



Profiling the dynamics among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy shaped by language tutor identity and language assessment literacy: A reflexive thematic analysis of TESOL in community settings

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Abstract

Language tutor identity and language assessment literacy shape teaching practice. Tutors' roles are especially critical in informal, community-based contexts, where they assist learners in one-on-one settings *without* fixed curricular or assessments. While previous studies have examined tutor identity in these contexts from a sociocultural perspective, little attention has been given to their teaching practices from an assessment standpoint. Therefore, this research aims at exploring how language tutors' identities and their language assessment literacy influence pedagogy through curriculum decisions emerging from unintended assessment practices. This qualitative study employed Kremmel and Harding's (2020) language assessment literacy framework to guide the development of the interview schedule. Methodologically, Castillo-Montoya's (2016)

Interview Protocol Refinement framework was adhered to, ensuring reliability and validity of the semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Ten volunteer tutors from an adult English literacy programme in Australia participated in these interviews, which were analysed using ATLAS.ti following Braun and Clarke's (2020) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The analysis revealed three major themes: (1) 'Interaction as Assessment', (2) 'Assessment as Curriculum', (3) 'Socratic Questioning as Pedagogy'. These findings underscore the importance of language tutor education informing purposeful use of assessment in teaching to cohesively link assessment with curriculum and pedagogy in TESOL in community settings.

Keywords: *Assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy; community-based language education; interaction; language assessment literacy; reflexive thematic analysis; socratic questioning; tutor identity.*

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Introduction

Teaching practice is moulded by language tutors' identity (Morgan, 2017). Curriculum selection is determined by their knowledge of the language and pedagogy (Wahlström, 2022). Assessment use is informed by their language assessment literacy (Delgado, 2022). Collectively, language tutors' identities, knowledge of the language, and language assessment literacy form the foundation of the triad of educational practices: pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. But what happens when there is no curriculum or assessment? How does this absence influence tutors' teaching practices? These questions emerge in informal, community-based language teaching context, where a tutor assists a learner in one-on-one settings without fixed curricular or assessments.

One example is a library-based adult English literacy programme in Australia, where volunteer tutors, typically senior, native English-speaking citizens, support adult migrants in developing literacy for everyday life. Their motivation is social inclusion, positioning themselves not as teachers but as neighbours. Although valuable, their involvement as a neighbour may not be sufficient for guiding learners. To address this, tutor training sessions are provided before tutoring begins, as volunteers are not required to be registered teachers or hold TESOL qualifications. However, these sessions do not include dedicated language assessment literacy training, as standardised assessment is not part of the programme. Considering they are expected to teach without pre-determined curricular or assessments, identifying learning gaps and planning a lesson with appropriate materials would be challenging.

To understand how this volunteer tutor-based programme is operationalised, this study initially aimed to explore volunteer tutors' language assessment literacy through (1) their beliefs about language assessment and (2) their language assessment practices. However, the exploratory nature of the study led to unexpected insights through reflexivity in my dual role as both a practitioner researcher and a tutor in the programme. Therefore, I reorganised the findings into three major overarching themes centred on the interplay among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy in this article to engage a broader audience. This deliberate reflexive approach allows for the revelation of assessment as a pivotal link between curriculum and pedagogy, offering valuable implications for future TESOL practice and tutor training programmes.

Literature review

Defining language assessment literacy

Studies on language assessment literacy trace back to Stiggins's (1991) seminal paper, which questioned what it means to be assessment-literate. Since then, prominent scholars such as Davies (2008), Taylor (2013), and Kremmel and Harding (2020) have contributed significantly to its *theorisation*. While they propose various dimensions of language assessment literacy, they consistently agree on core elements: *knowledge* and *skills* aligned with sound assessment

principles. Specifically, language assessment literacy can be defined as the competence required by each stakeholder to perform assessment tasks effectively, including designing assessments, interpreting results, and making informed decision in accordance with assessment principles (Inbar-Lourie, 2017).

Another line of research has investigated the *application* of language assessment literacy, focusing mainly on three areas: (1) examining the impact of teachers' language assessment literacy on student learning outcomes (Mellati & Khademi, 2018; Mahapatra, 2015), (2) assessing teachers' language assessment literacy (Berry et al., 2019; Gardner & Galanouli, 2016; Hill & McNamara, 2011; Latif & Wasim, 2022), and (3) identifying teachers' language assessment literacy training needs (Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo, 2021; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014). These studies affirm the significance of teachers' language assessment literacy while also exposing notable shortcomings in teachers' knowledge, particularly among preservice teachers (Díaz-Larenas et al., 2012; Lam, 2015; López-Mendoza & Bernal-Arandia, 2009; Maclellan, 2004; Volante & Fazio, 2007), thereby emphasising the necessity for more comprehensive teacher training.

