

Monitoring Preservice Teachers' Language Assessment Literacy Development through Journal Writing

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ABSTRACT

Researchers in the field of language assessment literacy (LAL) remark the need to strengthen assessment and testing courses in undergraduate teacher education programs. Several studies conclude that in-service language teachers lack the knowledge, skills and principles to conduct sound assessment practices in their classrooms. In order to contribute to local and global discussions on prospective teachers' LAL development, the current paper reports on the implementation of the learning journal as a tool to monitor candidate EFL teachers' progress in an assessment and testing course at the Faculty of Education in a private university in Colombia. Results reveal substantial modifications in student teachers' understandings regarding the definition and purposes of language assessment, students' and teachers' roles, the what and how of assessment, ethical considerations, and desirable classroom-based assessment practices. Moreover, the research offers insights into the influence of teacher educators' assessment practices on pre-service teachers' LAL development.

KEYWORDS: language assessment literacy, language assessment, teacher education, pre-service teachers, classroom-based assessment

Introduction

Attention towards discussions on the nature and role of language assessment literacy (LAL) has increased worldwide. The 39th Language Testing Research Colloquium, held in Colombia in July 2017 by the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) offered a view of the extent to which the field has expanded. Nonetheless, despite the amount of work, developed in both international and local contexts, it can be concluded that little has been researched on pre-service teachers' LAL development.

A review of studies on the extent to which Colombian language teachers develop LAL allows us to conclude that 1) in-service teachers lack knowledge, skills and principles for classroom-based assessment and testing, 2) teacher education programs are to a big extent responsible for this situation, and 3) it is imperative to provide both pre-service and in-service language teachers with professional development in this area (Arias & Maturana, 2005; López & Bernal, 2009; Herrera & Macías, 2015; Giraldo, 2018). Therefore, as a language teacher educator, I felt strongly committed to contribute to the field by attesting achievements in LAL development among a group of Colombian candidate EFL teachers. The aim of this study was to describe prospective English teachers' progress regarding LAL through the implementation of the learning journal in an assessment and testing course.

Problem Statement

Studies in the field of LAL relate language teachers' underdevelopment of assessment knowledge, skills and principles to the low quality of training they receive in teacher education programs. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the extent to which assessment and testing courses actually promote LAL development among candidate teachers. Consequently, I have been implementing the learning journal as an alternative assessment procedure to appraise student EFL teachers' deconstruction and construction of knowledge regarding course objectives.

Moreover, according to Herrera and Macías (2015), for prospective teachers to build their own expertise in language assessment, it is necessary that teacher educators model sound assessment practices inside their courses (p. 310). Therefore, the learning journal has been also implemented as a strategy to motivate prospective teachers to use them in their own classrooms to foster students' learning. Eventually, I collected some of these journals to report on candidate teachers' progress regarding LAL to contribute to discussions in the field.

Review of related literature

In order to attain a better understanding of the research reported in this text, it is important to first approach the concepts of *language assessment literacy* and *learning journal*.

Language Assessment Literacy

Historically, the definition of language assessment literacy (LAL) has expanded from a narrow view of required knowledge and skills into considerations of ethical practices in language testing and assessment (Davies, 2008). In a broad sense, LAL can be understood as teachers' and other stakeholders' proficiency for the design, administration and use of testing and assessment results. However, a closer examination of the different authors' definitions allows us to conclude that the concept has been refined. Currently, LAL involves not only test designers' competencies but the need to promote an "assessment culture" in which those practices are properly inserted.

Pioneer explicit reference to the features that constitute proficiency in language testing can be found in Fulcher's (2012) definition:

The knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardized and/or classroom based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice. The ability to place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order understand why practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals. (p. 125)

Expanding on the definition above, Vogt and Tsagari (2014) conceive LAL as "the ability to design, develop and critically evaluate tests and other assessment procedures, as well as the

ability to monitor, evaluate, grade and score assessments on the basis of theoretical knowledge” (p. 377). Despite these attempts to define LAL, Inbar-Lourie (2017) concludes that there exist more uncertainties than shared understandings regarding the specific knowledge language teachers are expected to acquire for conducting language assessment. However, the author advocates for an assessment culture where learners play an active role in self-assessment and peer-assessment experiences, and where teachers communicate assessment results as descriptions, using them to inform instruction, not as simple grades (Birenbaum; Wolf *et al.*, as cited in Inbar-Lourie, 2008, p. 387).

