Assessment Literacy: Beyond Teacher Practice

Zineb Djoub

Abstract Language teachers nowadays should cope with the changing and challenging demands of society which requires more flexibility in assessment in order to support learning. Indeed, assessment is no longer used for merely measuring learning outcomes but also for creating more learning opportunities. To support the achievement of this goal, an increasing interest in developing teachers' assessment literacy via training and professional development courses has been gaining ground. Yet, reaching the intended objectives and effectively defining the contents and approaches of those courses depend on understanding the nature of assessment literacy. To this end, this paper aims to find out about this process through examining how ESL/EFL teachers' assessment literacy affects their assessment views and practices.

Keywords Assessment literacy · Enhancing learning · Teacher training

1 Introduction

Assessment of language learning has been the primary concern of several researchers, teachers, test developers, syllabus designers, etc. It is a vital component of the educational process which serves a variety of purposes such as diagnostic, achievement, progress, among others. Hence, the challenge which remains either unaddressed or not addressed properly is how teachers can make the most out of their assessment practice in a given educational context. In this respect, it has been widely recognized that language assessment literacy is an important aspect of teachers' professional knowledge (Coombe, Al-Hamly, & Troudi, 2009). Thus, the question which may be raised is: How can teachers' beliefs and knowledge of language assessment affect their assessment practices and attitudes within this process? To provide empirical evidence of what constitutes teachers' beliefs and

Z. Djoub (✉)
Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University of Mostaganem, Mostaganem, Algeria
e-mail: Algeriazdjoub@yahoo.fr

knowledge of language assessment and how these may affect their assessment approaches in English language teaching, a questionnaire was administered to English language teachers worldwide using a web based survey site called SurveyMonkey. This chapter will first introduce the concept of assessment literacy, its definitions and importance in language teaching and learning. Then, it will analyze and interpret the data obtained from the survey. Finally, a set of recommendations will be provided on how to train teachers to become more literate in assessment in ESL/EFL contexts.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Principles of Language Assessment

Language assessment refers to "the act of collecting information and making judgments on a language learner's understanding of a language and his ability to use it" (Chapelle & Brindley, 2002, p. 267). It is, thus, an interpretation of the test taker's ability to use some aspects of this language (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). It is worth noting that being able to use a language entails interacting with others, in a given setting, to create or interpret intended meanings within a particular discourse (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Though assessment is undertaken for a variety of purposes (e.g. formative or summative assessment), the primary purpose remains to support learning which occurs when learners are, according to Cameron, Tate, Macnaughton and Politano (1998):

> Thinking, problem-solving, constructing, transforming, investigating, creating, analyzing, making choices, organizing, deciding, explaining, talking and communicating, sharing, representing, predicting, interpreting, assessing, reflecting, taking responsibility, exploring, asking, answering, recording, gaining new knowledge, and applying that knowledge to new situations (p. 6).

Improving assessment practice remains the concern of several researchers who are attempting to find out how to make this process support learning. To do so, there has been a need to account for what constitutes good or "sound" language assessment, whose characteristics, as put forward by Stiggins (2007, cited in Coombe et al., 2009, p. 16), are:

- They arise from and serve clear purposes.
- They arise from and reflect clear and appropriate achievement targets.
- They rely on a proper assessment method (given the purpose and the target).
- They sample student achievement appropriately.
- They control for all relevant sources of bias and distortion.

So, in summary, effective or sound assessment is purposive and targets clear and relevant objectives which can contribute to both evaluating and developing learners' language ability. Moreover, it uses appropriate assessment methods according

to the set objectives and communicates assessment results to all stakeholders who are involved in the process. Sound assessment also needs to develop valid and reliable grading by maintaining control over the variables that may distort its results. In addition to reliability and validity, Bachman and Palmer (1996, cited in Daalen, 1999) add other terms which refer to test usefulness such as authenticity, interactiveness, practicality and impact.

Additionally, sound assessment also entails involving learners in the assessment process and helping them move towards greater autonomy through introducing a wider variety of assessment methods, or what has been called alternative assessment. The latter is often connected to formative 'assessment for learning' (AFL) where assessment needs to "serve the purpose of promoting students' learning….an assessment activity (is formative) if it provides information to be used as feedback by teachers and their students" (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2003, p. 10).

Following this description of the various concepts involved with assessment, a question which can be addressed is how teachers can effectively use assessment procedures in a given educational context. In fact, to avoid "the potential misuse or abuse of tests", teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and training required to practice effective assessment procedures (Taylor, 2009, p. 25). This has been referred to as assessment literacy.