Although valuable, most existing studies on language assessment literacy have been conducted within formal education systems, with limited attention to community-based contexts. In addition, previous studies on community or other language educational settings have often focused on cultural connectedness and social inclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse adults such as migrants or refugees (Balyasnikova, 2020; Dashwood et al., 2023; Gooch & Stevenson, 2020; Hassemer, 2020), leaving a gap in understanding how tutors use assessment in their teaching. Exploring how tutors understand and enact assessment to inform teaching is essential for broadening current models of language assessment literacy. This enquiry aligns with emerging trends that emphasise learning-oriented assessment integrated with everyday teaching rather than accountability-driven test outcomes (Holroyd, 2000).

Learning-oriented formative assessment aims to promote student learning through personalised instructions by assessing each learner's learning needs and teaching to fill the gaps. This necessitates knowledge in utilising assessment consciously in teaching for student learning and an awareness of assessment's impact. Also, sociocultural knowledge in assessment practices is essential as 'language' assessment literacy, unlike other assessment literacies, requires understanding of language as a social inclusion tool (Piller & Takahashi, 2011, cited in Barkhuisen, 2017, p. 62) to communicate to integrate into a community. All the factors combined, the dimensions of language assessment literacy within formative contexts can be categorised into four: (1) *knowledge of educational philosophies*, (2) *purposeful practices*, (3) *context-dependent practices*, and (4) *educational impact* (Kim, 2023).

Identifying language assessment literacy elements required for teachers

Language assessment literacy covers a broad spectrum, ranging from understanding assessment principles to implementing assessment policy. While complete mastery of all its

aspects would be ideal, stakeholders need only the components relevant to their specific professional roles (Pill & Harding, 2013). As this research addresses the aspects of language assessment literacy most pertinent to teachers, it outlines the key elements necessary for them to be considered assessment-literate. Table 1 provides a summary of the core language assessment literacy components identified in earlier frameworks.

Table 1. Minimal language assessment literacy elements for classroom language teachers (Extracted from Kim, 2023, p. 19).

Davies's 3 aspects of LAL (2008)	Taylor's 8 dimensions of LAL (2013)	Kremmel & Harding's 9 factors of LAL (2020)
Knowledge-based	Dimension 1: Knowledge of theory	Factor 7: Language structure, use and development
	Dimension 2: Technical skills	Factor 1: Developing and administering language assessments
		Factor 5: Statistical and research methods
Skill-based	Dimension 4: Language pedagogy	Factor 2: Assessment in language pedagogy
		Factor 8: Washback and preparation
Principle-based	Dimension 8: Scores and decision making	Factor 9: Scoring and rating
	Dimension 3: Principles and concepts	Factor 6: Assessment principles and interpretation
	Dimension 5: Sociocultural values	Factor 3: Assessment policy and local practices
	Dimension 6: Local practice	
	Dimension 7: Personal beliefs/ attitudes	Factor 4: Personal beliefs and attitudes

The elements in the blue and green boxes represent the essential language assessment literacy elements outlined by Taylor (2013) and Kremmel and Harding (2020), respectively. The solid red outlines indicate the minimal language assessment literacy required for teachers: 'Factor 2. Assessment in language pedagogy', 'Factor 8. Washback and preparation', and 'Factor 4. Personal beliefs and attitudes'.

To clarify the meaning of each element, Kremmel and Harding's (2020) survey items representing each factor are used (Table 2 below).

Table 2. Factor 2, 8, and 4 of LAL and the representing items in the survey (Extracted from Kremmel & Harding, 2020).

