Editorial

Preface to "Recent Developments in Language Testing and Assessment"

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1. Introduction

The field of language testing and assessment (LTA) has evolved significantly. Recent discussions and research have been motivated by a number of developments such as the role of computer-based and multimedia-based assessment affordances; the growing interest in the area of assessment literacy; the implementation of formative assessment, especially in the case of classroom-based assessment; assessment challenges and practices in multilingual contexts; assessment accommodations for test-takers with special needs; and education crisis circumstances. Furthermore, evidence indicates that LTA is a situated activity characterized by assessment practices and policies compatible with the social and pedagogical values and beliefs that the local community upholds.

The current Special Issue aimed to examine the above LTA developments, experiences, and practices, taking into consideration the importance of context from a number of different disciplinary and language perspectives, involving a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches. The Special Issue comprises 27 high-quality original submissions from across the world that address a variety of issues from both theoretical and empirical points of view. The studies provide critical insights into the contemporary developments, challenges, and opportunities in LTA.

This preface organizes the articles into the following thematic clusters: (1) Technological Innovations in Assessment; (2) Equity and Inclusivity; (3) Teacher Beliefs and Professional Development; (4) Assessment Practices in Times of Crisis; and (5) Student-Centered Approaches. Each paper is summarized briefly, highlighting its key contributions. The articles span diverse contexts, addressing theoretical underpinnings, empirical investigations, and practical applications. The articles reviewed here showcase research that integrates evidence-based approaches with sensitivity to contextual variables.

2. Thematic Clusters of Special Issue

Cluster 1: Technological Innovations in Assessment

The integration of technology has expanded the scope and precision of language assessment. Several studies in the current Special Issue explore how technology is reshaping LTA, from automated discourse analysis tools to online placement tests and digital reading assessments, offering both opportunities and challenges. For example, in their study, Naqvi et al. evaluate the reliability and validity of an online English placement test in Oman. Through statistical analyses and expert review, the test potential lies in the accurate and scalable screening of language skills, aligning online tools with educational goals. Liontou also measured cohesion and coherence through automated discourse analysis tools for

writing assessments. The results showed that while improving efficiency, such tools must be complemented by human judgment to capture language subtleties. The authors stress that integrating automation and teacher expertise can enhance fairness, feedback, and learner development. Furthermore, Giannikas showed that alternative assessments for young distance learners include digital portfolios, games, and interactive tasks. These methods are said to motivate learners, ensuring richer engagement and insight. Giannikas concluded that effective implementation calls for user-friendly tools, teacher training, and continuous monitoring to maintain validity and reliability. Wolf and Lopez investigated academic language learners using a technology-based reading assessment tool. The researchers stressed that teachers can utilize the tool for formative purposes, tailoring instruction and improving students' reading proficiency in a transparent and accessible manner. Finally, Lin and Yu, using a bibliometric analysis of peer assessment in online language courses, map the emerging trends. Their study concluded that understanding emerging patterns in the field may guide the future design of digitally mediated peer assessments, strengthening theoretical frameworks and pedagogical practices.

Technological innovations can afford more accessible, efficient, and individualized assessments. These studies underscore the importance of balancing automation with human oversight, ensuring that test validity and user experience remain central, suggesting that educators and researchers must refine digital tools, integrate stakeholder feedback, and promote teacher training to maximize benefits. While the studies in this Special Issue demonstrate innovative approaches to reconciling these demands, particularly in online and technology-mediated contexts, future research should focus on refining these tools and integrating them into hybrid assessment models that combine automation with human expertise. However, it necessitates careful validation and ethical considerations, as highlighted by these studies.

Cluster 2: Equity and Inclusivity

The papers included in this cluster examine how language assessments can become more inclusive, culturally responsive, and equitable, particularly for refugee, migrant, and special needs learners. For example, Chatzina and Mouti stress that assessing refugee and migrant children in Greece demands culturally responsive tools. The study highlights that linguistic, social, and emotional factors influence test fairness. The researchers conclude that inclusive frameworks can bridge gaps, fostering equal opportunities and aiding integration into mainstream education. Furthermore, Hertel et al. argue that bilingual children with special needs in Germany require assessments addressing both linguistic and developmental factors, and tailored testing identifies strengths, supports learning plans, and improves outcomes. The researchers recommend that effective collaboration among professionals and culturally sensitive materials ensure fairness. Similarly, Mitsaki et al. stress that diagnostic assessment in Greek as a second language influences teaching approaches for migrant learners; for example, teachers recognize its washback potential but need support in order to implement its consistent use. The researchers advise test constructors and users to implement flexible, learner-centered diagnostic tools as they may empower teachers and offer vulnerable students meaningful learning opportunities.

This cluster of papers on Equity and Inclusivity hinge on assessments that honor learners' backgrounds, linguistic profiles, and educational needs. These studies show that responsiveness and adaptability in testing foster more just and meaningful learning environments. Policy and practice must embrace diverse methodologies, training educators in culturally attuned, student-focused assessment strategies (as stressed in Cluster 4).

