

Book review

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Perspectives on language assessment literacy: Challenges for improved student learning. Sahbi Hidri (Ed). Routledge, New York & Oxon (2021), xiv+291pp. ISBN: 978-0-367-85969-5 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-003-01608-3 (ebk).

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A surging number of studies have been published to look into different stakeholders' language assessment literacy (LAL), a hallmark of successful assessment practices. Among these stakeholders (e.g., teachers, learners, principals, administrators, etc.), while teachers' LAL has been addressed abundantly, LAL of other stakeholders, learners in particular, has been under-researched. The book *Perspectives on language assessment literacy: Challenges for*

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improved student learning edited by Sahbi Hidri has become a refreshing addition to LAL literature to fill this gap. As both a doctoral student and a former EFL teacher, I found this book engaging and enlightening. It provides a venue for learners' voices to be heard in LAL research. It also opens a window for readers to (re)visit the genesis and evolution of LAL and to gain insights into perceptions, practices and contexts of language assessment from the perspectives of both teachers and learners. Besides, this book reports on the contextualised studies on LAL, portraying a complete picture of how LAL is developed and implemented in situated contexts.

The volume features four parts, focusing respectively on theoretical underpinnings of LAL, students' LAL, teachers' LAL and LAL as a mediator between teaching, learning and assessment. It unfolds with theoretical discussions of LAL in Part I (Chapters 1-4). Chapter 1 is an introduction in which the editor pinpoints the relationship between language assessment, teaching, and learning and highlights the significance of LAL for language education. Chapter 2 is a review of LAL studies by Dina Tzagari. It starts with LAL conceptualisation in which LAL components and levels are defined. Then empirical studies on LAL with various stakeholders, particularly with language teachers in different geographic and educational contexts, are synthesised. The conceptual discussion and empirical synthesis foreground methodological issues and participant orientations in the existing LAL

literature. Given that these issues and orientations may pose great challenges to LAL studies, Tzagari proposes a list of future directions, underscoring further research into the relation between generic assessment literacy and LAL in which the language construct needs to be clarified and conceptualised. The review in Chapter 2 demonstrates that stakeholders' LAL is prominent for language teaching, learning, and assessment. The prominence may be ascribed to a shift from traditional language testing to critical language testing. The critical paradigm encourages the use of alternative assessment to promote student learning, which necessitates assessment requirements for language teachers, especially in the English for Academic Purposes context (Chapter 3). Like Chapter 2, Chapter 4 traces back to the origin and expansion of the LAL concept. The study problematises LAL research from three aspects. First, LAL conceptualisation is not operationally defined. Second, LAL teacher education programmes do not cover sufficient assessment-related content. Third, LAL resources fail to strike a balance between assessment theories and practices. As such, Mojtaba Mohammadi and Reza V. Sanavi suggest corresponding approaches to these problems, including the involvement of a broader perspective, such as perspectives of stakeholders other than language teachers.

Enhancing stakeholders' LAL is an essential but thorny task in LAL research. Part II focuses on promoting LAL among learners. In Chapter 5, Abatayo reflects on his practices of engaging students in writing activities to

fine-tune their learning by giving feedback on writing outputs and designing "can-do" statements for students' self-assessment. This reflection is helpful for those who intend to learn how to conduct feedback in EFL classrooms and who expect to advance feedback literacy, one integral part of teacher assessment literacy (Xu & Brown, 2016). Chapter 6 introduces an innovative method, namely, checklists, to develop student teachers' LAL by involving them in assessing undergraduates' speaking and writing performances. Checklists are efficient in student teachers' self- and peer assessment because of their clarity, flexibility, and reader-friendliness in format. Chapter 7 reports how students' IELTS preparation in the United Arab Emirates impacts their scores and mastery of the sub-skills of the test. The mastery of knowledge and the use of IELTS sub-skills contribute to students' LAL development. This empirical study also fills the geographic gap in LAL literature, as described in Chapter 2.