3   Assessment Literacy: Definitions and Importance

It has been widely recognized that language assessment literacy is an important aspect of teachers' professional knowledge (Coombe et al., 2009). Being literate in assessment means "having the capacity to ask and answer critical questions about the purpose for assessment, about the fitness of the tool being used, about testing conditions, and about what is going to happen on the basis of the results" (Inbar-Lourie, 2008, cited in Watanabe, 2011, p. 29). Accordingly, assessment literacy provides teachers with the knowledge and necessary tools to help them understand what they are assessing, how they need to assess it according to specific purposes, and what decisions they need to make in order to assess their learners effectively and maximize learning. According to Coombe et al. (2009), assessment literacy can be achieved through:

1. Understanding what a good assessment means while recognizing the different views about the nature of education which may lead to dissimilar approaches to assessment.
2. Providing professional development through both online training of teachers and through assessment workshops at all levels.
3. Being committed to significant change in educational practices.
4. Making assessment resources (especially online) available to language teachers to achieve successful professional development.

However, it needs to be maintained that assessment literacy does not only concern teachers, but also those involved in test development such as: policy makers, test developers, test administration, etc. Test takers or learners are also concerned "because they are the most important stakeholders and the greatest recipients of the benefits derived from the process and the product of language assessment" (Watanabe, 2011, p. 29). Therefore, learners need to understand the assessment process being implemented, its objectives and the criteria on which it is based. Indeed, Watanabe (2011) argues that this literacy is of crucial importance because, first, it helps relieve learners of their fear or anxiety towards the test they take, thereby avoiding negative washback. Second, because it allows them to get actively involved in the process of assessment and gain motivation from it.

4   Research Method

To investigate the effect of teachers' assessment literacy on their assessment practices, a questionnaire was administered to English language teachers worldwide during April and May 2014. The results of this survey were collected online using a web based survey site called SurveyMonkey. The online survey was distributed through the author's Twitter Network and English language teaching Networks such as Academia.Edu, Learner Autonomy Research Network, ESL International via LinkedIn, and the TESOL Arabia e-list.

This survey consisted of ten questions (four open questions, three semi-structured, and three structured questions). These questions were grouped into three sections. The first section attempted to find out about the participants' teaching experience of English and their training related to assessment practices. The objective behind addressing these questions is to determine whether these teachers' assessment practices are based on certain knowledge and skills developed from training programs, or are they mostly shaped by their teaching experience? The second section included five questions which aim to reveal their awareness of what constitutes sound assessment (what according to them is good language assessment? Are they aware of the importance of including alternative assessment or not?), as well as attempting to investigate how such knowledge is put into practice through examining their stated assessment objectives, approaches and procedures. In doing so, this section was looking to discover whether these teachers were encouraging their learners to learn and develop their language ability through assessment practices or just use assessment as an end in itself, i.e. limiting its scope to assigning grades, indicating learners' success or failure at the end of a given term. This section's aim was also to get an idea about test-takers' assessment literacy through asking the participants whether they provide their learners with some knowledge about language assessment or not. In the last section of this survey, a space was devoted to the participants' views regarding their institution's supporting role and teachers' needs, as far as assessment is concerned, in order to help enhance this process.

5 Results

The participants were forty-five EFL/ESL teachers from different schools and institutions worldwide. As their answers to the first question indicate, most of them (77.78 %) have more than 10 years of teaching experience, while only 17.78 % have experience of 5–10 years, and just 4.44 % have less than 5 years within this profession. So, the majority of the participants have considerable experience with teaching and thus with assessing their learners. When they were asked whether they had received training into how to assess language learners (Fig. 1), the majority (71.11 %) responded that they had while only 28.89 % said no.

However, the kind of training these teachers received in assessment processes may not guarantee their assessment literacy since not simply any kind of training may serve this aim. Therefore, those who received such training were asked about the kind of training they had received. Their answers demonstrate that most of them had taken courses on how to assess and test language learners as part of their Master's programs. Still, a description of such courses and targeted objectives was not explicitly stated as the following examples show:

- In my master study we took a course named testing and its main objective how to test different English skills
- Assessment in ELT-MA Module
- During my Masters in TESL/TEFL studies, one course (3 credit hours) was in language testing but I don't remember the name. It was about what and how to test

In addition to those MA courses, there were other teachers who gave just names of training programs without identifying their objective, duration nor the center or organization. For instance: *Evaluation and Assessment in General and Designing Good Tests*, *Continuous Assessment*, *Testing and Learning, Designing Language*

