there might be official reports, at least of this program.

Professional Development Programs for LAL

The focus in this section is on research studies that sought to target specific aspects of language teachers' LAL, from only *knowledge*, to *knowledge, skills, and principles*. Table 3 includes information about the type of professional development program the teachers were engaged in, the topics and/or tasks that formed the contents of the programs, and the most salient learning points in the studies. To find these studies, I consulted specialized journals (e.g., *Language Assessment Quarterly*) and local journals in Colombia. The main criteria for selecting the studies was that they had to explicitly report (a) initiatives in which teachers studied language assessment and (b) clearly reported results from these programs.

Several commonalities may be discerned in the studies below. Except for Giraldo and Murcia (2019), the professional development initiatives did not last long periods of time but a week (for example, Baker & Riches, 2017) or three weeks (Kremmel et al., 2018), or even a few hours (Boyd & Donnarumma, 2018). The reason for this can be traced to a second commonality: All studies, except Giraldo and Murcia, involved in-service teachers who were not taking official courses and naturally were doing their in-service work.

Table 3. Studies Reporting the Impact of Professional Development Programs on Teachers' Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)

Publication	Type of Program	Focus of LAL	Main Results Impacting LAL
Nier et al. (2009)	Blended learning course	Knowledge and skills: key concepts; task and rubric development; assessing culture	Participants expanded their understanding of assessment.
Walters (2010)	Workshops	Skills and principles: standards reversed engineering, item specifications; critical analysis of items and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in critical awareness regarding standards and performance indicators for English language learning. • Awareness of possible connections between standards and indicators, and test items.
Arias et al. (2012)	Collaborative action research	Knowledge and skills: communicative language ability, key concepts (e.g., validity and reliability), design of instruments for speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better articulation between formative and summative practices • Rigorous design of instruments • Reliable practices • Higher levels of interactiveness in alternative assessments • High content validity in instruments • Greater inter-rater reliability. • Transparent practices thanks to rigorous rubrics • Fair and democratic assessment practices
Baker & Riches (2017)	A series of workshops that lasted one week.	Knowledge (superficially), skills, and principles: key concepts (e.g., validity and reliability); writing test items and tasks for reading, vocabulary, grammar, and writing; analyzing sample test items; doing student-centered assessment	<p>Participants in this study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • became critical towards large-scale test items used in their country; • learned how to create questions for reading comprehension; • described intricate constructs for reading assessments, that is, from superficial understanding to inferences; • became aware of the importance of vocabulary tasks for teaching and assessment; • learned how to design test items in grammar, vocabulary, and writing by having texts as their base; • connected teaching and assessment; • developed a more formative view of assessment; • became aware of the existence of key concepts such as validity and reliability; and • had difficulties sharing and/or accepting ideas from other workshop participants.

Publication	Type of Program	Focus of LAL	Main Results Impacting LAL
Boyd & Donnarumma (2018)	One three-hour workshop	Knowledge and skills: assessment purposes; traditional and alternative assessment; communicative competence as a construct; validity, reliability, and other assessment qualities; guidelines for the design of test items	<p>Participants in this study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developed confidence to judge the validity of a test; • became aware of how students may react to assessments; • learned to identify poorly designed test items (e.g., questions); • connected test preparation and learner performance; • realized they needed further training for writing multiple-choice questions and judging writing and/or speaking performance; and • raised awareness on the importance and complexity of testing.
Kremmel et al. (2018)	Training for teachers as item writers. Three workshop weeks each year, for three years in a row.	Mainly skills: test specifications; using oral texts for listening; tasks for writing and items for listening; rating scales; item and task evaluation; improvement of tasks and items after trials; benchmarking	<p>Participants in this study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learned mostly about item and task development (writing and evaluation); designing test specifications; test development (e.g., stages); test selection; validity, practicality, and reliability • related knowledge for large-scale testing to their own classroom assessment.
Giraldo & Murcia (2019)	Language assessment course for preservice teachers (16 weeks, 4 hours weekly)	Knowledge, skills, and principles: qualities such as validity, reliability, and authenticity; design of items for listening and reading; design of tasks for writing and speaking; communicative language testing; ethics and fairness; general assessment policies in Colombia	<p>Participants in this study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • radically changed conceptions: They went from a grade-only view to a broader conception of assessment. • developed a sophisticated metalanguage to analyze and critique assessment and assessment instruments • became aware of the intricacy involved in designing assessments (i.e., items and tasks) • connected their developing LAL to their practicum experience

As explained earlier, scholars have urged teacher educators to have a contextual, needs-based approach to professional development programs. Arias et al. (2012) and Giraldo and Murcia (2019) completed studies that directly align with this principle. In Walters (2010), the study was based on teachers' context but there is no explicit reference to their needs or institutional context in his research. In Baker and Riches (2017), the authors asked teachers about standardized examinations in Haiti *before* the workshop took place, but the authors do not report having planned the workshop based on teacher feedback, although it may be sensible to think they did. Finally, the remaining studies do not report how the professional development programs were planned but rather focus on how they were delivered. This does not mean these programs do not align with professional development principles at all. For example, Kremmel et al. (2018) had teachers carefully analyze and improve test items and tasks, which required consistent reflection. Additionally, these programs respected teachers' voices to analyze language assessment issues (Boyd & Donnarumma, 2018; Nier et al. 2009; Walters, 2010): Teachers had the chance to criticize policies for language learning, increased their awareness of language assessment, and reflected on how language assessment impacts students.