On the other hand, the fact that most of the times the knowledge base of assessment and testing courses is determined by experts outside the classroom has been debated. In their study, Berry, Sheehan and Munro (2019) point at the need for teachers to offer their perspectives on what language assessment literacy means to them. Through classroom observations, individual interviews and focus group discussions with 54 in-service teachers, the researchers found that participants' assessment practices are not always guided by a conscious understanding of what language assessment entails. Therefore, the authors suggest that in order “to foster teachers' awareness of the relationship between good teaching practice and good assessment practice, explicit links should be made during initial teacher training” (Berry *et al.*, 2019, p. 121). Furthermore, they advise that “during initial teacher training teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of assessment and project forward on how they will be expected to assess their students” (Berry *et al.*, 2019, p. 121).

Altogether, regardless of the theoretical transitions in the field of LAL, there is wide agreement on the need for language teachers to develop knowledge, skills and principles which enable them to conduct appropriate and sound language assessments inside their classrooms.

Learning journal

Varner and Peck (2003) define a learning journal as:

a semistructured written assignment that provides evidence that you can use to translate course concepts for use in the real world. Entries should apply the theories to your personal experiences, assess those experiences through the lenses of the theories, and propose some action steps based on the assessment. (p. 69)

According to the authors, learning journals can vary in form. Depending on the degree of structure, expected output or assessment purpose, learning journals can differ from one another. Regarding the first feature, learning journals can be structured or unstructured. In other words, they can be guided by pre-established questions or opened to writers' natural flow of extended thought. However, all of them involve students' reflections emerging from the relationship between individual understanding and course subject matter.

Furthermore, depending on the desired outcomes, learning journals can be used to promote learners' mindfulness—inward focus—or their understanding of course material—outward focus. Finally, with regard to how learning journals vary according to assessment aims, the authors state that “internally oriented journals may be used by students for self-assessment of progress toward their personal development goals. Externally focused journals may be used as a way for

students to demonstrate to the instructor their knowledge of course material” (Varner & Peck, 2003, p. 54).

According to Moon (2006), the content of a learning journal is the product of the writer's reflection process, recorded on a regular basis, with the aim of enhancing his/her understanding of a particular subject or area. It is suggested that “writing a journal can have the effect of bringing knowledge presented as ‘out there’ into the ownership of the writer. It involves working with meanings and ensuring that the meanings relate to the current understanding of the writer” (Moon, 2006, p. 47). Additionally, the author states that journal writing for learning purposes requires a certain degree of assistance, as well as the provision of useful inquiry.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, research on pre-service teachers' LAL development is limited. Studies about the use of learning journals to monitor candidate EFL teachers' progress towards LAL were not found during the revision of relevant work in this field. Related studies conducted in the last few years examined journal writing as a resource to promote both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' reflective practice, but not as a tool for prospective EFL teachers to account for knowledge and understandings of language assessment.

Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad and Ghanbari (2013) investigated in-service EFL teachers' views about journal writing in a Second Language Teaching Methodology course. Their findings revealed that teachers considered reflective journal writing as helpful to unveil, reflect on and express their assumptions about English Language Teaching (ELT). On the other hand, teachers remarked the required preparation – prior readings– to enroll in class discussions and reflective skills development as the main challenges in journal writing. Additionally, participants suggested teacher educators to clarify the nature and aims of journal writing, and to promote peer feedback, in order to increase its efficacy. The researchers conclude that teacher educators' role in guiding reflective journal writing is crucial to maximize student teachers' ability to express opinion, and to critically analyze and refine their beliefs and values regarding ELT.

In their study, Nurfaidah, Lengkanawati and Sukyadi (2017) reported results from a phenomenological case study aimed to explore levels of reflection in journals written by prospective EFL teachers in their teaching practicum. The researchers found that journal entries were descriptive-reflective in nature with evidence of participants' ability to support their decisions regarding teaching. The content reflected pre-service teachers' awareness to provide explanations and hypothesis to judge their experiences. However, results signaled a low level of critical reflection observed in the journals mainly explained by student teachers' limited experience and time in real teaching scenarios. In the same vein, Afzali's (2018) study, regarding the quality of recall and reflection journals produced by pre-service teachers in EFL practicum courses, revealed that entries are mainly characterized by descriptive and affective content. Accordingly, the author calls for action into the development of student teachers' skills to write critically.

