

Factors Affecting EFL Teachers' Use of Multiple Classroom Assessment Practices with Young Language Learners

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Abstract

In recent years, researchers in language testing have focused greater attention on classroom assessment, especially as applied to young language learners (YLLs). In Taiwan, classroom assessment utilizing multiple assessment procedures is recommended for the assessment of YLLs according to the guidelines included in the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum. Due to this focus on classroom assessment, there is a need to understand teachers' current assessment practices. An increasing number of studies in other disciplines have explored the roles of teacher and context factors in teachers' assessment practices; however, the relationships between these factors and teachers' practices in an EFL setting remain unknown. To address this gap, this study surveyed 425 Taiwanese elementary school EFL teachers. The results indicated that perceived assessment competency (self-efficacy), teacher beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of assessment, and teacher education are significantly positively correlated with teachers' assessment practices, while teacher beliefs about the difficulty of implementing assessment is negatively correlated with teachers' practices. Theoretical implications and pedagogical suggestions are discussed, and recommendations for future research are provided.

Key Words: classroom assessment, multiple forms of assessment, elementary school EFL education

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Educators and researchers have been concerned for decades about how to evaluate second language learners' performance. Recent trends in second language assessment, however, indicate that the purpose and function of assessment should not be testing students' learning outcomes, like that of large-scale standardized tests, but facilitating students' learning process. This is especially important for young language learners (YLLs).

Young language learners (YLLs) are children who learn a foreign or second language during the first six or seven years of formal schooling (McKay, 2006). Early YLL assessment dates back to the 1960s when foreign language instruction at the primary school level was initiated in America, Canada, and Europe (Stern & Weinrib, 1977). Since the 1960s, two major themes—one in YLL assessment standards and one in YLL assessment formats—have evolved.

In the 1960s and 1970s, YLL assessment was neglected both in research and instruction. During this time, no special assessment standards or assessment formats were designed for YLLs, so standards developed and normalized for first language (L1) learners were usually used for assessing YLLs (Alderson & Banerjee, 2001). In a similar manner to assessment formats, no special assessment for YLLs but standardized assessment for L1 learners was frequently used to assess YLLs' proficiency achievement (Rea-Dickins & Rixon, 1997).

In the 1980s, however, YLL assessment standards and YLL assessment formats were revolutionized. Early in the decade,

researchers pointed out the problems of using L1 assessment standards with YLLs; for example, it is unfair and inappropriate to use L1 assessment standards with YLLs because L1 learners and YLLs differ in their language use and language development (Cummins, 1984a, 1984b; Stansfield, 1981). Also, due to the negative impact of large-scale standardized assessment on instruction (such as teachers' teaching-to-the-test, students' loss of self-esteem), scholars also began to advocate classroom assessment as a more suitable assessment method for YLLs (Barrs, Ellis, Hester, & Thomas, 1988).

In the 1990s, YLL standards and YLL assessment gained increased focus and international attention because of the worldwide increase in the introduction of foreign language instruction at the primary school level (Alderson & Banerjee, 2001; Kubanek-German, 1998; Nikolov, 2000). Thus, a worldwide YLL standards development movement spread quickly (Australian Education Council, 1994; Council of Europe, 2001; National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, 1994; TESOL, 1997; 1998; 2001). These standards designate the language proficiencies that YLLs have to achieve in the target language. However, these YLL assessment standards also have their limitations as they may result in "a tension between the concerns of the educational system for ease of administration, appearances of equity and accountability and those of teachers for support in teaching and learning" (Alderson & Banerjee, 2001, p. 230).

Meanwhile, regarding the development of YLL assessment formats, some commercially standardized YLL tests were introduced in the field of YLL education, such as the Cambridge Young Learners English (YLE) Tests. This test, developed by the University of

Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, aims to measure students' English proficiency accurately and promote English instruction in countries where English is not the primary language (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2003). Although YLE Tests are considered to be good standardized tests that have validity and reliability documented, they can not provide YLLs immediate diagnostic information and enhance their learning motivation (Bailey, 2005).

Due to problems associated with standards and the limitations of large-scale standardized tests, classroom assessment has gained prominence in current YLL testing because of its strengths in providing immediate diagnostic feedback and enhancing learning motivation (McKay, 2006). YLL teachers, like other second language teachers, are encouraged to develop their own classroom assessment according to needs and characteristics of their students while assessment standards may function as a general reference (Breen, Barratt-Pugh, Derewianka, House, Hudson, Lumley, & Rohl, 1997).

Classroom assessment is small-scale assessment prepared and implemented by teachers in classrooms according to their own teaching objectives and suitable for local students' learning characteristics. This is in contrast to large-scale standardized assessment developed and executed by a central educational administration or external test developers according to unified standards (Leung, 2005). The general purpose of classroom assessment is "the collection, evaluation, and use of information to help teachers make decisions that improve student learning" (McMillan, 2007, p. 8). Namely, classroom assessment primarily aims

to “promote learning.” Since students learn language through a diversity of activities characterizing various language competencies, classroom assessment, in nature, consists of multiple assessment approaches which evaluate different aspects of a learner’s language learning performance. Therefore, multiple classroom assessment includes traditional assessment and alternative assessment. Traditional assessment refers to predetermined testing measures such as selected-response tests (e.g., multiple-choice questions, true/false questions, matching questions), brief constructed-response tests (e.g., short-answer questions), and essay questions. Alternative assessment refers to authentic assessment tasks/forms such as oral questioning, teacher observation, performance tasks, and student self-assessment (Airasian, 2005; McMillan, 2007; Stiggins, 2001).

