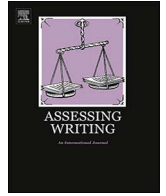




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Integrating assessment *as, for, and of* learning in a large-scale exam preparation course



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ABSTRACT

This empirical study examined the validity of arguments regarding assessment integration tensions, strategies, and the potential of an integrated assessment model in enhancing students' writing ability. To this end, an integrated assessment *as, for, and of* learning model was experimented with a group of learners preparing to take the *Cambridge English: Preliminary English Test*. Moreover, an assessment *for* and *of* (non-integrated) model was used with another group of candidates as the control group. Subsequently, the candidates' writing performances measured by Cambridge Assessment in terms of overall band descriptions were converted into numerical indices. The Mann-Whitney *U* Test comparison of the participants' converted scores revealed that the integrated assessment group performed better than the non-integrated assessment candidates. Furthermore, classroom observations and a focus-group interview with the integrated assessment group clarified a number of issues concerning assessment integration and AaL implementation tensions and strategies. The results indicated that an integrated assessment model tailored to contextual specifications can contribute both theoretically and practically to teaching and assessing writing.

1. Introduction

The history of language testing and assessment is marked with four periods of major paradigm shift. The first period, known as the psychometrics era (the 1950s), was characterized by an emphasis on the objective measurement of language proficiency using standardized multiple-choice tests. This period grew out of language testing experts' concerns for reliability, validity, practicality, and accountability. Research publications in language testing and assessment refer to this period as *traditional assessment* (Huang, 2012; Singh, Abdul Samad, Hussin, & Sulaiman, 2015), *summative assessment*, and *assessment of learning* (AoL) (Earl, 2013; Lee & Coniam, 2013). The psychometrics era is often criticized for being indirect, decontextualized, product-oriented, and one-shot with no clear mechanisms for offering constructive feedback. Subsequently, *alternative assessment*, also called *formative assessment* and *assessment for learning* (AFL) (Dann, 2014; Earl, 2013; Lam, 2013a) came into vogue in the mid-1980s as a pendulum reaction to the psychometrics period. Conferences, journals, reflections, self/peer assessment, and portfolios were the major alternatives in assessment introduced in this era. Next, *dynamic assessment* was developed at about the turn of the century based on the sociocultural theory of language learning. Though dynamic assessment is considered to be a form of alternative assessment by some experts (e.g., Douglas, 2010), it is distinguished from alternative assessment in that its major premise is building the unknown from the known through expert/knower mediation. Therefore, in dynamic assessment the distinction between teaching and assessment is blurred (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). The integration of teaching and learning coupled with the importance assigned to self in psychology gave way to the idea of

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Table 1
Principles of AoL, AfL, and AaL.

Approach	Time	Purpose	Means	Key components	Assessor(s)
AoL	After instruction; end of the program/course	Summative reports; certification	Tests and examinations	Grades; scores	Teacher; school internal/external examination bodies
AfL	Iterative; spread throughout a program/course	Formative opinions; identification of students strengths and weaknesses	Portfolios, journals, conferences, interviews, projects	Feedback for both learners and teachers	teacher
AaL	Teaching and assessment integrated	Formative; enhancing learners agency and meta-cognitive ability	Different means including the ones used in AfL	Self-assessment; self-evaluation; self-reflection; assessment criteria sharing; mediation	Self/learner and teacher

assessment as learning (AaL) (Dann, 2014; Earl, 2013; Lam, 2015). Finally, with the advent of computer technology and the ensuing developments in corpus linguistics, especially learner corpora tailored to language testing and assessment purposes (Callies & Götz, 2015; Park, 2014), the field is about to witness a fundamental turn although these new resources have to stand the test of empirical investigations (Sadeghi & Rahmati Kelahsarayi, 2016).