In her paper, Kim (2018) discusses the focus of eighteen Korean candidate EFL teachers' reflection, and their views of journal writing. The study showed participants' positive perceptions of journal writing as a beneficial activity to 1) promote reflection on their practice, 2) establish critical positions towards themselves as teachers, the context and teaching, 3) lower

anxiety towards the process of writing, and 4) enhance their vocabulary for appropriate expression of ideas. Kim's findings contradict to some extent the results from the two studies mentioned earlier where entries were mostly descriptive. In relation to this, the author calls the attention towards the importance of taking into account previous writing experiences, and providing guidance through preconceived questions to facilitate writers' critical observation, analysis and interpretation processes, in order to maximize journal writing effectiveness.

In a similar study, Khanjani, Vahdany and Jafarigohar (2018) convoked twenty-four candidate EFL teachers to write journal entries based on guidance provided for reflection, or in response to contents developed in different language teaching courses they had enrolled. The purpose was to determine journal writing effects on teacher trainees' reflective practice. The researchers compared the focus of teachers' reflection, from a list of twenty-eight aspects related to teaching practices, before and after journal writing implementation. The study concluded that journal writing promoted participants' reflective practice since it allowed them to critically evaluate their practice to inform decision-making.

A recent research by Donyaie and Afshar (2019) involved thirty EFL teachers working at private language institutes in Iran. The study aimed to identify teachers' perceived obstacles and motivating factors for engaging in reflective journal writing. Participants were asked to write individual and collective journals previous to and after a workshop they were expected to attend. For teachers in this context, the predominant barrier in reflective journal writing is the lack of training; followed by inflexible institutional rules; insufficient salaries, time, reflective skills and motivation; as well as tension between teachers' educational background and school demands. Nonetheless, the findings revealed an acknowledged contribution of conscious writing to participants' awareness on action.

Much of the current literature on the implementation of journal writing in EFL teacher education pays particular attention to the ways in which reflective writing contribute to candidates' understandings of teaching practices. Journal entries quality as well as participants' perceptions of reflective writing constitute the focus of research in the field. Together these studies highlight the need for maximizing journal writing effectiveness, allowing writers to move from analytic descriptions into critically constructed judgments. On the other hand, research into the implementation of journal writing to monitor pre-service EFL teachers' LAL development is non-existent.

Research methods

Context and sample

This research adopted an action research approach to investigating the following research question: How does the implementation of a learning journal in an EFL undergraduate course affect their language assessment literacy? This research was conducted in a language assessment and testing course to train EFL teachers in an undergraduate program at a private university in Medellin, Colombia. My major concern after graduating from a Master of Arts in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning has been English teachers' scarce knowledge and underdeveloped skills for language assessment and testing. Therefore, I have devoted considerable time and effort to examine the extent to which student EFL teachers develop LAL

in this course.

In this attempt, the learning journal has proved to be a helpful tool. A twofold purpose guided its implementation in the course: to model alternative assessment procedures and to monitor student teachers' comprehension of course contents. There were 23 student teachers in the class. Although everyone kept his/her learning journal, not all of them were suitable for the purpose of this research since some were incomplete. In total, 18 learning journals were selected for analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

They were semi-structured learning journals in which candidate teachers responded to prompts suggested by the teacher on a regular once a week basis during four months. Some prompts read: What is your definition of assessment? What guides your decisions regarding assessment in the English class? What should be assessed in the English class? What type of procedures can be used to assess learners in the English class? What are the results from assessment useful for? Who should make decisions regarding assessment in the English class? I collected them three times during the term. Based on the insight gained each time, I conducted whole class conferences for favoring the interpretation process and providing revisions on course materials. In order to control levels of practicality, entries had a length limit of one page (letter size paper). Other important requirements involved using English language, exhibiting neat handwriting, and providing deep and critical reflections. Each selected learning journal included sixteen entries.

The method used to analyze journal entries was *content analysis*, based on the steps suggested by Saldaña (2009): establishing preliminary codes and categories, recoding and recategorizing, and determining themes. It consisted of a manual process comprising two stages: individual treatment of data within each entry and journal, and the construction of a matrix to compare developed codes and categories among all learning journals. Five categories, explained in the results session, emerged from a total of fifteen codes developed. Some codes were *definition, passive role, active role, authentic assessment, fairness, formative assessment, language to be assessed, and democracy*.