Currently, classroom assessment with a variety of test techniques is the primary assessment recommended by most worldwide YLL scholars as a more valid and reliable means of measuring and facilitating YLLs’ language learning progress (Cameron, 2001; Hughes, 2003; Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou, 2003; McKay, 2006; Moon, 2000). In the Taiwanese context, EFL instruction has been an important required subject in secondary and post-secondary schools for decades. In 2001, due to the worldwide trend of growth in foreign language instruction at the primary school level, the Taiwan Ministry of Education started a new program introducing EFL instruction to the elementary school curriculum (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2001). The Nine-year Integrated Curriculum Guidelines state that English teachers should develop their own teaching and testing materials catering to the learning needs of local students with the

Guidelines as a reference. Also, multiple classroom assessment is designated in the Guidelines to assess Taiwanese YLLs aiming to reflect teachers' own teaching objectives and students' learning process (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2001; 2004).

Within the framework of multiple classroom assessment, YLL teachers' assessment practices are both promising and hopeful. However, how EFL teachers of YLLs specifically implement classroom assessment has not been a focus of research. Only a few studies have been done on YLL teachers' assessment practices in EFL contexts such as Taiwan (Chan, 2007; Chen, 2003; Hsu, 2005; Yang, 2008) and Europe (Edelenbos & Kubanek-German 2004; Gattullo, 2000; Rea-Dickins & Rixon, 1999). Although there is little research on YLL teachers' classroom assessment practices, existing limited studies found that YLL teachers used a variety of assessment tasks and differed in their assessment practices. These studies suggested a number of critical factors, such as teacher beliefs, assessment education, and perceived competency (self-efficacy) which potentially contribute to teachers' differences in their classroom assessment practices (Chan, 2007; Chen, 2003; Edelenbos & Kubanek-German 2004; Gattullo, 2000; Hsu, 2005; McKay, 2006; Rea-Dickins & Rixon, 1999). However, how these factors are related to YLL teachers' classroom assessment practices remains unclear in second language (L2) context due to a lacking of empirical research.

Contrary to L2 context, in non-second language disciplines, a few studies (Campbell, 1998; Green & Stager, 1987b; McMillan, 2003; Vitali, 1993) have investigated the relationships between these crucial factors: teacher beliefs, assessment education, and perceived

competency. First, teacher beliefs are what teachers know which affects their thinking, interpretation, and planned action (Woods, 1996). In recent literature on teacher beliefs, scholars generally agree on the central role of teacher beliefs in their decision-making about classroom practices (Borg, 2003). In assessment, teacher beliefs also play a central role in teachers' decision making for classroom assessment practices (McMillan, 2007). Although teacher beliefs are important, empirical studies revealed inconsistent findings about the relationship between teacher beliefs and teachers' assessment practices. Some studies indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between teacher beliefs and teachers' assessment practices (Chan, 2007; Green & Stager, 1987b; Vitali, 1993); namely, teachers who believed assessment effective tended to use more assessment tasks. However, other research showed no strong relationship between teacher beliefs and teachers' classroom assessment practices (Campbell, 1998; Cox, 1994).

In order to further explore these inconsistent findings, McMillan (2003) conducted a qualitative study and found that teacher beliefs were an unreliable indicator of classroom assessment practices because of the intervention of other external and internal factors (for instance, large-scale standardized tests, insufficient teacher education on assessment). Among these factors, teacher education was found influential in affecting teachers' classroom assessment practices. These teachers indicated that insufficient teacher education in assessment resulted in their little use of classroom assessment tasks, even though they believed these test tasks beneficial. Other quantitative studies also demonstrated a significantly positive

relationship between teacher education in assessment and teachers' assessment practices (Borko, Flory & Cumbo, 1993; Green & Stager, 1987a, 1987b; Jonson, 1999; McMillan, 2003; Patelis & Singer, 1997). That is, sufficient and useful assessment education is likely to facilitate teachers' assessment practices. Although assessment education is critical, existing surveys in both second and non-second language education have indicated that assessment training in teacher education programs is lacking and that teachers need more pre-service and in-service formal education in assessment (Chan, 2007; Chen, 2003; Hasselgreen, Carlsen, & Helness, 2004; Hsu, 2005; Schafer & Lissitz, 1987; Stiggins & Conklin, 1988; Wise & Lukin, 1993).