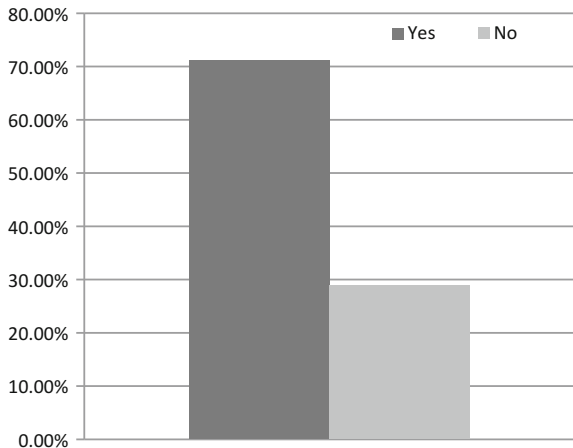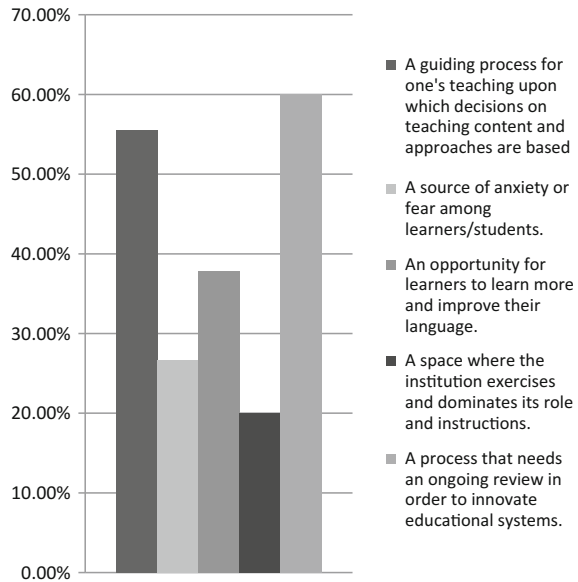**Fig. 1** Have participants had training in assessment?

Fig. 2 The sample's views concerning language assessment

Legend:
- A guiding process for one's teaching upon which decisions on teaching content and approaches are based
- A source of anxiety or fear among learners/students.
- An opportunity for learners to learn more and improve their language.
- A space where the institution exercises and dominates its role and instructions.
- A process that needs an ongoing review in order to innovate educational systems.

Tests, etc. It is worth noting here, that there were two teachers who did not mention the name of the training program because they could not remember, as it was such a long time ago.

Furthermore, it is thought that teachers' beliefs and understanding of teaching and learning may affect their actual assessment approach. Indeed, Richards and Rodgers (2001) affirmed that teachers possess assumptions about language and language learning, and that these provide the basis for a particular approach to language instruction. To find out about such an effect, the participants were asked about their views concerning assessment, i.e., how they view the assessment process in relation to their teaching practices. A set of options were provided here for selection, as well as a space for their additional or alternative answers. Figure 2 shows the data obtained for this question.

From this question we can see that assessment was regarded by 60 % of the teachers as a process which needs ongoing review in order to innovate educational systems. The second highest response (55.56 %) was from those considering it a guiding process for their teaching, including its content and approaches. 37.78 % of the questioned teachers believed that assessment is an opportunity for learners to learn more and improve their language, while only 26.67 % viewed it as a source of anxiety or fear among learners. Moreover, most respondents seemed to disagree with the idea that within this process there is much more space for institutional control and less or no room for the teacher or tester's own voice, as only 20 % opted for this answer.

Moreover, there were other additional comments provided by 6.67 % of the teachers. Assessment was regarded as a way to determine students' progress and

achievement as one teacher mentioned. Yet, another one pointed to the existing gap between what is taught and what is assessed stating: "When teaching at my university, an emphasis is placed on teaching students language skills, but many of the tests focus on grammar structures or filling in blanks with vocabulary from the book". Likewise, one teacher referred to the dichotomy between what theoretical principles imply and actual practices indicate writing: "Assessment has the potential to be a great experience, but often it isn't". The need to train teachers in formative assessment forms was also raised by one teacher.

In the attempt to find out about their assessment literacy, the participants were also asked about their definition of sound assessment. This was done through an open-ended question, so that they could express themselves freely. The collected data reveals that, out of the questioned 45 teachers, 29 answered this question. Although, these answers differ from one teacher to another, they were grouped into the following categories, as shown in the following chart. There were criteria for sound assessment which pertain to the assessment tasks themselves, i.e., content; and those related to the process of assessment, i.e., the kind of assessment tools used, the way the assessment task was administered, feedback provided, etc. (Table 1).