Furthermore, feedback provided by participants during conferences highly contributed to enhance trustworthiness in this research. These conferences took around twenty minutes at the end of each class, and consisted of sharing partial interpretations from entries with pre-service teachers. After listening to them, they briefly commented on the extent to which they agreed or not and why. I took notes of students' comments to contrast them with my initial interpretations to make adjustments. Final interpretations were shared during the last class and were approved by participants.

Findings

Data analysis revealed five dimensions in which pre-service EFL teachers made progress. Firstly, LAL development was evident in student teachers' evolving definition of *assessment* and their changing views of *assessment purposes*. Secondly, writers exhibited a turn of mind regarding initial conceptions of teacher and student's role in language assessment. A third

element that constituted evidence of growth regarding LAL was candidate teachers' gained clarity on language assessment constructs (*what*) and procedures (*how*). Similarly, reference to ethical considerations in language assessment, signaled the fourth dimension in which candidate teachers demonstrated LAL development. Finally, the fifth dimension deals with their ability to contrast language assessment practices taking place in different scenarios with their self-constructed views of desirable and expected language assessment processes.

Assessment definitions and purposes

Early in the course, trainees' definitions of *assessment* were very limited. Some of them just used the word *process*; others added adjectives such as *complex*, *systematic* or *continuous* before this word; and a third group referred to *assessment* as a *moment*, *procedure* or *tool*; all of these words followed by what prospective teachers considered to be assessment purposes. Furthermore, some pre-service teachers offered rather unclear definitions of the concept by using "vague" terms.

Similarly, disjunctive formative and summative purposes in language assessment were acknowledged by most prospective teachers. A group of students thought of language assessment as primarily aimed to adjust teachers' and learners' practices, course plans and school programs, and to provide feedback in order to enhance students' performance, while a second group expressed a rather opposed view where language assessment served just the purpose of valuing learning outcomes, measuring knowledge, determining progress, and proving achievement of goals at any time during language teaching-learning processes. The following excerpts from student's journals exemplify these cases.

Trainee #2: "Assessment is...the follow up of students development and improvement, it help monitor students and take actions about them, suggestions, help, and give advices."

Trainee #11: "Assessment is a process or activity that involves collecting and interpreting data from teaching and learning in order to make decisions to improve these processes."

Trainee # 5: "Assessment is a procedure to measure individuals' knowledge in a particular period of time, to see what they are or aren't able to do."

Moreover, the content analysis of learning journals revealed pre-service teachers' view of language assessment as useful just to look back on the past. They expressed that assessment allowed them to check if teaching had been accurate, if learners had learned what they were expected to or if policies had been applied. At this point, it was evident that preservice teachers did not see assessment as helpful in determining further actions conducive to future success in the language teaching and learning process. As a case in point, trainee #9 expressed that "assessment is useful to verify that the learner understood and acquired the knowledge given by the teacher in the class, and to see if he accomplished the learning objectives". On the other hand, trainee #15 asserted: "assessment is useful to see if students achieved the goals, what knowledge was or wasn't acquired."

In contrast, last journal entries exhibited future language teachers' ability to conceptualize assessment from a more complex perspective in which they were able to connect different terms

to offer a more complete definition. Additionally, it was found that some trainees articulated their point of view about language assessment purposes from both summative and formative perspectives, and considered it useful to plan subsequent actions, as illustrated in the following journal excerpts:

Trainee #14: "Assessment is a process in which the teacher gathers relevant information about the student's weaknesses and strengths in the learning process to make decisions about the instruction and students' learning."

Trainee #15: "Assessment is a permanent process where the teacher gathers information to monitor students' learning progress."

Trainee #17: "[Assessment] is the process of collecting data, information or evidence of the student's learning process. [It] can be used to check the progress of the students, and to make decisions about either teaching practices or learning processes."

Teacher and student's role in language assessment

The analysis of pre-service teachers' learning journals evidenced their preconceptions towards the teacher and the learner's role in language assessment. It was found that, at an early stage in the course, most of the trainees saw the teacher as an active participant in the language assessment process who uses outcomes to inform and improve his/her own practices, while learners were assigned a rather passive role where they just show what they have learned and receive feedback. At this point in the course, it was clear that future teachers thought of a teacher-centered assessment process, as illustrated below:

Trainee #3: "Through assessment the teacher can analyze the students' performance during the process, determine the students' strengths and weaknesses and create a plan to improve that."