In addition to assessment education, perceived competency is another critical factor that may influence teachers' assessment practices according to self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is defined as one's conviction to successfully carry out a task. Derived from this definition, teachers' self-efficacy in assessment (perceived assessment competency), is teachers' confidence in their capability in using assessment. The theory of self-efficacy holds that an individual's performance is affected by a number of variables, for example, self-efficacy, skills, and beliefs about whether a particular behavior will lead to a particular outcome or not. Among these variables, self-efficacy is an accurate and strong predictor of performance, as "the greater the increments in self-perceived efficacy, the greater the change in behavior" (Bandura, 1977, p. 206). In other words, an individual with high self-efficacy tends to perform very competently. Extrapolating from this theory, teachers who possess high perceived competency in assessment are

likely to be successful in using assessment in their classrooms. The results of empirical studies also support the applicability of this theory to educational measurement of non-second language disciplines, evidenced by the positive and strong relationship between perceived assessment competency and teachers' assessment practices (Bol, 2004; Campbell, 1998; Jonson, 1999).

To conclude, research on non-second language disciplines, teacher beliefs, assessment education, and perceived competency in classroom assessment were found positively related to teachers' assessment practices. However, the relationship between these factors and YLL teachers' classroom assessment practices in an L2 context remains unknown because little research has been conducted on these issues. As Davison (2004) points out, "less attention has been paid to the way in which different educational and cultural contexts, and teacher assumptions about those contexts, shape teachers' assessment beliefs, attitudes and practices" (p. 306). Edelenbos and Kubanek-German (2004) further emphasize, "in order to be understood and effectively implemented by teachers, it is useful to analyze the factors that influence teacher's assessment behaviors" (p. 276). Thus, the present study aims to address this gap by conducting a survey investigating the beliefs and assessment practices of elementary school EFL teachers in Taiwan.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Research Question of This Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationships between selected factors and YLL teachers' classroom assessment practices. The specific research question was: To what extent are the classroom assessment practices of EFL teachers who work with YLLs related to teacher beliefs, assessment education, and perceived competency about classroom assessment?

Participants

The population of interest consisted of EFL teachers at elementary schools in Taiwan. To select the sample from this target population, cluster random sampling was used to select elementary schools from the list of all elementary schools provided by the Statistics Department of the Ministry of Education (2006). A total of 734 surveys were mailed to EFL YLL teachers at 252 randomly selected elementary schools. In total, 425 surveys were returned with a response rate of 57%, which is considered to be a good return rate according to Gillham (2000). This sample represented the target population of the study comprehensively since it included teachers from 23 cities/counties out of 25 in Taiwan. The sample was predominately comprised of higher grade level (3rd to 6th grade) EFL YLL teachers in public elementary schools. The majority of the respondents were young female novice teachers with limited EFL young learner teaching experience (0-5 years). Nearly 80% of these respondents ranged in age from 20 to 40 years old. The respondents

overall were college graduates with a major related to English education or English. The respondents had few EFL colleagues teaching at their schools. Most of the teachers had a heavy teaching load with large numbers of semester-long classes and a significant number of students in each class (see Table 2).

The Instrument

The instrument of the study was a paper-and-pencil survey. The development of this survey began by consulting related literature and existing surveys which dealt with teachers' assessment practices, assessment education, perceived assessment competency, and teacher beliefs about assessment (Bol, 2004; Campbell, 1998; Chan, 2007; Chen, 2003; Cheng, Rogers, & Hu, 2004; Etsey, 1999; Granados, 2004; Green & Stager, 1987a; 1987b; Greenstein, 2004; Gullickson, 1984; Lu, 2003; Mertler, 1998; Vitali, 1993; Yang, 2000). The survey consisted of ten sections (A to J). Among these sections, section A investigated teachers' practices on each type of twenty-three classroom assessment items. The results of section A have been reported in another paper (see Yang, 2008). Sections B to J addressed the present paper's research question, and investigated the relationships between selected factors and teachers' classroom assessment practices (see Tables 1 to 3). Before main data collection, the instrument was pilot tested three times by three different groups of elementary school English teachers in Taiwan (four, nineteen, and seventeen teachers respectively), according to their comments and Cronbach alpha coefficients, appropriate changes to the survey were made after each pilot.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Validity was addressed during the development of the survey instrument by basing the questions and choices on a thorough literature review and a review of existing surveys. After the survey was developed, it was reviewed by content, research, and language experts. The researcher revised the survey according to feedback from these experts and translated it into Chinese. The language of the instrument was evaluated and critiqued by a native speaker of Chinese as well as a native speaker of English who is a Chinese language specialist, and they consulted with each other to assure its accuracy, appropriateness, and clarity. After expert review and revision, the Chinese version of the survey was used with EFL teachers in the previously mentioned three pilot studies for validity. The participants' comments on the design, content, and ease of use of the survey were considered in the final revision of the survey.

In addition to validity, the reliability of the survey was another major concern. The data from the pilots and the main data collection were used to estimate the reliability of section H (teacher beliefs about classroom assessment), which contains four subsections: teacher beliefs about the (1) pedagogical benefits of traditional assessment, (2) pedagogical benefits of alternative assessment, (3) difficulty of implementing traditional assessment, and (4) difficulty of implementing alternative assessment. The Cronbach alpha coefficients ($N=425$) for these elements were 0.77, 0.82, 0.61, and 0.63 respectively, indicating substantial to very strong reliability.