Cluster 3: Teacher Beliefs and Professional Development

This group of papers explores how teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and training (language assessment literacy—LAL) shape their assessment practices, and how professional development can enhance language assessment literacy. Building LAL among teachers is critical for the effective implementation of assessment practices. Therefore, teacher beliefs and training emerge as critical factors influencing assessment practices.

For example, Tsagari et al. make the point that teachers in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) contexts struggle to align beliefs with assessment practices, while an alignment between them enhances validity, cultural sensitivity, and meaningful feedback in multilingual classrooms. Saglam and Tsagari, in their paper on integrated proficiency assessments, raise concerns about consequential validity. Their study showed that stakeholders highlight alignment issues, needing transparent rationales, and recommend that clarifying assessment purposes and involving teachers can yield more positive educational outcomes. Erickson and Tholin, working with Swedish lower secondary teachers, reveal that practitioners put emphasis on the value of national English tests for benchmarking. However, practitioners question their pedagogical relevance and seek more influence in test design. The researchers conclude that collaboration between policymakers and teachers can enhance trust and test utility.

Kvasova, researching student teacher LTA courses, found out that teachers enter these with fixed notions of assessment. Kvasova points out that reflective activities challenge these preconceptions, fostering deeper understanding and concluding that strengthening assessment literacy requires bridging theoretical knowledge with hands-on practice. In a similar line of inquiry, Bustamante worked with Mexican middle school English teachers. Her research showed gaps in language assessment literacy and recommended that focused training can fill these voids, improving test design and feedback provision. The author concluded that enhanced assessment literacy leads to more informed instructional decisions and better student outcomes.

In a pre-service Swedish and Finnish teacher context, Hilden et al. researched summative assessments. The researchers emphasized that cross-cultural insights better inform training programs, fostering coherent practice while teacher mentoring and clear guidelines build practitioners' confidence, resulting in fair and effective summative evaluations.

In their paper, Lee et al. highlight that mentoring and stakeholder interactions strengthen pre-service teachers' assessment literacy and that multiple perspectives enrich understanding and skill application. The researchers also emphasize that collaborative learning communities pave the way for more informed, confident practitioners. Also, Vold highlights that teachers' assessment of French writing and learners' responses interact dynamically. The researcher underlines the importance of a formative approach in assessment considering its learning and learner-centered focus, concluding that matching teacher strategies with student needs boosts writing quality and learner autonomy.

In Frisén et al.'s study, teachers applying policy guidelines to assess L2 English oral proficiency face conceptual challenges. The researchers stress that clearer policy communication and teacher training can bridge gaps and conclude that aligning policy and practice assures more reliable, meaningful oral assessments. In addition, Osidak et al.'s study looks at mentoring programs for Ukrainian university teachers and how they build LAL competencies. The researchers conclude that guided experience, feedback, and reflection develop both confidence and sophistication, as such initiatives empower educators to lead transformative assessment reforms. Finally, Gkogkou and Kofou's study offers a practical resource that is a toolkit for evaluating Greek EFL teachers' assessment literacy. The authors stress that their resource is flexible and context-sensitive, it informs training

and self-assessment, and empowers teachers to become more adept at designing and interpreting tests, ultimately benefiting learners.

The papers in this cluster emphasize that teachers are pivotal in shaping assessment quality. The authors stress that enhanced professional development, reflective practice, and supportive tools improve their confidence and expertise. One of the major lessons learned is that as teacher beliefs and knowledge align with sound assessment principles, educational systems achieve more consistent, fair, and meaningful evaluations of language learning. Also, these studies reveal gaps in assessment literacy and advocate for targeted professional development programs, including teacher development courses and mentorship. The research studies reveal persistent gaps but also highlight the transformative potential of targeted professional development. Building assessment literacy should be an ongoing effort, incorporating practical experiences and reflective practices.

Cluster 4: Assessment Practices in Times of Crisis

The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the educational landscape around the world, affecting the way language educators deal with teaching and assessment. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional assessment methods, prompting educators to adapt to remote and hybrid models. Under the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic, the following papers show how educators adapted assessment practices and navigated new challenges.

The paper by Maaoui et al. undertaken during the COVID-19 crisis shows how language educators adapted assessment to online modes; their perceptions of validity varied in their attempts to balance constraints and standards. The researchers concluded that professional support and training can sustain effective, resilient remote assessment systems. Ducasse's study also investigated assessment during COVID-19, focusing on how emergency remote teaching spurred advanced L2 learners to reflect on oral assessment. The study highlights the value of interactive, student-driven tasks, emphasizing that communication, flexibility, and transparency maintain assessment integrity even in upheaval.

The papers included in this cluster show that crises spotlight the need for adaptable assessment frameworks and teacher readiness. The studies in this Special Issue document the challenges and opportunities associated with these shifts, highlighting the need for crisis-resilient assessment frameworks. The studies have also shown that despite abrupt shifts, educators found creative solutions that preserved student engagement and fairness. This resilience model can inform future policies and preparation, ensuring continuity in language assessment under uncertain conditions.