Lastly, most of the initiatives mainly focused on the *knowledge + skills* side of language testing (Davies, 2008). In other words, emphasis was placed on the nuts and bolts of testing, but the programs did not explicitly target critical issues such as ethics and fairness, or the social impact of language assessment. In this respect, Kremmel et al. (2018) clearly state that this was not the focus of the training they provided. Conversely, principles such as fairness and transparency were pivotal in Arias et al. (2012). These authors in fact highlight these principles as major findings in their study. Interestingly, the findings in Giraldo and Murcia (2019) do not refer to ethics and fairness, even though these were central contents in their LAL program. Thus, it remains unclear

whether students in Giraldo and Murcia became aware of these issues in language assessment.

Three conclusions are worth highlighting. Not only did these initiatives teach specific aspects of language assessment (e.g., validity), but they helped teachers become more critical towards their practices or assessment systems. For example, in Baker and Riches (2017), the participating teachers became critical towards the way standardized tests are designed; also, in Walters (2010), teachers criticized test items and their relationship, or lack thereof, with standards for learning English. Finally, the participants in Boyd and Donnarumma (2018) aligned knowledge of high-stakes testing to how they involve students in assessment; additionally, these teachers identified strengths and gaps in their learning. Thus, explicit training in language assessment can have the potential to lead to reflection, a major feature of professional development.

The second conclusion refers to the connection between teachers' needs and the development of their LAL. As commented above, teachers mainly report they need training in practical matters of language assessment. The studies in Table 3 seem to align well with such needs. This trend may be another reason why principles are not generally featured in LAL initiatives. Notice, however, that Giraldo and Murcia's (2019) study did include explicit attention to principles; the authors explain that this was a judgment call in their diagnostic study (Giraldo & Murcia, 2018) rather than something the preservice teachers needed or expected. Similarly, Arias et al. (2012) explicitly addressed principles in language assessment, with corresponding positive effects. In this case, however, the authors deliberately included these aspects, because, in an earlier study, they found unsystematic and invalid practices (see Arias Toro & Maturana Patarroyo, 2005) and therefore had compelling reasons to address principles.

Finally, some of the studies targeted LAL within a wider social context. Baker and Riches (2017), Boyd and Donnarumma (2018), and Kremmel et al. (2018)

educated teachers in their studies by having socially impactful tests (i.e., high-stakes) as points of reference. Walters (2010), similarly, studied items—a small unit of analysis—to scrutinize public standards for English as a second language.

Scoping the Territory: LAL and Professional Development

There are enough empirical and conceptual arguments to highlight LAL as a crucial aspect of language teachers' professional development. The call, as commented elsewhere, has been constant and emphatic. Only recently, however, the answer to cultivating teachers' LAL has gained impetus, but current resources and programs for LAL have clear potential to foster teachers' LAL.

Whereas several resources for LAL development require fees, there are other available materials teachers can use on their own. Some of the latter I have reviewed in this paper. Fortunately, they may be considered of high quality since they are developed by experts. Thus, one recommendation for teacher educators and teachers in general is to explore these initiatives and personally reflect on how they impact and help to advance LAL.

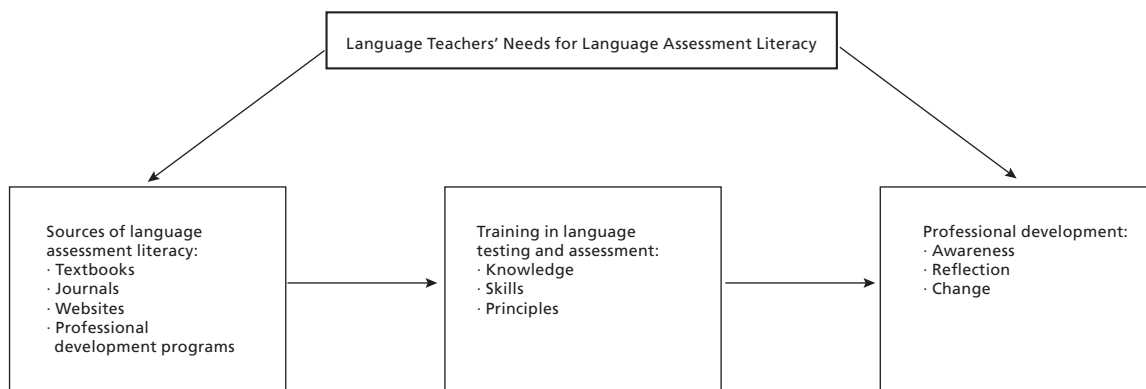
Language teachers' self-reported needs in language assessment have tended to relate to *skills + knowledge*. Fortunately, the resources and programs reviewed in

this paper have responded to these needs. What seems to be a revealing trend is that as teachers are engaged in technical aspects of language testing, their institutional and broader social contexts come to play a role. Consequently, it can be argued that training in language assessment leads to reflection, an expected feature of teachers' professional development in language education. In other words, as teachers are studying the design and nature of instruments, they may become aware of the social implications of language assessment.