Part III (Chapters 8-10) explores EFL teachers' LAL in diverse contexts. It involves novice university teachers from Turkey (Chapter 8), in-service teachers in the English for Specific Purposes context from Saudi Arabia (Chapter 9), and in-service university teachers from Ukraine (Chapter 10). This part examines teachers' perceptions of assessment concepts and LAL training (Chapter 8) and teacher-made summative assessments (Chapter 10). It also observes teachers' assessment practices like designing assessment criteria or rubrics and using them to assess students' writing (Chapter 9). Studies in this

part have yielded implications for LAL needs among teachers (Chapters 8, 9, 10), an urgent call for teachers' assessment training in pre-service or in-service stages (Chapters 8, 9, 10), and the support for teachers' LAL development from academic institutions (Chapter 10).

Part IV (Chapters 11-13) delves into how LAL is enacted in language teaching, learning, and assessment and how it facilitates the tripartite. For instance, Chapter 11 calls for rectifying the negligence of teaching and assessing students' speaking in the Bahraini context, as speaking assessment is greatly challenging for EFL teachers and students at the tertiary level. Similarly, Chapter 12 uses a case study to illustrate how LAL is utilised to promote the positive washback of a listening proficiency test in Spain. This study corroborates that understanding the impact of assessment on teaching and learning is also one of LAL needs required for language teachers (Taylor, 2013). Uniquely, Chapter 13 explores the feasibility and effectiveness of assessing learners' abilities in a socially interactive way, namely, social interactive assessment. The successful implementation of social interactive assessment relies on assessment designers' LAL to a great extent. When it comes to Part IV, the conclusion section, the book editor paves the way for future LAL research by accentuating the interface between assessment and learning through LAL.

As the review proceeds, this book impresses us with four applaudable aspects. Structurally, it maintains a balanced coverage of LAL theoretical

underpinnings and empirical studies. The conceptual discussions of LAL in Part I lays a solid foundation for empirical studies on LAL issues in different educational contexts in Parts II, III, and IV. In terms of content, the book took the initiative to subsume LAL studies on students who benefit directly from the language assessment processes and products but have been neglected in the field (Wanatabe, 2011). Given the centrality of learners' needs in the curriculum, it is crucial to incorporate students' voices into theory construction and empirical studies on LAL (Lee & Butler, 2020). The incorporation will blaze a trail for a comprehensive appreciation of the complex nature of LAL. Third, the book brings together LAL studies in various contexts, especially targeting those under-researched contextual settings such as Arab countries, including Bahrain, Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. It deserves to be disseminated globally to readers the trend of LAL studies, particularly studies in those underrepresented areas. Fourth, it is most praiseworthy that this volume has initiated the studies on how LAL can align teaching and learning with assessment in practice, a research niche that has not been given due attention to, as the book editor states in the conclusion.

Despite these scholarly merits, we find some limitations in this volume. Regarding the structure, placing a chapter on the paradigm shift from traditional to critical language testing (Chapter 3) in Part I seems not well grounded. While this part centres around LAL conceptualisation, the

discussion in Chapter 3 does not yield evident implications for LAL conceptual clarity. Moreover, it is a bit misleading to place Chapter 6 (student teachers' LAL) under Part II concerning students' LAL. In LAL literature, student teachers, also known as pre-service teachers, are regarded as teaching practitioners. As such, it would be better to put Chapter 6 under Part III (teachers' LAL). Another limitation is that the research approaches of most empirical studies in this volume are qualitative in nature and only one used a mixed method design (Chapter 11). Qualitative methods do engender an in-depth understanding of how teachers and students perceive and develop their LAL from teaching or learning practices. However, quantitative and mixed-method studies are more oriented to the broad generalisation of LAL research findings. Besides, qualitative methods in the studies of this volume cannot ensure a full-scale picture of stakeholders' LAL when longitudinal studies are absent among them. It would be interesting to include more longitudinal studies with different approaches to investigate the process of stakeholders' LAL development over time.

Regardless of the limitations, this volume makes a valuable contribution to LAL literature, as it initiates learners' LAL and calls for the exploration of LAL from diverse geographical and educational contexts. It is highly recommended for researchers, scholars, language testers, and doctoral students who are interested in LAL or language assessment. They can enhance

conceptual and empirical understanding of LAL nature and discern intriguing research areas from this book (e.g., novice teachers' and learners' LAL enhancement). It is also useful for language teachers and teachers in other disciplines to enrich their conceptualisation of assessment literacy to promote students' learning by reflecting on assessment practices and research. We believe this book can facilitate language learning through LAL, stimulate discussions on LAL issues and help extend the research scope of LAL.

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