Trainee #7: "Assessment determines if a student has reached the stated goals to move to the next level. It is also useful for teachers to analyze gaps in students' understandings".

Trainee#14: "...students' assessment results let the teacher improve his/her teaching practices and performance to be more accurate and successful inside the classroom, also these results allow the students receive a feedback from the teacher..."

Surprisingly, by the end of the course, prospective teachers had abandoned the view of learners as passive agents and acknowledged the essential and dynamic role they play in language assessment processes. The following passages from their journals portrayed this turn of mind:

Trainee #5: "Assessment is not only the work of a teacher, also the student her/himself has to analyze their performance to give his/her own judgment and to know their own strengths and weaknesses, promoting the self-assessment."

Trainee #7: "The student is the protagonist in his learning process. For this reason, assessment must be focused on the student, taking into account multiple intelligences, learning strategies and all the individualities of the student regarding the learning and assessment process."

Trainee #12: “[Assessment] is a bidirectional process, which is guided by the teacher...but becomes so much richer if students are allowed to take part in it...”

The what and how in language assessment

At the beginning of the course, most prospective teachers regarded the mastery of contents, and the development of reading, listening, speaking, writing skills and attitudes as the primary focus of language assessment. Few trainees alluded to performance, through which students can show acquired language abilities regarding language use and where process and output are taken into account, as the *what* in language assessment. Moreover, it was evident that most preservice teachers did not make a clear distinction between the language and skills to be assessed and the kind of procedures to be used. They interchangeably used terms such as *the four skills, tests, tasks, language abilities, dialogues, roleplays, communicative competence, performance, ability to use grammar and syntax, workshops, objectives, activities, participation* to refer both to the *what* and the *how* in language assessment. For instance, Trainee #4 expressed: “In the English class, what teachers should assess is students’ ability to state utterances appropriately, taking into account grammar; moreover, their ability to listen, read, write and speak”

However, later in the course, one of his annotations in the learning journal read: “In the English class what is assessed is students’ use of the language, how they organize and give coherent messages and how they use resources of the language to formulate clear messages.” In other words, this journal exhibited the future teacher’s insights regarding the *what* in language assessment. He moved from considering mere development of knowledge and skills to focus on language use as the language to be assessed, which is consistent with what current views state about the ultimate goal of teaching and learning a language.

Furthermore, data analysis evidenced their progress in differentiating the *what* and *how* in language assessment. The following assertions were found in journal entries by the end of the course:

Trainee #11: “Depending on the skills we want to assess, we must choose the appropriate procedure that allows us to collect this information. For instance, if we want to check students’ comprehension through listening or reading, selected response and constructed response are a good option, however, if we need to check productive skills, personal response will be the appropriate option.”

Trainee #17: “We can assess syntax, cohesion, coherence, discourse, punctuation, morphology, phonology, functions of the language and the use of the language within social contexts, among other aspects of the communicative competence, through tasks and tests.”

Ethical considerations in language assessment

Findings derived from the analysis of preservice teachers’ learning journal at an early stage in the course suggested participants’ tendency to associate fairness in language assessment with the degree of transparency offered by assessors along the assessment process. Particularly, participants remarked the importance of providing test takers with clear assessment criteria in advance, as well as including contents or tasks already familiar to them. Moreover, removing

bias; using rubrics; making accommodations; and providing feedback, continuous assessment and opportunities for learners to demonstrate achievement were considered key factors to promote fair language assessment practices. This can be observed in the journal excerpts below:

Trainee #8: "Assessment is fair when the learner knows in advance what is going to be assessed, there is rubric and he is given more than one chance to perform".

Trainee #10: "Assessment is fair if the what and the criteria for assessment are clear in advance, when each student is demanded according to his capabilities, and based on what was taught; also if the student has opportunities to show what he knows."

Trainee #14: "Assessment is fair and reliable, when you do not allow your feelings and your personal problems affect the value you give to your students, also do not surprise your students with a 'pop-quiz' or assessing and goal you did not state to be reached by your students, and at last keep your students knowing what are you requiring from them and giving them the enough time to learn or acquire the language.

Prospective teachers kept this view along the course. At the end of it, they still associated fairness with reliability and transparency. Nonetheless, it was possible to identify a new element in their conception of fair assessment. They acknowledged a correlation between teachers' LAL level and the implementation of fair assessment practices. As a case in point, Trainee #18 wrote: "The teacher needs to be updated of the latest trends in assessment because in that way the learning process will be assessed in a framework of principles which will turn the assessment in a fair and inclusive process".