Cluster 5: Student-Centered Approaches

Student-centered learning prioritizes the learner's position at the core of the educational process, emphasizing their active involvement, engagement, and the cultivation of autonomy. The following studies focus on learner participation, formative feedback, and peer collaboration, placing students at the heart of the assessment process.

More specifically, Antia and Vogt, through the use of annotated texts, demonstrate diagnostic insights into students' reading comprehension processes. The study underscores that understanding learners' strategies may guide targeted support and recommends that such formative feedback improves both reading proficiency and learner autonomy. In a similar line of inquiry, Ioannou and Tsagari worked on recasts and metalinguistic feedback, which are seen to influence learners' grammatical development in Greek. The authors stress that tailoring feedback to proficiency levels enhances outcomes and advocates for a responsive, student-focused approach that refines linguistic accuracy and confidence.

Furthermore, in their study, Meletiadou and Tsagari explored peer assessment in exam-dominated EFL writing contexts as a way to foster collaboration. The findings showed that

students gain critical thinking skills when using peer-assessment, though trust issues arise. The authors propose that proper training and guidelines ensure reliability and mutual benefit. In addition, Sandvik and Sommervold's study focuses on student involvement in oral competence assessment. The authors suggest that such practice encourages responsibility and motivation and increases engagement and perceived fairness. The researchers conclude that clear criteria and guidance support a positive, empowering assessment environment.

Liontou studies Finnish and Chinese university students and found that they have different perceptions of an assessment's role. The researcher explains that cultural factors influence whether they see it as a learning tool or a judgment mechanism, stressing that recognizing this difference refines assessment design to align with student values. Finally, Meletiadou's study focused on peer assessment and concluded that such a practice may boost EFL students' writing quality by encouraging reflection and revision, as well as developing autonomy and insight into students' learning needs. The author stressed that with clear structures and supportive classrooms, peer assessment may nurture independent, skilled writers.

Student-centered approaches may enhance learners' insights and agency, enriching the assessment experience. By valuing active participation, formative feedback, and peer interaction, these methods may help learners become co-creators of their educational journeys. Sustained by teacher guidance and supportive policies, student-centered assessment enhances motivation, self-efficacy, and overall language competence. However, successful implementation requires careful scaffolding and teacher support.

3. Conclusions and Future Directions

The current Special Issue aimed to examine a number of LTA developments, experiences, and practices, taking into consideration the importance of context from a number of different disciplinary and language perspectives and involving a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches. Contributors to the volume are academics, researchers, and professionals in language testing and assessment. Each and every paper expands our understanding of the needs, synergies, contributions, and collaborations among a range of LTA stakeholder groups (e.g., teachers, students, testing professionals, and researchers operating in different professional and geographical contexts). The volume raises important questions in the field and attempts to show the beginning of perhaps a new era of conscious epistemological traffic between LTA and other disciplines too.

The articles in this Special Issue collectively underscore the dynamic interplay between theory, practice, and policy in language assessment.

Future research needs to take a broad view of language assessment by taking stock of where we have come from, as well as the developments (social, political, pedagogical, and technological) that have impacted on our individual research and assessment development work, to consider what the implications are in relation to the future of language assessment and testing in Europe and beyond.

Furthermore, as language assessment is an activity guided by prevailing language ideologies as well as more general ideas that permeate the entire society (Tsagari & Vogt, 2022), it is also very important to examine the ideologies of language proficiency descriptors and assessment based on the theoretical perspectives of critical language testing (e.g., Lynch, 2001; Shohamy, 2001).

The field should also throw more light on the impact of the wider field of educational measurement and the study of the alignment of exams to frameworks and standards, since this has been carried out and adapted for local contexts well beyond Europe. Looking forward, the field must continue to embrace interdisciplinary approaches, integrating in-

sights from linguistics, education, and technology. Expanding research in underrepresented contexts and addressing the long-term impacts of assessment reforms is vital.

Finally, the insights from these studies underscore the need for integrative and adaptable assessment frameworks that cater to diverse learners and contexts. Policymakers must invest in resources, training, and research to ensure that assessments remain valid, reliable, and inclusive. Meanwhile, educators should adopt a reflective approach to their assessment practices, staying attuned to learners' needs and emerging trends.

In conclusion, the research in this Special Issue provides a rich tapestry of insights into the evolving landscape of language testing and assessment. It challenges educators, researchers, and policymakers to think critically about how assessment practices can be refined to meet the demands in a diverse, interconnected world. Through collaboration and innovation, the field can advance towards assessments that are not only technically sound but also transformative for learners and educators alike.

As Guest Editors, we sincerely thank the authors and reviewers for sharing their expertise and experience in language testing and assessment theory and practice. We are also very thankful to the MDPI Editorial staff, who have been very supportive throughout the whole process of putting together this Special Issue. We hope that this volume will be useful to language testers, practitioners, researchers, examination boards, and graduate students with an interest in the field.

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