1.1. Conceptual framework

To avoid terminological confusion, AoL, AfL, and AaL, as major approaches to classroom assessment (Earl, 2013), are consistently used throughout the present paper and comprise the main focus of the current study. The recurring themes in various definitions of AoL, AfL, and AaL (Harlen, 2005; Lam, 2015; Lee, 2016; Lee, 2017; Lee and Coniam, 2013) are the time, purpose, means, and key components of assessment as well as who holds the role of assessor. Table 1 presents a summary of principles regarding these recurrent themes in each approach.

Though some experts (Earl, 2013; Lam, 2015; Lee, 2016, 2017) believe that AaL is a subset of AfL, a number of key characteristics distinguish the two approaches. First, Lee (2016, 2017) states that AaL principles draw on a number of theoretical perspectives, including theories of motivation, autonomy, metacognition, and self-regulation. Another defining feature of AaL is the significant role played by self/learner in the assessment process leading to a proliferation of combinations of self and assessment-relevant concepts including, self-assessment, self-evaluation, and self-reflection. Self-assessment is defined as a learning-oriented process through which learners judge the quality of their work and change/revise it accordingly (Lam, 2015) whereas self-evaluation involves students in assigning a grade/mark to their own work (Andrade & Du, 2007). Self-reflection, on the other hand, is a more global process (Lam, 2015) in which learners reflect on their achievement (Andrade & Du, 2007) in terms of what they have learned throughout a course/program. Although these terms are often used interchangeably, self-assessment is the concept which is, by far, most commonly associated with AaL (Dann, 2002, 2014). Sharing quality criteria with students serves as a further distinguishing principle of AaL. It differentiates systematic self-assessment in AaL from fragmented and informal self-assessment in AfL (Leach, 2012) in which learners are normally asked to select, often without set criteria, and present their most representative work (Lam, 2013c; Lam & Lee, 2010) for final grading. A final distinctive characteristic of AaL is its positive influence on students' meta-cognitive development (Lam, 2015; Lee, 2016, 2017). This is accomplished, according to Lee (2016, 2017), through students asking themselves meta-cognitive questions like *what I am doing, how I am doing that, and what/where I should do/go next*. This is unlike AfL in which information regarding different stages of learning is provided by teachers rather than being obtained in a process of meta-cognitive engagement.

1.2. AaL implementation tensions and resolution strategies

Most AaL studies have raised concerns over the reliability of student assessment compared to teacher assessment (Matsuno, 2009). Moreover, students' reluctance to self-assess (Cassidy, 2007; Kirby & Downs 2007; Leach, 2012), and their preference to be assessed by experts (Evans, McKenna, & Oliver, 2005; Lam, 2013b) have been identified as major challenges in AaL implementation. Andrade and Du (2007), Lam (2013b, 2015), and Leach (2012) have proposed sharing assessment criteria/rubrics as a strategy to overcome challenges associated with self-assessment. Torrance (2012), however, criticizes transparency in assessment criteria and describes it as "conformative assessment" (p. 332) which "encourages instrumentalism" and "criteria compliance" (Torrance, 2007, p. 282) rather than learning. Lee (2016), also, identifies large class sizes, dominant traditional assessment paradigms, and learners' low linguistic proficiency as the main impediments to AaL implementation. To resolve the issue, Lee (2016, 2017) proposes that the four main strategies teachers can adopt in this regard include helping learners identify learning goals and success criteria, set personal learning goals, engage in peer assessment, and develop ownership of their writing by asking metacognitive questions and conducting self-monitoring. These tensions (Lam, 2015; Torrance, 2012) have turned AaL, despite being intuitively right, into an empirically uncharted area with limited application (Lam, 2015) awaiting a comprehensive (re)clarification (Dann, 2014) and warranting attention (Lee, 2016).

As early as 2003, Earl pointed out the values of AoL, AfL, and AaL and called for the integration of all these approaches in a right balance. Furthermore, Carless (2011) argues that the integration of AfL and AaL in an AoL context can be more beneficial. Lee (2016), also, assumes "AoL and AfL/AaL can co-exist" (p. 271). However, in view of the above tensions, assessment experts have been widely

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