Factor 2: Assessment in language pedagogy	(1) how to use assessments to inform learning or teaching goals
	(5) how to use assessments to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses
	(6) how to use assessments to motivate students learning
	(7) how to use self-assessment
	(8) how to use peer-assessment
	(21) how to give useful feedback on the basis of an assessment
Factor 8: Washback and preparation	(19) how to prepare learners to take language assessment
	(23) how assessments can influence teaching and learning in the classroom
	(24) how assessments can influence teaching and learning materials
	(25) how assessments can influence the design of a language course or curriculum
Factor 4: Personal beliefs and attitudes	(45) one's own beliefs/attitudes towards language assessment
	(46) how one's own beliefs/attitudes might influence one's assessment practices
	(47) how one's beliefs/attitudes may conflict with those of other groups involved in assessment
	(48) how one's own knowledge of language assessment might be further developed

For instance, 'Factor 2. Assessment in language pedagogy' encompasses six representing items, ranging from knowledge of using assessment for its intended purposes, skills of using self- and peer-assessment, and practices about giving feedback based on test results. These are tightly connected to (1) *knowledge of educational philosophies* and (2) *purposeful practices*. 'Factor 8. Washback and preparation' contains four items, including knowledge of assessment preparation, awareness of assessment influence in teaching, material, and curriculum, mirroring the recognised language assessment literacy element in formative setting, (4) *educational impact*. Moreover, 'Factor 4. Personal beliefs and attitudes' is comprised of four questions regarding teachers' beliefs and attitudes that might influence their teaching and assessment practices. While ostensibly irrelevant to (3) *context-dependent practices*, this factor reflects how teacher agency shapes their context-sensitive practices and assessment identity (Gardner & Galanouli, 2016; Looney et al., 2018). Essentially, the four language assessment literacy elements in formative contexts can be seen to align with the itemised factors identified Kremmel and Harding's survey items (2020), providing a robust theoretical framework for investigating language teachers' assessment literacy in formative educational settings.

Uncovering language tutors' roles in community-based teaching contexts

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes shape their pedagogical and assessment practices, particularly in informal, community-based contexts where tutors typically design and deliver lessons autonomously in response to learners' individual needs. In one-on-one settings with migrants, language tutors often take on four overlapping roles: (1) language and culture informant, (2) visitor, (3) friend, and (4) social worker (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 64).

The most apparent role is teaching language and informing cultural norms to support learners'

integration into a new society. However, as sessions often occur in learners' homes, tutors may also be seen as visitors, who engage in casual conversation over shared meals. These interactions can evolve into deeper connections, with tutors acting as friends who participate in special occasions or help with everyday tasks (O'Hara, 2005, cited in Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 64). In many cases, they serve informally as social workers, assisting with settlement-related challenges rather than focusing solely on teaching grammar or pronunciation. These language teachers' roles bring about a positive impact on community as evidenced by Mahoney and Siyambalapitiya's (2019) systematic review which revealed that community-based language teaching increases newcomers' social inclusion.

Often involved through volunteering, tutors in community-based language programmes have their own motives, such as doing something meaningful, helping others, or sense of community (Volunteering Australia, 2022, cited in Dashwood et al., 2023, p. 5). These psychological and social motivations of volunteers, along with their four roles, shape how tutors interpret learners' needs, approach lesson planning, and engage in informal assessment. Teaching becomes responsive and grounded in real-life experiences, leading to naturally integrated practices that link curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, often without the tutors' conscious intent. This highlights how tutor identity and relationship-based teaching can play a critical role in shaping assessment literacy in community-based contexts.

Methodology

Research design justification

Unlike methods, which refer to the specific techniques used to collect and analyse data, methodology involves the *justification* behind selecting these methods (Crotty, 2003; Wellington, 2000). Therefore, in this qualitative research, providing a clear rationale for the chosen methods of data collection, analysis, and discussion is crucial to ensuring research rigor and credibility.

Data collection.

I selected qualitative semi-structured one-on-one interviews for data collection in order to explore tutors' experiences, their meaning-making processes, and how they articulate these experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To capture real-time thought processes and reasoning, I also incorporated task-based think-aloud interviews and retrospective verbalisation. As shown below, I developed a diagnostic test sheet, adapted from the current pre-test used by the programme manager before matching a learner with a tutor to inform the tutor of the learner's level. I asked the interviewees to interpret test results through six sub-questions.

Example 1. Task-based think-aloud interview questions.

13. Esther has taken a diagnostic test below and received 25 marks out of 100.

The following article has some spelling and punctuation errors.

Circle as many as you can find.

Write the correct spelling underneath and add punctuation.

Jump a bord the gingerbread train at Yandinya's famos Ginger Factory this Christmas. Meet Santa in his walkshop, get your Christmas photoes sorted, take in the massive display and shop for unic Aussy gifts at the iconic ginger gift shop. Dont forget to BYO your camera for some epic shouts with Santa!