It is worth noting, however, that there were few answers provided for each category since the teachers' definition of sound assessment covered just one or two criteria. Indeed, there were some teachers who put emphasis on what is known as the assessment principles: reliability, validity, authenticity, practicality and washback. Only two teachers stated these principles together, while others mentioned one or two of them (three referred just to authenticity, two others to reliability, another two teachers to validity and reliability, and one teacher wrote authenticity and reliability). For other teachers, relating assessment to teaching and covering the different language skills was considered a common feature of assessment content. Indeed, there were four teachers who maintained that sound assessment should assess directly what was taught in class, except when it is the case of language competency tests such as IELTS. On the other hand, four others pointed to the need to provide learners with opportunities to use the different language skills by assessing them. One of these teachers added that a good test should not only cover the language structure (language usage), but it should also assess learners' productive and receptive skills (language use).

Moreover, for some teachers' good assessment practices are attributed entirely to the process of its implementation. Clarifying the assessment criteria, objectives, and explaining the how and why were highlighted by four teachers. Another teacher referred to the importance of asking well-phrased questions. Three others saw that feedback needs to be clear for both teachers and learners. Other test criteria were also mentioned by teachers in relation to the assessment process, among them was the use of different assessment methods to gather ample data about learners' performance, as noted by four teachers. It is worth noting, however, that assessment should not be conducted merely for the sake of collecting such data, it also needs to provide learners with the opportunity to learn and improve—a sentiment echoed by just two other teachers. Similarly, in spite of the increasing tendency towards

Table 1 Criteria of sound assessment according to the sample

	Criteria of sound assessment	Some examples
Content of assessment	Valid, reliable, and fair	Fair, reliable and tests student abilities
		Valid and reliable assessments should all be extensions of the curriculum
	Authentic, i.e., interactive, testing learner's communicative competence	Testing the ability to apply the learned concepts into real life setting
		A good language assessment in a language classroom measures how well the student has internalized the language system and how competent the student is in using the language in social contexts
	Directly related to what was taught	Good language assessment asks students to produce language based on what they have been practicing in class
		It should be directly related to what the students are learning at the time
	Assessment of different skills	Assessment that includes all four skills with clear criteria identifying each level for consistency
		Weekly reviews or short quizzes that examine different skills
Process of assessment	Clear assessment process including the objective and criteria	Students know what, why and how to do well
		Assessment where both teacher and learners understand and can use the goals, processes and outcomes
	Clear feedback provider for both teachers and learners	The one that gives the teachers clear feedback on learners' performance
		Criterion-based fairness in marking feedback to students on how to improve their performance
	Using a variety of methods of information collection	A mixture of standard tests and ongoing monitoring
		One that provides ample opportunities for the students to exhibit their proficiency
	A source of learning and progressing	This process needs to track students' learning as well as contribute to their learning
		Where the learner learns not just being tested. He should have the opportunity for feedback about his performance
	Prompting reflection	Summative assessment: reflection paper is good for the student to be aware of his own progress, checklists are good to the teacher to collect qualitative data of the student
		Sound assessments are based on sound and achievable objectives that have ongoing formative assessments based on reflective practices that have been incorporated into the lesson plan, and utilize the input of both students and teachers

**Fig. 3** The sample's use of alternative assessment tools
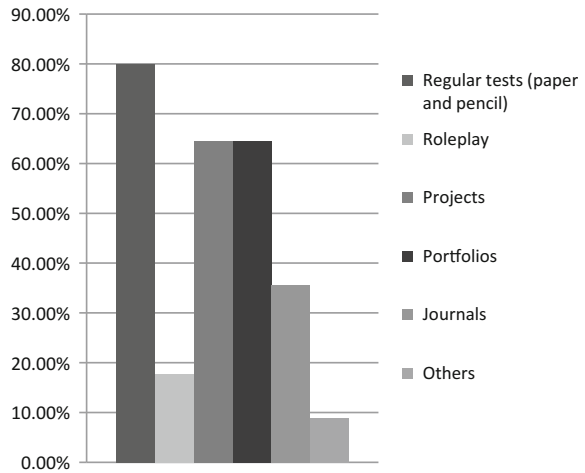
integrating alternative assessment forms in language teaching and involving learners in assessing themselves and their peers, only two teachers conceived this as important in their answers.

Question six was addressed to learn whether these teachers use any kind of alternative assessment approaches apart from final exams. Regular tests (paper and pencil), role play, projects, portfolios and journals were the choices provided within this question, besides asking the teachers to indicate other tools that they used to assess their learners which were not among the choices. As Fig. 3 shows, the majority of the sample (80 %) used regular pen and paper tests. Projects and portfolios were used by the same number of teachers (64.44 %); around half this number (35.56 %) assessed their learners through journal writing and only 18 % of the participants selected role play. Other assessment modes were also provided such as Quizzes (by four teachers), checklists and reflection (three teachers), presentations (two teachers), tests on iPad (one teacher), observations (one teacher), and oral interviews (one teacher).