Data Collection and Analysis

The Chinese version of survey was distributed by surface mail to the 734 respondents in the randomly selected Taiwanese elementary schools. The questionnaires were mailed to the academic affairs supervisors of each school, who volunteered to assist in collecting the data. They distributed the surveys to all EFL teachers in their schools, collected the questionnaires from volunteer teachers, and returned the package to the researcher. Data from the survey were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Canonical correlation analysis is a method for determining relationships between two sets of variables (Johnson & Wichern, 2002) and was used to answer the research question in this study, which aimed to understand the relationships between important factors (assessment education, perceived competency, teacher beliefs) and YLL teachers' classroom assessment practices (traditional and alternative assessment). In addition, descriptive statistics were used to further interpret the correlation analysis results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In canonical correlation, roots refer to the possible canonical correlations between two sets of variables. From the significance tests, there were two significant canonical correlations between two sets of variables, root 1 and root 2 as shown in Table 1. To better understand these correlations, root 1 and root 2 were further examined. In root 1, given the high canonical loading of alternative assessment ($r = 0.99$),

Table 1
Canonical Correlations

Canonical Variates	Root 1 Canonical Loadings	Root 2 Canonical Loadings
Canonical Variate 1		
<u>Assessment education:</u>		
Amount of pre-service education received in ^a TA (Item Ca)	(-0.068)	0.482
Amount of pre-service education received in ^b AA (Item Cb)	0.493	0.120
Amount of in-service education received in TA (Item Da)	0.108	0.412
Amount of in-service education received in AA (Item Db)	0.498	0.049
Perceived usefulness of pre-service education in TA (Item Fa)	0.069	0.427
Perceived usefulness of pre-service education in AA (Item Fb)	0.471	0.178
Perceived usefulness of in-service education in TA (Item Ga)	0.091	0.294
Perceived usefulness of in-service education in AA (Item Gb)	0.511	0.122
<u>Perceived competency:</u>		
Perceived competency in using TA (Item Ea)	0.018	0.689
Perceived competency in using AA (Item Eb)	0.731	0.214
<u>Beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of classroom assessment:</u>		
Pedagogical benefits of TA (Mean of H1a, H2a, H4a, H7a)	0.138	0.634
Pedagogical benefits of AA (Mean of H1b, H2b, H4b, H7b)	0.659	0.389
<u>Beliefs about the difficulties of implementing classroom assessment:</u>		
Difficulty of implementing TA (Mean of H3a, H5a, H6a, H8a)	0.053	(-0.200)
Difficulty of implementing AA (Mean of H3b, H5b, H6b, H8b)	(-0.182)	0.168
Canonical Variate 2		
<u>Classroom assessment practices:</u>		
Teachers' traditional assessment practices (Item Ba)	(-0.323)	0.946
Teachers' alternative assessment practices (Item Bb)	0.999	0.037

Note. ^aTA refers to traditional assessment ; ^bAA refers to alternative assessment

it can be seen that root 1 primarily identifies the relationships among assessment education, perceived competency, teacher beliefs, and teachers' alternative assessment practices. In root 2, with the large canonical loading of traditional assessment ($r = 0.94$), it appears that traditional assessment predominately represents the canonical variate 2 in root 2.

Overall, Table 1 indicated that for the teachers in this study, assessment education, perceived competency, and teacher beliefs are related to their classroom assessment practices. Perceived competency was the strongest ($r = 0.73, 0.68$), followed by teacher beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of using assessment ($r = 0.65, 0.63$), teacher education ($r = 0.29 \sim 0.51$), and teacher beliefs about the difficulties of using assessment ($r = -0.18, -0.20$).

Perceived Assessment Competency

Among these factors, the results demonstrated that confidence (perceived competency, self-efficacy) in assessment capabilities is the most critical factor determining teachers' use of classroom assessment tasks, with particularly strong associations being noted with teachers' practices in traditional assessment ($r = 0.69$) and alternative assessment ($r = 0.73$). The finding that perceived assessment competency affects teachers' assessment practices to a greater extent than the other factors can be explained by the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). According to this theory, stronger self-efficacy (confidence) enhances one's coping efforts in the face of difficulties and stressful situations and enables those with self-efficacy to achieve competent performance. This implies that teachers' strong drive to be

successful in using assessment aids them in eliminating difficulties in using alternative assessment, and enables them to cope with their limited teacher training in assessment. In addition to this theory, this finding about perceived competency as the strongest factor is also supported by other research (Campbell, 1998; Jonson, 1999). Campbell (1998) pointed out that with the critical role perceived competency plays in teachers' assessment practices, it is important to understand what sources contribute to teachers' confidence (self-efficacy) in assessment capabilities.

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 indicate that the majority of teachers did not feel *substantially* competent about their use of classroom assessment. They perceived themselves more skilled in implementing traditional assessment ($M = 4.53$) than alternative assessment ($M = 4.15$). The relatively low perceived competency in alternative assessment implies that teachers' self-confidence in their ability to carry out a variety of alternative assessment tasks is insufficient and needs to be enhanced. Similar to what Campbell (1998) suggested, it is critical to determine the sources contributing to the perceived assessment competency. Furthermore, these sources should be provided to teachers in order to reinforce their self-confidence in their alternative assessment practices.