When: From 2th to 5th Deesember

Where: The Ginger Factory

Cost: Free

For more infomation, call xxx-xxx-xxxx

13-1. What do you think the score means?

13-2. What inference can you draw about Esther's writing skills based on her performance in this test?

13-3. After this test, what would you put on the learner record?

13-4. After this test, what kind of feedback would you give to Esther, and how?

13-5. What do you think about this test? (good-why? Not good-why?)

13-6. This test was designed to assess learner's overall writing skills. To what extent do you think this is an effective or appropriate test for that purpose? Please justify your answer.

While reviewing the test and the learner's answers, they were asked to make senses of the score, 25 out of 100, through think-aloud. This process allowed me to observe and understand their assessment literacy in 'Factor 2. How to use assessment for teaching and learning' (p. 6 above), as well as to capture reflections on their current practices through the questions 13-3 and 13-4.

In addition, I asked retrospective questions about their daily teaching practice shown below.

Example 2. Teaching practice retrospective interview questions.

[Teaching Practice Retrospective Questions]

11. Please talk me through about your one-on-one session procedure.

11-1. How do you start your session?

11-2. What (material and/or content) do you usually teach?

11-3. Who talks more, you or your learner?

11-4. Do you give your learner homework?

11-5. How do you plan for your next class?

The questions are to identify whether they incorporate forms of assessment they might not recognise as such, for example, a small talk for error detection or crossword puzzles. This indirect approach was used after I discovered their fixed definition of assessment and negative perceptions toward it. The aim was to verify their actual teaching and assessment practices. Although they strongly claimed not to use assessment when asked directly, I sought to determine whether their teaching practices suggested otherwise.

Data analysis.

For data analysis, I adopted Reflexive Thematic Analysis, which involves developing themes based on collected data and the researcher's theoretical insights (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Given the exploratory nature of my research, Reflexive Thematic Analysis offered a flexible framework to construct a narrative from individual experiences and sense-making processes. This choice was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2020) four theoretical assumptions: constructionist epistemology, experiential orientation, inductive and deductive analysis, and latent coding. By integrating these methodological principles, the research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of tutors' perceptions and beliefs, contributing to theoretical, developmental, and practical insights in TESOL in community settings.

Research process explanation

Conducting a semi-structured interview requires meticulous construction of interview questions. I adopted the four-phase Interview Protocol Refinement framework as a methodological framework to ensure the reliability of the interview protocols and the validity-by-design of my semi-structured interview process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) (see Table 3 below).

Table 3. Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Phase	Purpose of Phase
Phase 1: Ensuring interview questions align with research questions	To create an interview protocol matrix to map the interview questions against the research questions
Phase 2: Constructing an enquiry-based conversation	To construct an interview protocol that balances enquiry with conversation
Phase 3: Receiving feedback on interview protocol	To obtain feedback on interview protocol (possible activities include close reading and think-aloud activities)
Phase 4: Piloting the interview protocol	To pilot the interview protocol with a small sample

Interview protocol.

Instrument Development Phase 1. Ensuring interview question align with research questions

In instrument development phase 1, I aligned interview questions with research objectives to avoid information gaps (Patton, 2015). I created a matrix to ensure a balanced distribution of questions across all research questions, based on the theoretical framework from Krenn and Harding's (2020) survey items. Since this study is exploratory, the framework served as a guiding tool rather than a confirmatory measure, offering a conceptual foundation for interview question formulation. I also used spontaneous follow-up questions during interviews to encourage participants to elaborate on their beliefs and practices, revealing the interplay between assessment beliefs and practices. I organised the interview questions by task type (how to ask) and content focus (what to ask), setting the stage for Phase 2 (see Example 3 below).