In addition to identifying their assessment approaches, there is also a need to uncover their intention behind implementing them in order to find out about their assessment objectives and whether these match their assessment practices. To achieve this aim, an open question (N°7) was addressed to the participants. From the collected responses, three main objectives of assessment were identified by the sample as follows: to examine the learners' achievement of the learning outcomes, to help them learn from the teacher's feedback and progress, to improve the efficiency of teaching and learning. The highest rate was recorded for the first objective as Fig. 4 demonstrates.

Concerning the kind of support these teachers provide their learners during their assessment process, it was found that providing constructive feedback on learners' performance was selected by 88.89 % of the sample. Similarly, the majority (84.44 %) agreed with the need to familiarize their learners with the test format and

Fig. 4 The teachers' intentions of integrating formative assessment
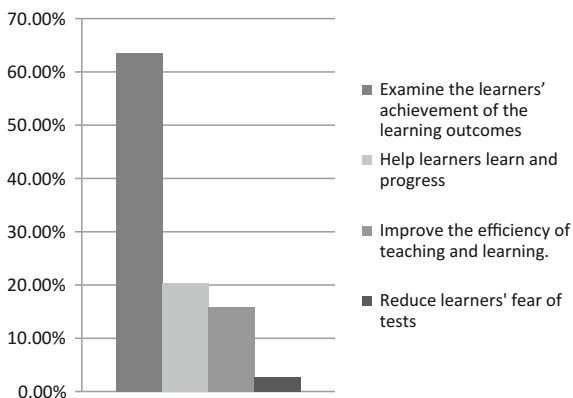
clarify from the outset the assessment criteria and objective. Reviewing lessons covered by the test was regarded essential by 60 %. As Fig. 5 shows, other forms of support were provided for learners by some teachers, such as:

- "Handouts of best examples of students' answers".
- "Discussions".
- "Praise the effort made. Advise with sensitivity and encouragement".
- "Streamed tables focusing on different skills, so that learners can focus on the one skill they really need to improve.
- "Self-reflection on test performance and reasons why they achieved/didn't achieve their goals—Goal-setting—Making study plans—Allocating some class time to study skills".

As far as teacher's autonomy in assessment is concerned, the participants were requested to mention to what extent their assessment practices are dictated by the institutions/universities/schools they belong to. It was found that 81.39 % of them stated that these play a dominating role within this process and thus there is no space for teacher freedom. Whereas, only 11.62 % replied that there is some freedom left for them mainly within formative assessment as the following examples show:

- "Other than final assessments we have a lot of flexibility with assessments, bearing in mind they are within the framework of the institution's dictated learning outcomes".
- "In my institution, the middle and end of semester practices are dictated by the institution but the assessment practices throughout the semester are in the hands of the individual teacher".
- "Final assessments are quite regulated, but within the course it's fairly liberal".

Additionally, 6.97 % of these participants mentioned that this depends on the institution/school's objective behind their assessment practices, as one teacher said: "It depends on the institution's curriculum. Some are strict on the type of
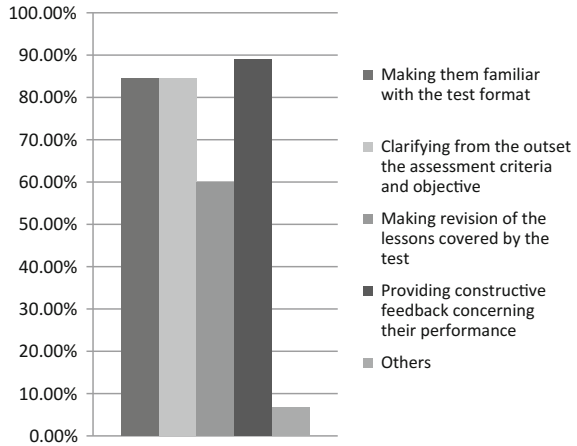
assessment to be done and others are interested only in scores that can be assigned to students". Finally, the participants indicated the kind of support they need to make their assessment more effective. These ranged from providing teacher training courses and programs on how to assess language learning, to having at their disposal the necessary materials, time, and certain autonomy to achieve this objective. Figure 6 illustrates these findings.

Overwhelmingly, the kind of support which teachers looked for was the provision of teacher's training and professional development courses in relation to language assessment, as stated by 60.46 %. These would cover the know-how of the assessment process, including understanding its purpose, criteria of assessment, what should be assessed, its approaches (why, how and when to implement them), in addition to how feedback should be communicated to learners. For other teachers (18.60 %) mentoring and collaborating among teachers and experts in the assessment process is crucial to help them gain more feedback about their practices and get involved in reviewing and improving them.