Teacher Beliefs about the Pedagogical Benefits of Classroom Assessment

The second strongest factor is teacher beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of classroom assessment. The results of the correlation analyses (Table 1) showed a substantial relationship between beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of classroom

assessment and teachers' classroom assessment practices ($r = 0.63$ for traditional assessment; $r = 0.65$ for alternative assessment). These findings indicate that those teachers who believed classroom assessment was beneficial tended to use more classroom assessment, especially alternative assessment. These findings are consistent with the studies of Chan (2007), Green & Stager (1987a), and Vitali (1993). That is, teacher beliefs play an important role in teachers' assessment practices.

In addition to the relationship investigated, the descriptive statistics as shown in Table 2 indicate that the teachers participating in the current study did not completely agree that classroom assessment is beneficial to teaching and learning, especially for traditional assessment. Among the various benefits of traditional assessment, Table 3 further shows that the teachers were doubtful that traditional assessment could enhance students' learning motivation ($M = 4.36$). For alternative assessment, they did not believe very firmly that alternative assessment could identify students' learning problems ($M = 4.78$) as compared with other benefits of alternative assessment.

Assessment Education

Overall, the correlations between the amount and usefulness of pre- and in-service assessment education and teachers' classroom assessment practices were moderate ($r = 0.29 \sim 0.51$). That is, those teachers who received a greater amount of pre- and in-service assessment education and who viewed pre- and in-service assessment education to be useful, tended to report more classroom assessment use. These findings suggest that teacher education facilitates the development

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	^c <i>SD</i>
<u>Demographics:</u>			
Grade level taught (Item I3)	368	4.45	1.378
Class size (Item I4)	422	29.37	7.141
Number of semester-long classes taught (Item I5)	419	8.63	4.586
Number of EFL teachers at the same grade level (Item I6)	377	1.71	1.025
Number of EFL teachers at the school (Item I7)	417	4.41	4.513
Years of teaching experience outside elementary schools (Item J6)	400	2.74	3.862
Years of teaching experience in elementary schools (Item J7)	407	4.05	2.442
<u>Assessment education:</u>			
Amount of pre-service education received in ^a TA (Item Ca)	421	4.22	1.081
Amount of pre-service education received in ^b AA (Item Cb)	423	4.01	1.165
Amount of in-service education received in TA (Item Da)	419	3.69	1.199
Amount of in-service education received in AA (Item Db)	422	3.89	1.176
Perceived usefulness of pre-service education in TA (Item Fa)	417	4.06	1.083
Perceived usefulness of pre-service education in AA (Item Fb)	421	3.90	1.173
Perceived usefulness of in-service education in TA (Item Ga)	419	3.87	1.120
Perceived usefulness of in-service education in AA (Item Gb)	422	3.99	1.159
<u>Perceived competency:</u>			
Perceived competency in using TA (Item Ea)	421	4.53	0.838
Perceived competency in using AA (Item Eb)	422	4.15	0.962
<u>Teacher beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of classroom assessment:</u>			
Pedagogical benefit of TA (Mean of items H1a, H2a, H4a, H7a)	409	4.70	0.611
Pedagogical benefit of AA (Mean of items H1b, H2b, H4b, H7b)	410	4.82	0.639
<u>Teacher beliefs about the difficulties implementing classroom assessment:</u>			
Difficulty implementing TA (Mean of items H3a, H5a, H6a, H8a)	400	2.48	0.728
Difficulty implementing AA (Mean of items H3b, H5b, H6b, H8b)	402	4.41	0.789
<u>Teachers' classroom assessment practices:</u>			
Traditional assessment practices (Item Ba)	420	4.55	0.977
Alternative assessment practices (Item Bb)	421	4.02	1.038

Note

- (1). ^aTA refers to traditional assessment; ^bAA refers to alternative assessment; ^cSD refers to standard deviation.
- (2). For items Ba, Bb, Ca, Cb, Da, Db, 1 as *Not at All/None*; 2 as *Very Little*; 3 as *Little*; 4 as *Some*; 5 as *A Great Deal*; 6 as *A Very Great Deal*.
- (3). For items Ea, Eb, Fa, Fb, Ga, Gb, 1 as *Not at All*; 2 as *Somewhat*; 3 as *Moderately*; 4 as *Very*; 5 as *Substantially*; 6 as *Extremely* (3) For items H1 to H8, 1 as *Strongly Disagree*; 2 as *Disagree*; 3 as *Slightly Disagree*; 4 as *Slightly Agree*; 5 as *Agree*; 6 as *Strongly Agree*.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics:
Teacher Beliefs about Classroom Assessment