[Example 3. Interview Matrix]

Krenn and Harding's (2020) Survey Items
(e.g.) F2(1) = How to use assessments to inform learning and teaching goals (Table 2, p.5)

LAL Factors (Refer to Table 2 p. 5)

	F2 (1)	F2 (5)	F2 (6)	F2 (7)	F2 (8)	F2 (21)	F8 (19)	F8 (23)	F8 (24)	F8 (25)	F4 (45)	F4 (46)	F4 (47)	F4 (48)
Q12-1	V	V	V							V	V	V	V	V
Q12-2	V	V	V			V				V	V	V		
Q12-3		V	V	V		V				V	V	V		
Q13-1	V	V						V	V	V	V		V	V
Q13-2	V	V				V		V	V	V	V		V	V
Q13-3			V	V		V		V	V	V	V	V		V
Q13-4						V		V	V	V	V	V		V
Q13-5 /6	V	V	V					V	V	V	V	V	V	V

Tasks	Interview Questions	Research Questions	Core LAL factors that act as a basis for each question
Scenario-based interview questions	<i>Q12. Participants received a learner profile</i>	Assessment design	Factor 2: Assessment in language pedagogy (1), (5), (6), (7), (21) * As the teaching context is one-on-one situation, "(8) peer-assessment" was excluded.
	Q12-1. How would you assess her proficiency level in writing?	: to investigate their BELIEFS about diagnostic assessments	
	Q12-2. Why do you prefer this approach and/or method?	: to check their levels of UNDERSTANDING of assessment design for the purpose of identifying learning needs	
	<i>Q13. Participants were given a test the learner had taken, and the test score</i>	Score interpretation	Factor 2: Assessment in language pedagogy (1), (5), (6), (21)
	Q13-1. What do you think the score means? (25/100)	Uses of test score	
	Q13-2. What inference can you draw about Esther's writing skills based on her performance in this test?	Test validity	Factor 4: Personal beliefs and attitudes (45), (46), (47), (48)
	Q13-3. After this test, what would you put on the learner record?	: to investigate if assessment results are used in teaching PRACTICES	Factor 8: Washback and preparation (23), (24), (25) * As this task is designing a diagnostic assessment, "(19) how to prepare learners for assessment" was excluded.
	Q13-4. After this test, what kind of feedback would you give to Esther, and how?	: to check their levels of UNDERSTANDING of test validity for the diagnostic purpose	
	Q13-5. What do you think about this test? (good-why? Not good-why?)		
	Q13-6. This test was designed to assess learner's overall writing skills. To what extent do you think this is an effective or appropriate test for that purpose? Please justify your answer.		

Instrument Development Phase 2. Constructing enquiry-based conversation

In Phase 2, I aimed to balance enquiry and conversation by designing an interview protocol that: (1) rephrases research questions into interview-friendly formats, (2) follows the flow of natural conversation, (3) includes a variety of question types, and (4) features prepared follow-up prompts (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I structured interview questions as open-ended prompts with follow-up options, maintaining flexibility for clarification and deeper probing based on skills supported by my previous job as a journalist. To build rapport, I started with background questions before moving into research-specific topics (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A variety of interview tasks ensured comprehensive insights into tutors' assessment beliefs and practices, organised into five sections:

- Background Questions: Exploring personal beliefs and experiences.
- Perceptions of Assessment: Directly investigating definitions and opinions.
- Teaching Practice Retrospectives: Examining beliefs and practices.
- Scenario-Based Questions: Understanding real-world application.
- Sentence Completion: Revealing underlying perceptions and beliefs.

This approach facilitated rich, meaningful conversations, capturing diverse perspectives on assessment practices. Below are scenario-based interview questions to assess their language assessment literacy in using assessment to inform teaching.

Example 4. Scenario-based Interview questions.

12. You have been assigned a new learner, Esther, and this is your first session with her.

Learner profile

- Name: Esther Hoffman
- Nationality: Israel
- Previous occupation: Event organiser
- Level of education: Master of Business
- Number of years in Australia: 2 years
- Current job: Volunteering as an event organiser at a community centre on the Sunshine Coast
- Learning goal: English test preparation for permanent residency
- Likes: Listening to music, watching movies
- Dislikes: Memorising vocabulary, reading a book

12-1. How would you assess her proficiency level in writing?

12-2. Why do you prefer this approach and/or method?

12-3. What other methods have you considered and why did you not use them?

Instrument Development Phase 3. Receiving feedback on interview protocol

After composing interview questions, I shared them with my colleague to double check its validity. This process was done twice before and after piloting to confirm a final version of interview questions.