As for the professional development programs reviewed (see Table 3), they are, perhaps not surprisingly, well received among teachers and exert positive change overall. Most importantly, teachers in professional development programs, as the studies report, tend to connect learning about language assessment to their general teaching and their students' learning. It is unfortunate, however, that few programs for language teachers' professional development in LAL are reported in journals (see more in the Limitations section below). More experiences should be made available to further fuel the LAL discussion (Inbar-Lourie, 2013a).

Figure 1 shows the relationship between LAL and professional development, as I have discussed it in this paper.

Figure 1. Relation Between Language Assessment Literacy and Professional Development



The needs language teachers express regarding LAL seem to be starting points for initiatives to happen. This decision makes sense and is consonant with principles for professional development in general; that is, professional development in language education is receptive of teachers' needs and contexts. For example, Fulcher's (2010) textbook for language testing, Tsagari et al.'s (2018) TALE, Arias et al.'s (2012) professional development program, and Giraldo and Murcia's (2018, 2019) course are all based on thick descriptions of teachers' needs. This means some of the sources for LAL presented in Figure 1 are informed by teachers' life-worlds (Scarino, 2013).

Taken together, the sources of LAL are used for training teachers, mostly in *knowledge* and *skills* and with some emerging attention to *principles*. Thus, training programs lead to professional development as teachers reflect on and raise awareness of what language assessment means (Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Nier et al., 2009), how language assessment impacts or relates to learning (Arias et al., 2012; Baker & Riches, 2017; Boyd & Donnarumma, 2018; Kremmel et al., 2018; Walters, 2010), and what positive changes can occur through enhanced LAL (Arias et al., 2012).

Limitations

Two limitations need discussion in this paper. My search for studies on the connection between LAL and professional development was limited to major specialized and general journals, through both paid and open-access sources. However, there may be other studies in less commonly-known journals of which I was unaware at the time I wrote this paper. Thus, language teacher educators interested in reading about LAL initiatives may do their own search to see if more information can be found. Overall, as of 2019, there is a scarcity of research studies that bring LAL and professional development together; notice that Table 3 shows most studies started to appear after 2017. More case studies can be useful to aggregate findings and

lead to conclusions on how programs impact teachers' LAL, especially if they report what methodologies and principles for professional development are used, what contents are included, and what results arise from the experiences.

Another related limitation is that the trends I have highlighted in this paper may not be indicative of LAL initiatives at large. For example, I argue that there is limited emphasis on principles of language assessment, but this needs empirical validation, especially because of the limited available literature. As I commented, studies have recently started to appear, so it seems that research integrating LAL and professional development is and will be ongoing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

LAL definitely contributes to language teachers' professional development; because of this positive impact, it is past time that LAL become a more prominent component of language teacher education programs. Lack of LAL in pre and in-service teachers' professional development may have detrimental effects on their practices and therefore on student learning.

In this reflection paper, I have reported that, in general, language teachers want training in practical and technical aspects of language assessment. When engaged in training, however, teachers may become aware of issues that go beyond practical matters and into critical ones. This seems to connect LAL and professional development but further research is needed to confirm or refute the trend. Because of the needs expressed by teachers, the initiatives upon which I reflected in this paper have responded accordingly. In other words, they have targeted the *knowledge + skills* side of language assessment, though a few others have addressed *principles*.

Overall, there exist valuable, high-quality resources for teachers to improve their LAL levels. The free resources I included in this paper have the added

advantages that they are compiled and designed by experts and can be used however needed or desired. Additionally, if teachers can have the chance to be engaged in official professional development programs for language assessment, then it is likely that they will improve their LAL in general, that is, knowledge, skills, and principles.

Against these conclusions, I first invite language teacher educators to use the highlights in this paper to have a general perspective of how LAL helps with professional development. Along with general principles for professional development programs, these stakeholders can use the resources and insights in this paper to plan and implement programs that can impact teachers' professional development in language assessment.

Teacher educators can also encourage language teachers to use the available resources and customize them for their specific needs; for example, if teachers need to work on the assessment of reading, they can read articles in journals (see Self-Access Materials section and Table 2) or take relevant courses (e.g., in TALE). Also, teachers can use these resources in study groups so they can give and receive feedback on their developing LAL. Collectively, these efforts should lead to language assessment practices and instruments that are based on the theoretical, technical, and critical dimensions of the field.

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