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mode</i>	^c <i>SD</i>
<u>Pedagogical benefits of TA:</u>					
^a TA can increase students' motivation to learn (Item H1a).	412	4.36	4.00	5	0.905
TA can help teachers to evaluate how well they have taught the students (Item H2a).	412	4.78	5.00	5	0.726
TA can help me to evaluate how well students have learned the material (Item H4a).	412	4.91	5.00	5	0.727
TA can help me to identify students' learning problems (Item H7a).	413	4.78	5.00	5	0.803
<u>Pedagogical benefits of AA:</u>					
^b AA can increase students' motivation to learn (Item H1b).	417	4.86	5.00	5	0.756
AA can help teachers to evaluate how well they have taught the students (Item H2b).	415	4.83	5.00	5	0.742
AA can help me to evaluate how well students have learned the material (Item H4b).	413	4.83	5.00	5	0.796
AA can help me to identify students' learning problems (Item H7b).	414	4.78	5.00	5	0.874
<u>Difficulty of implementing TA:</u>					
Students' parents greatly doubt the objectivity of grading by TA (Item H3a).	405	2.80	3.00	2	1.151
Managing a classroom of students during TA is difficult (Item H5a).	407	2.34	2.00	2	1.067
The use of TA requires a lot of time (Item H6a).	410	2.80	3.00	2	1.109
TA is easy to use and saves time (Item ^d H8a).	414	2.01	2.00	2	0.969
<u>Difficulty of implementing AA:</u>					
Students' parents greatly doubt the objectivity of grading by AA (Item H3b).	411	4.37	5.00	5	1.115
Managing a classroom of students during AA is difficult (Item H5b).	415	4.28	5.00	5	1.300
The use of AA requires a lot of time (Item H6b).	415	4.88	5.00	5	1.063
AA is easy to use and saves time (Item ^d H8b).	412	4.09	4.00	4	1.116

Note:

(1). ^aTA refers to traditional assessment; ^bAA refers to alternative assessment; ^cSD refers to standard deviation; ^dItems H8a, H8b are reversely scored items.

(2). 1 as *Strongly Disagree*; 2 as *Disagree*; 3 as *Slightly Disagree*; 4 as *Slightly Agree*; 5 as *Agree*; 6 as *Strongly Agree*

of informed classroom assessment practices. To be specific, the teachers felt that the amount and usefulness of pre- and in-service education affected their assessment practices. This finding is consistent with existing research (Green & Stager, 1987a; Jonson, 1999).

Among all the variables in teacher education, the association between the usefulness of in-service alternative assessment education and teachers' use of alternative assessment was the highest as shown in Table 1 ($r = 0.51$). It not only emphasizes the importance of in-service alternative assessment education, but also highlights the significance of useful and relevant training content. This finding confirms the observations of Hsu (2005), who called for closer examination of in-service education, given the strong influence of useful in-service assessment training on teachers' implementation of informed multiple assessment.

In addition, the descriptive statistics of the current study showed that teachers received only *little* or *some* assessment education (see Table 2). This finding implies that teacher education in classroom assessment might be insufficient, especially in alternative assessment education. Additionally, teachers felt that the pre- and in-service education that they received was not *substantially* or *extremely* useful, but only from *moderately* to *very* useful. These two findings indicate that teachers need more useful pre- and in-service education, and are consistent with the findings of existing research. In fact, assessment training does not fully cater to the needs of YLL teachers in many countries, because underscoring these needs have been repeated in the YLL assessment literature for the past decade (Chan,

2007; Chen, 2003; Hasselgreen, Carlsen, & Helness, 2004; Hsu, 2005; Rea-Dickins & Rixon, 1999). Recently, McKay (2006) highlighted that teacher education in assessment remains the major gap in current YLL teacher education and research by saying:

In research into young language learner language teaching programs, teachers were found to be fully occupied developing teaching knowledge and skills, and most were less interested in assessment...Professional development in assessment for teachers of young learners may be one of the most pressing issues for the immediate future. (p. 356)

Teacher Beliefs about the Difficulty of Implementing Assessment

The descriptive statistics (Table 2) indicate that teachers perceived alternative assessment to be more difficult than traditional assessment in practice. Further analysis in Table 3 indicates that the hindrances that teachers perceived about alternative assessment included difficulty in implementation, time constraints, difficulties with classroom management, and parents' doubts about the objectivity of grading. Among these obstacles, time constraints were the greatest difficulty impeding teachers' extensive use of a variety of test activities. These difficulties and their negative influence on teachers' assessment practices were also noted in the findings of other recent studies investigating classroom assessment practices of Taiwanese elementary school EFL teachers (Chan, 2007; Chen, 2003; Hsu, 2005).

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The correlational analyses of the current study indicated four critical factors which affect YLL teachers' classroom assessment practices: self-confidence, teacher beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of classroom assessment, assessment education, and the difficulties of implementing classroom assessment. The results indicated that difficulties such as a heavy workload, time constraints, and pressure from parents may impede teachers' use of assessment tasks, while feelings of self-confidence, teacher beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of assessment, and assessment education likely lead to teachers' extensive use of a variety of assessment techniques. Given this finding, we might want to ask: what can we do to eliminate the impeding variables and reinforce the facilitating factors? Based on the results of this study and the existing research, the researcher would like to call for training, administrative, and collegial support to help teachers make informed and extensive use of a variety of test tasks.