Actual vs. expected language assessment practices

Previous to the course, most prospective teachers had already framed a view of improper versus ideal language assessment practices, derived from what they lived as learners in high school, from their current experiences as trainees in the English teaching program, and from their observations as student teachers in practicum scenarios. A high number of trainees agreed on the fact that students' motivation towards learning is affected negatively by the overuse of traditional assessment procedures in these contexts, aimed at testing students' ability to memorize contents, to control discipline or for pure progress check. Similarly, they referred to other practices in language assessment that could have an unfavorable impact on learners; namely, the high influence of teachers' subjectivity on his/her judgments, lack of clear criteria and feedback, use of grading as a discrimination tool, disregard of students' individuality, implementation of unplanned assessments which include contents and items which are not familiar to learners.

On the other hand, participants' views of acceptable assessment practices included making accommodations based on learners' capacities; assessing not only products but processes; keeping goals, topics, instruction and assessment aligned; proposing alternative assessment procedures; and assessing students' performance in authentic situations. These views are exemplified in the following journal excerpts:

Trainee #6: "... For instance, the teacher where I am carrying out my practicum is used to assess

students when they are having any kind of disrupting behavior in order to manage the situation...at my school I was not good at taking exams... he [the teacher] used to assess students in the traditional way...that was the reason why I failed almost all the exams. I think that there are many ways of assessing students, like through participation, presentations, and task, etc.”

Trainee #14: “Above all, applying assessment implies in my opinion have into account the students' language level, the context that surrounds students, the use of the communicative competence, how I taught the language in my class, the objectives and goals your students supposed to reach. Moreover, the assessment in my point of view is done or implemented in different ways...how they use the language in class in order to communicate or complete tasks...”

By the end of the course, it was evident that prospective teachers' initial perspectives on what constituted good assessment practices were no longer incidental ones but corresponded to the result of deliberate reflection on action. Regarding this attainment in the course, Trainee #16 wrote: “To be honest, what I was implementing in my practicum was just summative assessment...But, all my learning process in this course, I realized that assessment must not be isolated from everything in a course, even I learned that I can plan my lessons from the assessment results. I really hope to apply all the things I learnt...”

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to attest preservice EFL teachers' progress in their development of LAL through learning journals in an assessment and testing course. Findings revealed advancements regarding five specific areas: candidate teachers' understanding of the concept of assessment and its purposes, perceptions of teachers and students' roles in language assessment, clarity about the *what* and *how* in language assessment, acknowledgment of ethical considerations in language assessment, and awareness of what acceptable assessment practices imply.

Beyond yielding valuable information to release accurate judgments on prospective teachers' LAL development, learning journals provided the teacher educator in charge of the course with useful insights to adjust lessons. This can be considered an authentic response to theoretical shifts regarding the knowledge base of assessment and testing courses. In relation to it, Inbar-Lourie (2008) asserts that language assessment courses must “focus on learning, negotiating, discussing, experiencing and researching” (p. 396) instead of providing a set of prescribed methods to future teachers.

In the same vein, Scarino (2013) argues that “in relation to developing language assessment literacy on the part of teachers, therefore it is necessary to consider not only the knowledge base in its most contemporary representation, but also the processes through which this literacy is developed” (p.316). Consequently, it can be claimed that the learning journal written by pre-service EFL teachers in the assessment and testing course proved to be useful in order to trace the path through which student teachers constructed and deconstructed knowledge and understandings regarding language assessment.

In their paper, Babaii and Asadnia (2019) claim that “in ‘language assessment’ courses,

educators rarely go beyond briefly reviewing language assessment theories” (p. 12). This can be considered one of the reasons that supports low levels of LAL development in EFL teaching education. Nonetheless, results from the current research suggest that transformations in the knowledge base of assessment and testing courses are not sufficient to contribute to LAL development. It is necessary for teacher educators to model sound assessment practices, and to implement tools intended to monitor student teachers' actual understandings of what language assessment implies.

When properly implemented, learning journals provide teacher educators with reliable information about candidate EFL teachers' achievements regarding course objectives. Without the pressure that traditional assessments often put on learners, trainees displayed not just critical thinking but feelings in their writing, allowing the teacher to access information that would not be possible to obtain through different means. In this way, student EFL teachers experienced a sound assessment practice they will probably implement in their own classrooms.