Instrument Development Phase 4. Piloting the interview protocol

I conducted a pilot study with two tutors, evaluating timing (60 minutes, appropriate), clarity (satisfactory), and organization of the interview protocol. I reordered the “Perception Towards Assessment” section from last to second to capture original perceptions before tutors responded to other questions. However, this change revealed that the issue was not question order but rather tutors’ unclear understanding of assessment definitions. Despite the adjustment, tutors remained uncertain about the different assessment types and purposes. Rather than as a limitation, I interpreted this as a finding, highlighting the lack of clarity in assessment literacy among tutors, which is not included in this article as the focus on this article is not assessment literacy but assessment practice in class.

Data generation.

Participants

After ethics approval, I recruited ten tutors through emails sent by the programme supervisor and snowball sampling. Out of eleven potential participants, one deferred, leaving ten interviews completed. The participants (3 males, 7 females) were volunteers in the adult literacy programme on the Sunshine Coast, Australia, with 1 to 15 years of experience. As participation was voluntary, participant characteristics were not pre-determined. After the interviews, it was revealed that all were native English speakers, aged 69 to 85, and retired from roles such as nurse, accountant, police officer, marketer, builder, and teacher. Only one participant was a registered secondary English teacher, and three had vocational teaching experiences as a manager in their professional fields, such as police and emergency service, midwifery, and construction.

Instructional context

This research was conducted at a library-based adult English literacy programme run by the Sunshine Coast Council. The programme includes group lessons, such as conversation class or reading class, led by paid teachers for adult migrants and a few first-language speakers with language disorders or limited formal educations. Volunteer tutors, typically senior citizens, assist individual learners during these sessions and also meet them weekly for one-on-one classes outside the group setting.

Without fixed curricular or assessments, tutors act as curriculum designers, assessors, and teachers, tailoring lessons to each learner's needs. Most learners aim to improve English for community integration, often to gain employment or pass tests such as a driver's licence or citizenship exam, resulting in a need-based curriculum.

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted 60-minute one-on-one interviews with 10 tutors at a library, audio-recording the sessions. The interviews followed the planned questions, with additional prompts when needed for clarification. I manually transcribed the recordings and used YouTube's auto-transcription for cross-checking. From the transcription phase, I started my data analysis based on Reflexive Thematic Analysis through a six-phase process. This methodological framework is recursive and iterative, allowing flexibility to revisit earlier phases as needed (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Data analysis.

Data Analysis Phase 1. Familiarisation with the data

In the initial data analysis phase, I immersed myself in the interview data through repeated readings of the transcripts to identify relevant information for the research questions. I used verbatim transcription, noting pauses, repeated speeches, and gap fillers, and later cleaned up the text for clarity in the results section.

To ensure accuracy, I cross-checked manual transcriptions with YouTube's auto-transcription and sent transcripts to participants for clarification and confidentiality checks. Despite being time-consuming, this process allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the data without selective filtering (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

[Example of preliminary notes taken during phase one]

- (-) Perceptions of assessment = negative / score, failure, anxiety, stress...
- (-) Self-doubts about a role as an assessor / assessor = expert
- (+) Tutors' knowledge in Australian cultures, history, and English as L1
- (+) Rapports, learner interests, learner needs

Tutors take account of learner interests > their levels when asked to select books
A TESOL qualification was called "mickey mouse course"
= latent meaning: not serious course or ineffective course?

I took detailed notes, capturing observations, theoretical connections, research question relevance, and my emotional responses. I also created a summary table of participants' answers, facilitating familiarisation and identifying patterns and differences in responses. This multifaceted approach set a strong foundation for the subsequent phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Data Analysis Phase 2. Generating initial codes

In Phase 2, I generated initial codes as building blocks for theme development (Byrne, 2022) using ATLAS.ti to organise coding systematically. The codes were initially based on Kremmel and Harding's (2020) assessment literacy factors, which generated 38 theory-driven codes (e.g., "score uses for informing goals", "feedback based on assessment") and 21 data-driven codes (e.g., "test validity", "tutors' sociocultural knowledge"), providing a balanced foundation for theme development.