Perceived Assessment Competency (Self-confidence)

The findings of the current study shed light on the applicability of the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) to second language testing, especially YLL assessment. Bandura's self-efficacy theory states that self-efficacy (i.e. confidence in one's capability) is the major determinant of one's performance. Drawing from the self-efficacy theory, the correlational analyses of the current study (Table 1) suggest that perceived assessment competency likely strongly

influences YLL teachers' classroom assessment practices. This finding supports the applicability of the self-efficacy theory to YLL assessment.

From a pedagogical perspective, according to the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977), performance information (i.e. past successful performance), vicarious experience (i.e. observation of others' successful performance), verbal persuasion (i.e. others' conviction and encouragement), and emotional arousal (i.e. anxiety or other negative emotion) are the major sources which contribute to one's self-efficacy. Based on the self-efficacy theory, the researcher would like to argue that these four sources contributing to teachers' self-confidence in using assessment could be provided by training, administrative, and collegial support.

Training support. First, pre- and in-service teacher education have to provide as many opportunities as possible for pre- and in-service teachers to practice implementing a variety of assessment tasks in the classroom. Increased successful experiences can enhance teachers' confidence in carrying out familiar and unfamiliar tasks encountered in a variety of teaching contexts. Second, successful and correct demonstration of a variety of assessment tasks by competent teacher educators, corporate teachers, or pre- and in-service teachers needs to be provided for teachers to learn from the successful experiences of others. Third, teacher educators and corporate teachers could reinforce teachers' confidence by letting them know that they believe in their capabilities to succeed. Finally, teacher educators should demonstrate to teachers appropriate ways of handling the stressful situations that arise from using specific assessment tasks.

Administrative support. School administrators should not only supervise teachers, but also support them. Administrative encouragement of teachers' adoption of multiple forms of assessment is critical for teachers if they are to persist in their assessment practices. In addition to oral encouragement, a supportive environment can reduce teachers' anxiety so that teachers perform better in using new assessment tasks.

Collegial support. Teachers with more years of teaching experience at the elementary school level might have more exposure, practice, and experience in implementing a variety of classroom assessment approaches. This experience likely contributes to making these experienced teachers more competent in using assessment tasks. Therefore, experienced teachers could demonstrate to inexperienced teachers how to carry out multiple assessment procedures in the classroom in order to enhance novice teachers' perceived assessment competency.

Assessment Education

Training support. The current study indicates that teachers received insufficient assessment education, especially during their in-service education. Teachers seemed to perceive the education in classroom assessment they received as not being substantially useful. Based on these findings, teacher education programs need to provide more useful and relevant assessment courses and workshops for pre- and in-service teachers. Furthermore, the usefulness of in-service alternative assessment education was found to be the strongest factor facilitating teachers' use of alternative assessment. This finding

highlights the importance of useful and relevant in-service courses/workshops for in-service teachers in using alternative assessment. Given the limited training that in-service teachers in the current study reported receiving in alternative assessment, in-service teacher training programs with a series of well-organized and comprehensive assessment courses/ workshops should be developed and provided for teachers. The curriculum should consist of useful, practical, and relevant principles/techniques/strategies in alternative assessment that teachers can immediately and conveniently apply in their classrooms (Hsu, 2005).

Administrative and collegial support. Teachers at the same schools can share experience and knowledge in their assessment practices. In addition, professional talk between assessment scholars and teachers should be constantly held to solve problems and share experience and knowledge in assessment practices. Furthermore, school administrators are advised to develop an on-line resource center for teachers to download or review testing resources or materials (Hsu, 2005).

Teacher Beliefs about the Pedagogical Benefits of Assessment

Training support. The findings in this study indicate that teachers did not completely *agree* that classroom assessment benefits teaching and learning as a whole. These findings imply that teachers might not have comprehensive and solid knowledge about the characteristics and use of a variety of assessment tasks. Most existing research has shown that teacher education tends to influence teacher beliefs (Borg, 2003). Based on these findings, pre-service and in-service teacher education should reinforce teachers' beliefs and knowledge about multiple assessment tasks by providing appropriate

courses/workshops.

Difficulties Teachers Encountered

The findings of the present study point out that certain difficulties such as a heavy workload, time constraints, difficulty in classroom management, and pressure from parents may hinder teachers' use of a variety of evaluation tasks. In order to overcome these difficulties, collegial, administrative, and parental support should be available for teachers in order to facilitate their assessment practices, particularly alternative assessment.

Training support. Regarding time constraints, professional development programs should enhance teachers' knowledge and experience on a variety of assessment tasks, so that teachers can become more competent in developing and using these tasks. Once their skills are established, teachers would be able to work in a more efficient manner. To respond to parents' questions, teachers need to learn how to communicate with parents about test results. In addition to communicative skills, teachers have to be equipped with sufficient skills and knowledge to develop and use test tasks/rubrics. Only when teachers are well-prepared will they be capable of discussing assessment issues with parents in an informative manner (American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in Education, & National Education Association, 1990).