On the other hand, only 16.27 % of the participants mentioned that teachers should be given a certain degree of autonomy to make decisions regarding the assessment process, including selecting the type of assessment that matches their learners' learning needs and interests, as one teacher stated:

> creating the type of assessment that go along with what students have been doing in class. Classroom tests are not necessarily indicative of what students can do with the language. Assessment should allow a variety of usage to ensure that language is used in its appropriate sociocultural context.

Moreover, just 11.62 % of participants mentioned the materials needed within assessment (see Fig. 6) and the same rate was also noted for those who referred to the importance of allocating enough time for this process, as these teachers' statements indicate:
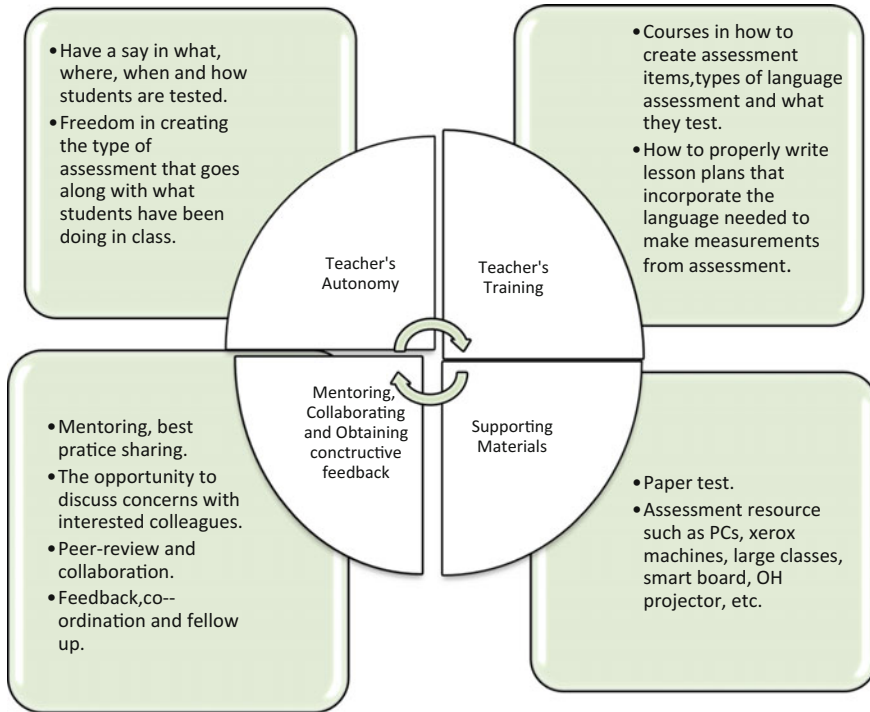
Fig. 6 The sample's needs within the assessment process

- "Time, time, time to create assessments, time to analyze the results, and time to make the necessary adjustments to the assessments".
- "….enough time to focus on the main skills".

6 Discussion

The survey results show that most of the teachers (45 teachers) have experience in teaching English which goes beyond 10 years. This is likely to contribute to their conceptions and attitude construction regarding the assessment process. During that teaching experience most of them had never been trained in language assessment. Instead, they received courses as part of their MA program. However, a clear distinction needs to be made here between receiving courses as part of an education where emphasis is put upon the development of knowledge and moral values required in all walks of life, and training which emphasizes knowledge, skills and behavior patterns required to perform a particular job (Rao, 2004). Thus, teacher

training is mostly concerned with the practice and skill of methodologies, not with the knowledge of background theories.

As a matter of fact, providing teachers with knowledge about assessment would not suffice to make it effective without equipping them with the necessary skills and strategies that can help them make decisions over what assessment tools to integrate into their teaching. They also need the ability to evaluate learners' needs and institutions' intended outcomes, as well as put them into practice along with feedback provision to enhance learner performance. In addition, since there are some teachers who do not remember even the type, name, objective or time of training they received, there is a need for continuous professional development (CPD) that can help teachers innovate and commit themselves to change their teaching and assessment practices.

It can be inferred that, overall, these participants must possess some knowledge and assumptions about language assessment as a result of attending such trainings and MA courses and their teaching experience. But, they may not have developed the necessary practical skills to assess their language learners, as their knowledge of assessment is not updated regularly since, as they stated, they have never gone through professional development courses. Some teachers who stated that they never received any training or courses into assessment displayed awareness of the importance and need for such training, and they also acknowledged that it is unacceptable for language instructors not to be trained in such a process whose results can be critical for their learners' future and decision makers' intentions and plans. This may raise issues related to the effectiveness of their assessment practices and trustworthiness of the assessment process. In fact, their dissatisfaction of its outcomes and effects was revealed when they highlighted the need for continuous review and reform to the process, in addition to pointing to the existing gap between theoretical principles on language assessment and what actual practices reflect.