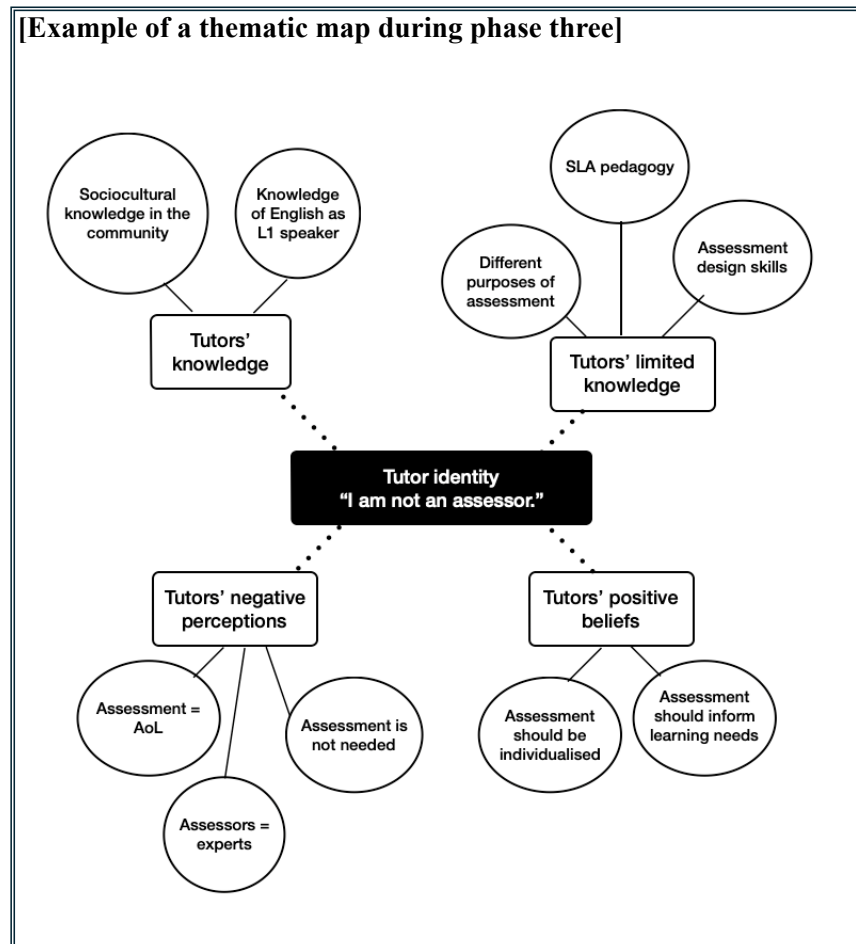
[Example of final initial codes during phase two]		
	A	B
1	Code	Comment
2	*Factor 6? principles - practicality	data-driven
3	*Factor2 (2) assessing to check improvement	data-driven
4	*Factor3 (13) culturally insensitive	data-driven
5	*Factor6 (32) test validity	data-driven
6	*Factor6 (43) different purposes	data-driven
7	*Factor6 (44) different forms of assessment - learning needs	data-driven
8	*Factor6 (44) Teaching/Assessment - interaction	data-driven
9	*Factor7 (26) tutor knowledge in English	data-driven
10	*Factor7 (28) tutor knowledge in socioculture	data-driven
11	Factor2 (1) score uses for informing goals	theory-based
12	Factor2 (3) assessing for achievement	theory-based
13	Factor2 (5) comprehension check with speaking	theory-based
14	Factor2 (5) diagnostic assessment	theory-based
15	Factor2 (5) diagnostic assessment design task	theory-based
16	Factor2 (5) what to measure	theory-based
17	Factor2 (6) authentic use of English	theory-based
18	Factor2 (6) learner autonomy	theory-based
19	Factor2 (6) purpose of testing should be	theory-based
20	Factor2 (7) self-assessment	theory-based

Data Analysis Phase 3. Generating themes

After generating codes, I shifted focus from individual data to aggregated meaning interpretation across the dataset (Byrne, 2022). I merged similar codes, eliminated overly broad or narrow codes, and drew on my familiarity with the data, research questions, and educational assessment theories to shape themes effectively. The themes did not emerge naturally from the data but were actively developed by interpreting relationships among codes.