Administrative support. Since implementing assessment requires a great deal of time, particularly alternative assessment, school administrations have to limit class size. Teachers will then have more time to implement a variety of assessment activities. Moreover, a

learning-oriented on-line electronic assessment system for students to self-assess their performance should be available in order to decrease teachers' workload and promote independent learning. School administrators should also provide teacher helpers to assist in classroom management during assessment. These assistants could include homeroom teachers, student teachers, and parents. Furthermore, school administrators should hold parent meetings to endorse and promote multiple assessment in order to help teachers gain parental support (Chen, 2003; Hsu, 2005).

Collegial support. Teachers at the same school should continuously communicate with each other about their assessment practices (Hsu, 2005). As a team, a shared and well-based testing philosophy or paradigm (i.e. multiple assessment approaches) in their assessment planning, development, and practices is critical if parents have questions about their use of assessment tasks.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationships between assessment education, perceived competency, teacher beliefs, and YLL teachers' classroom assessment practices. The results indicated four factors critically affecting teachers' practices: perceived competency, assessment education, teacher beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of assessment, and the difficulty of implementing assessment. More specifically, difficulties such as time constraints, classroom management, pressure from parents, and a

heavy workload influenced implementation. Additionally, teachers' perceived assessment competency, assessment education received, and teacher beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of assessment facilitated their extensive use of a variety of test activities.

The Nine-year Integrated Curriculum Guidelines, developed by the Taiwan Ministry of Education (2001; 2004), aim to guide the new program introducing EFL instruction to the elementary school curriculum in 2001. The mission of this new program and the Guidelines is to nurture children's English learning motivation and capability, particularly oral communicative competency. The Guidelines, which designate multiple classroom assessment approaches, aim to address the heterogeneity of English proficiency and learning characteristics of Taiwanese elementary school students. The findings of the current study indicate that by following the Guidelines, teachers' informed use of a variety of assessment tasks can cater to students' different needs and characteristics, while enhancing their English learning motivation and facilitating their language performance.

Given the spotlight on EFL teachers since the launch of the new EFL program in the elementary schools, these teachers likely have committed a great deal of time and effort to the design, administration, and evaluation of their assessment tasks in order to meet the high expectations put forward in the Guidelines. However, this study also indicates that teachers are overwhelmed by their increasing workloads and are alone in the face of various challenges as posed by their assessment practices. Most of them are novice female teachers who have limited English teaching experience in elementary schools, few

EFL colleagues at their schools, and insufficient support, yet they all have large teaching loads, as one teacher pointed out in her response to the open-ended question in the survey:

The most critical issue about current assessment practices is not about the assessment formats or content, but the fact that teachers are overwhelmed by their workload under the expectation of central educational administrators, the requirements of parents, and the reality of their local teaching contexts (participant 386, item J10).

The above quote indicated that these teachers need support. Like students, teachers need to be encouraged and guided. Thus they could persist in their passion, commitment, and effort in their teaching and learning. The suggested support from teacher education service, administration, and colleagues holds promise for improving teachers' current stressful situation and enhancing their informed implementation of a variety of assessment tasks. It is hoped that by providing a supportive, trusting, and collaborative environment, teachers will teach and learn happily and successfully.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to contribute to YLL education by addressing the gap in the knowledge found in current YLL assessment research about teachers' multiple classroom assessment practices. Further research is needed to provide a fuller explanation of teachers' classroom assessment practices in order to facilitate teachers'

informed assessment practices. For example, first, not only is research on the quantity of teachers' assessment practices warranted, but also the quality of those assessment practices should be investigated. Further research is needed on how well teachers use multiple classroom assessment. Second, teacher education in assessment is crucial and needs closer examination. As indicated by the existing research, there is a lack of teacher education in assessment for second language teachers. Third, replications of this study in other educational contexts are encouraged to compare the results and examine the generalizability. Fourth, follow-up research is needed to evaluate the implementation of the suggested training, administrative, and collegial support. Finally, a variety of research methods should be employed in future studies to investigate this issue. Each research method has its strengths and limitations. Using various research methods, such as interviews and observations, can further validate the survey findings.

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影響國小英語教師實施多元課室評量之因素探究

摘要

課室評量近來在國際第二語言測驗領域中受到相當的關注，尤其是在國小英語教學的評量方面。在臺灣，教育部「國民中小學九年一貫課程綱要-語文學習領域(英語)」中亦推薦多元化課室評量的使用。因此，了解現今國小英語教師實施多元課室評量現況及其相關影響因素有其必要性。教師及環境因素在教師實施課室評量中所扮演的角色已在其他學科領域裡逐漸受到研究與重視；然而此議題在英語教學領域中因有研究的缺乏仍未受到深入討論；故此研究以 425 位隨機抽樣之台灣國小英語教師為調查樣本，探討英語教師實施多元課室評量之相關影響因素。典型相關分析結果顯示教師自我效能感、對評量的效益信念及教師知能培育與教師實施評量之間具顯著正相關性；然而實施評量時所碰到的阻礙與教師實施評量之間具顯著負相關性。根據此研究結果及相關文獻，本文提供理論應用及教學實務建議(例如給予英語教師專業知能訓練、學校行政、及教師同儕上之各項支援)，期能對國小英語教師實施多元課室評量之現況有所助益，本文最後對此議題提出未來研究的建議。

關鍵詞：課室評量 多元評量 國小英語教學