In reviewing the literature, no studies were found on the association between monitoring of pre-service EFL teachers' LAL development and learning journal writing. Furthermore, very little has been researched on journal writing in EFL teacher education. Regarding the latter, prior studies have noted the influence of journal writing on the promotion of EFL teachers' reflection on action (eg, Abednia et al., 2013; Nurfaidah et al., 2017; Khanjani et al., 2018; Kim, 2018). Moreover, these studies conclude that guidance is essential to favor critical reflections over mere descriptive ones. Consequently, the claim that, because of its nature, a learning journal is more likely to foster this type of reasoning among student teachers is one of the main contributions of this research to discussions in the field.

Additionally, findings from this research support results reported in Yastibaş and Takkaç's (2018) study. Participants in their study were eight English language teachers working at a Turkish University. As part of the data collection, researchers inquired them about learning gained in assessment and testing courses they had previously engaged in. Two participants expressed the following:

I remember that I failed in this course because presentations were made and composed of theoretical knowledge and numerical values. The course teacher did not pay enough attention to our learning. As a result, I was not interested and engaged in the course. I think it was not attached enough importance. (p.98)

We should not think that we can expect a student to have the expectation that what he has learned will be useful in an environment if the teacher does not give importance to assessment and evaluation. Therefore, I had trouble in this course. (p. 98)

Therefore, the researchers argued that the design and implementation of varied assessment methods to which student teachers are exposed contributed to a big extent to their assessment knowledge. They suggested that “this old experience has been found to cause the participants to form different beliefs about different assessment methods depending on the effects of assessment methods, which is a part of teachers' assessment and evaluation knowledge” (Yastibaş & Takkaç, 2018, p.101).

Finally, results from the current study advance to some extent the research developed by Berry et al. (2019). Regarding teachers' perspectives on what language assessment literacy means, the authors explain that

teachers tend to include assessment practices within their teaching practice and therefore do not consider assessment, as such, to be part of their teaching role. It is possible that they associate assessment with tests or exams, and not with classroom practice techniques such as monitoring and giving feedback. (p.118)

Moreover, they found that participants' confidence to engage in testing and assessment practices was low.

The implementation of the learning journal in the current study allowed to evidence pre-service English teachers progress in five specific areas of LAL: candidate teachers' understanding of the concept of assessment and its purposes, perceptions of teachers and students' roles in language assessment, clarity about the *what* and *how* in language assessment, acknowledgment of ethical considerations in language assessment, and awareness of what acceptable assessment practices imply. Consequently, it could be claimed that language teachers' misconceptions or underdeveloped areas of LAL described by Berry et al. (2019) can be avoided or reoriented during training courses. This can be done by applying tools such as the learning journal which allow teacher educators to effectively determine candidate teachers' understandings regarding language assessment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of the learning journal as a tool to monitor prospective EFL teachers' LAL development, in an assessment and testing course, allowed the teacher in charge of the class to collect evidence of progress in five specific areas. Progress involved 1) an evolving definition of *assessment* and changing views of *assessment purposes*, 2) a turn of mind regarding initial conceptions of teacher and student's role in language assessment, 3) gained clarity on language assessment constructs (*what*) and procedures (*how*), 4) reference to ethical considerations in language assessment, and 5) ability to contrast language assessment practices taking place in different scenarios with own their constructed views of desirable and expected language assessment processes. Additionally, these outcomes provided her with meaningful information about their training needs to adjust the course.

This work contributes to existing knowledge on journal writing in EFL teacher education by providing evidence of its effectiveness to monitor candidate teachers' LAL development in an assessment and testing course. It highlights the importance of modelling sound assessment practices to collect evidence of student EFL teachers' progress in LAL development in a systematic and reliable way. Its findings have important implications for designing and conducting assessments in courses devoted to develop EFL teachers' LAL. Together with other research in the field, this information can be used to implement targeted interventions aimed at improving the quality of assessment and testing courses in EFL teacher education programs.

Although the data reported appear to support the assumption that learning journals are effective

tools to account for LAL development, future studies are therefore recommended since no prior research was found on the topic. Moreover, further research could explore the extent to which specific guiding prompts for entries in learning journals affect the quality of their content. For instance, it would be desirable to compare entries that come from unstructured learning journals with those from structured ones to establish the influence of the journal format on prospective teachers' elaborations regarding their understandings on assessment and testing.

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