Nevertheless, their views that assessment is not a source of anxiety or fear for learners, nor a space for institutions to exercise complete control, may imply that these teachers are aware that this process should help learners achieve their learning potential through helping them "appreciate challenge and shake off the fear of failure" (Clegg & Bryan, 2006, p. 218). They also seem to realize that they need flexibility to adjust their assessment according to their learners' needs. Still, the findings revealed that they were unaware of the means to achieve such a purpose. Using alternative assessment approaches was not regarded as a major feature of sound assessment by most of them, who considered reliability and validity as the most crucial criteria for any assessment. Focusing entirely on these criteria, however, may not encourage learners' creativity and language use, as Gipps (2006) maintains, these concepts "are now seen to have limited usefulness because of the way that they assume that all assessments are unidimensional, and that they are steps towards producing a single 'true score' to summarise the educational achievement level of a student" (cited in Murphy, 2006, p. 43).

In fact, these teachers were unaware of the potential of such assessment approaches in helping learners to learn and progress, and improve the teaching/learning process on the basis of assessment feedback. With participant's

stated objectives for integrating them was limited entirely to the examination of learners' achievement of the learning outcomes, whereas no teachers indicated any intention of involving their learners in the assessment process through providing them with the opportunity to reflect on their learning process or monitor their progress and make the necessary decisions to improve it. Integrating such forms is not a guarantee of subsequent AFL opportunities, as they may simply be used for grading purposes (Murphy, 2006). So, making the right selection of alternative assessment approaches does not suffice without considering the purpose behind implementing them, which remains crucial to determining their usefulness.

Moreover, since the washback effect can engender either learners' frustration or motivation to learn and improve, the affective aspect of assessment also needs to be catered for as part of the teacher's support within this process. Though most of the participants did not consider assessment as a source of anxiety and fear for learners, no kind of psychological support was provided by them to help their learners overcome their fear of exam taking. This could imply that they are not aware that "being assessed is undoubtedly an emotional business" which is likely to be remembered by learners (Clegg & Bryan, 2006, p. 218).

Finally, most of the teachers' answers refer to the dominating role of their institutions and schools over the entire assessment process, a role deemed not necessarily helpful by most teachers. Rather, teacher training into language assessment was conceived as a prerequisite for the effectiveness of this process. By the same token, the participants were calling for their institutions/schools' support to provide them with the necessary professional development courses which can help them achieve their "continual, intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth" in regard to their language assessment process (Richards, 1989, p. 4).

7   Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

From this study, it can be concluded that the participants have not received the necessary training into educational assessment in order to maximize its effectiveness. Nor have they gone through professional development courses during their career. Their beliefs and views concerning what assessment means for them in general and what constitutes sound assessment in particular reflect their lack of assessment literacy. And, hence, they seem mostly unaware of the need "to recognize that assessment procedures can and should contribute to student learning as well as measure it", besides assessing learning "in a wide variety of ways, and indeed be reported in ways that recognize diversity rather than mask it" (Murphy, 2006, p. 44).

Though they mentioned their implementation of some alternative assessment forms, their use remains for the sake of grading rather than for learning. Thus, traditional assessment practices are still prevailing where the focus is entirely on the learning outcome instead of the process. This might be due to their lack of assessment literacy and thus their narrowed vision of what learner assessment

should focus on. Another possible reason, however, would be that using alternative assessment for grading is part of the institution or school's policy because as stated previously most of the participants have no control over their assessment practices.

As with any study, there are some limitations that affect the generalizability of these results. This study needs to be carried out on larger numbers of participants to improve the validity of the findings. Also, other data collection tools can be used such as interviews and observations of the English language teachers' assessment practices. Another limitation is that the study did not examine the teachers' assessment literacy in relation to a given language skill, i.e., writing, speaking, etc. Future studies would benefit from gaining more empirical evidence to investigate teachers' assessment literacy regarding a particular language area.

To help learners overcome their fears and anxiety of exam taking, it is crucial for teachers to understand learner psychology in relation to language assessment. To this end, researchers need to examine this relationship and provide evidence regarding psychological support for learners (Watanabe, 2011). There are also other questions that still need answers. For instance, how can we train teachers in assessment literacy and keep them up to date with the latest innovative approaches to assessment so that they can cope with the changing and challenging demands of society?

In fact, this study revealed that the participants' teaching experience alone has not allowed them to learn about how language assessment needs to be conducted more effectively, and they have therefore failed to develop their assessment literacy and share it with their learners. Their lack of assessment literacy is reflected through their views and practices in assessing their learners. Indeed, their views demonstrate their lack of awareness of what constitutes sound assessment, and their assessment practices act as instruments of justification, measurements and limitation rather than tools to enhance and enable self-regulated learning and judgments (Bryan & Clegg, 2006).

Therefore, teacher training into assessment literacy is advocated here as part of initial teacher education and should be supported beyond this stage through continuous professional development courses. This training needs to support teachers in developing "multi-dimensional awareness" and "the ability to apply this awareness to their actual contexts of teaching" (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 2). To do so, it first needs to sensitize them to the importance of being literate in assessment and the benefits derived from such a process over both learning and teaching, besides introducing them to the major assessment principles in the EFL/ESL context. Second, it needs to equip them with the necessary strategies and techniques of language assessment which are related to particular contexts. Finally, this training needs to encourage teachers' self-evaluation over their assessment practices and provide guidance into the process. This can be done by making them aware of procedures such as observations, checklists, questionnaires, etc., and showing them how to use them continuously and effectively to gain more insights into these practices, thus linking theoretical concepts with experience.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

1) Would you please indicate your teaching experience:

   - Less than 5 years ☐
   - 5 to 10 years ☐
   - More than 10 years ☐

2) Have you ever been trained into how to assess you language
   ☐ ☐
   learners? YES NO

3) If your answer is YES, would you please indicate the kind of training you received.

   …………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………

4) How do you consider your assessment practices?

   - A guiding process for your teaching upon which decisions on ☐ teaching contents and approaches are based.
   - A source of anxiety or fear among learners/students. ☐
   - An opportunity for learners to learn more and improve. ☐
   - A space where the institution exercises and dominates its ☐ role
     and instruction.
   - A process that needs an ongoing review in order to innovate educational systems. ☐
   - Others? ☐

5) What is your definition of sound assessment?

……………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………….

……………………………………………………………………….

…………………………………………………

6) What kind of alternative assessment do you integrate in your

assessment of your learners?

- Regular tests (paper and pencil)   ☐

- Role play   ☐

- Projects   ☐

- Portfolios   ☐

- Journals   ☐

- Peer-assessment   ☐

- Others?   ☐

7) What is your main objective(s) from using such alternative

assessment approach(es)

…………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………

8) To support your learners along the assessment process, you:

- Make them familiar with the test/exam format.   ☐

- Clarify from the outset the assessment objective and criteria. ☐

- Make revision of the lessons covered by the test/exam.   ☐

- Provide constructive feedback concerning their   ☐

  performance.

- Others?   ☐

9) To what extent your assessment practices are dictated by the

institutions/ universities /schools you belong to?

…………………………………………………………………….....

10) What kind of support do you need to make from your assessment

more effective?

……………………………………………………………...…......

………………………………………………………………...........

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………

……………………………………….......

References

Bachman, L., & Palmer, A. (1996). *Language testing in practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & William, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning: Putting it into practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Cameron, C., Tate, B., Macnaughton, D., & Politano, C. (1998). *Recognition without rewards*. Winnipeg, MB: Peguis Publishers.

Chapelle, C., & Brindley, G. (2002). Assessment. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 268–288). London: Arnold.

Clegg, K., & Bryan, C. (2006). Reflections, rationales and realities. In C. Bryan & K. Clegg (Eds.), *Innovative assessment in higher education* (pp. 216–227). New York: Routledge.

Coombe, C., Al-Hamly, M., & Troudi, S. (2009). Foreign and second language teacher assessment literacy: Issues, challenges and recommendations. *Research Notes, 38*, 14–18.

Daalen, M. V. (1999). Test usefulness in alternative assessment. *Dialog on language Instruction, 13*(1 & 2), 1–2.

Gipps, G. (2006). How assessment frames student learning. In C. Bryan & K. Clegg (Eds.), *Innovative assessment in higher education* (pp. 23–36). New York: Routledge.

Inbar-Lourie, O. (2008). Constructing a language assessment knowledge base: A focus on language assessment courses. *Language Testing, 25*, 385–402.

Murphy, R. (2006). Evaluating new priorities for assessment in higher education. In C. Bryan & K. Clegg (Eds.), *Innovative assessment in higher education* (pp. 37–47). New York: Routledge.

Rao, R. (2004). *Methods of teacher training*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.

Richards, J. C. (1989). *Beyond training: Approaches to teacher education in language teaching*. Retrieved from http://markandrews.edublogs.org/files/2010/05/training-v-development-11.pdf.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, L. (2009). Developing assessment literacy. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 29*21–36.

Tomlinson, B. (2003). *Developing materials to develop yourself. Humanising language teaching*. Retrieved from http://www.hltmag.co.uk/jul03/mart1.htm.

Watanabe, Y. (2011). Teaching a course in assessment literacy to test takers: Its rationale, procedure, content and effectiveness. *Research Notes, 46*, 29–34.