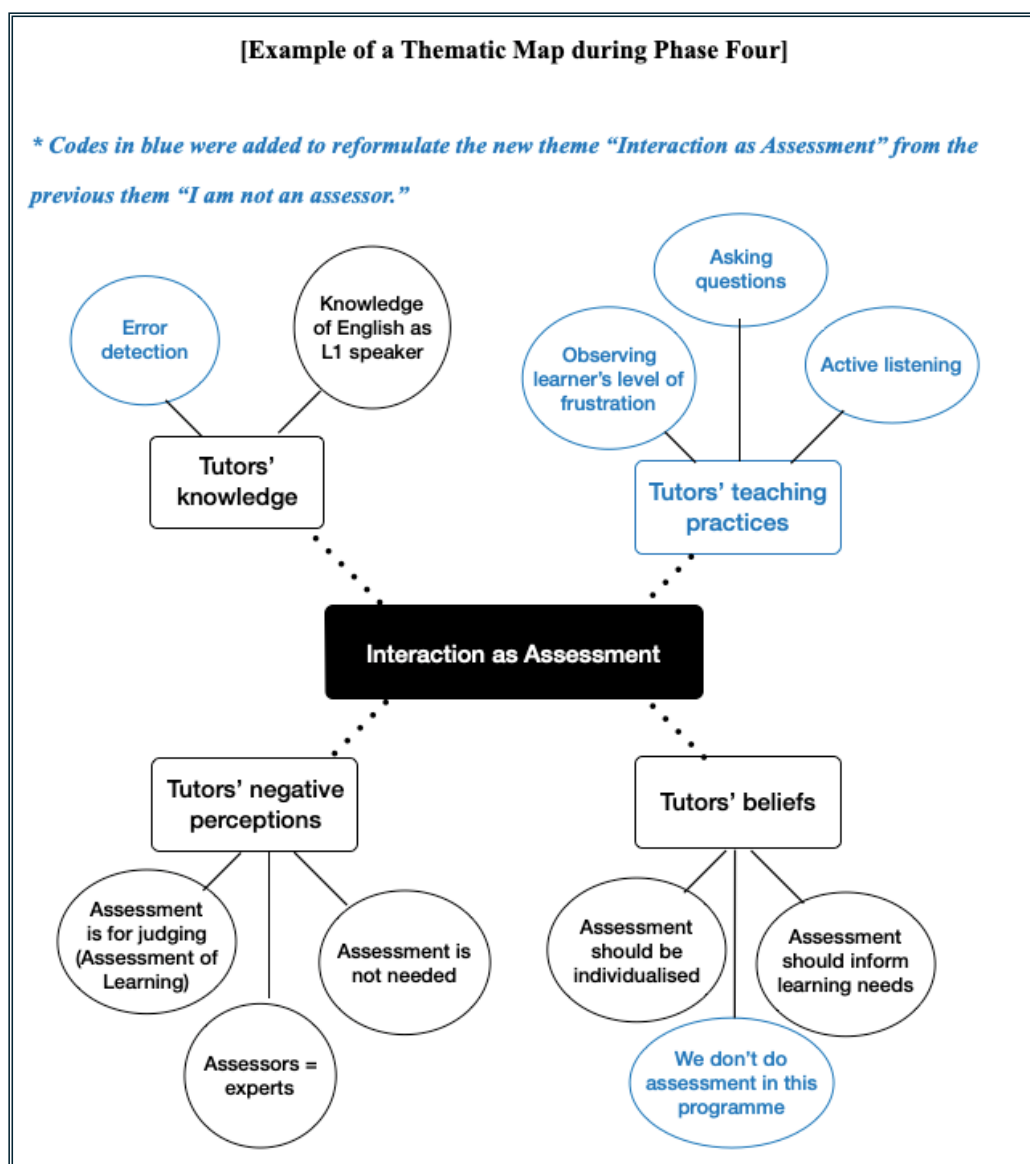
Five themes were created, including "We don't need assessment in this programme.", "I am not an assessor", "I know her level by just having a conversation.", "I was not assessing her,

just helping her doing a fill-in-the-blank activity.”, and “She had to take a test, so we went through the online modules together.”. Illustrated below is among one theme, “I am not an assessor.”, that reflects tutors’ self-identity based on the combination of their sociocultural understanding of the community, limited knowledge in language teaching, negative perceptions of assessment, and ideal assessment practices.



Data Analysis Phase 4. Reviewing potential themes

The initial focus of this study was to explore tutors’ perceptions and assessment practices. However, during data analysis, an unexpected theme emerged, highlighting the dynamic interplay between the programme’s non-fixed curriculum and tutors’ teaching practices. While examining tutors’ teaching practices, I noticed they conduct informal oral assessment to gauge their learners’ learning needs, which they think is not an assessment. This showed that their assumed teaching practices are actually assessment in the form of interaction.



I restructured the analysis to let the emerging themes revolve around the interplay among curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, integrating my theoretical knowledge and post-literature review insights. This adaptive approach aligns with Reflexive Thematic Analysis, where the literature review is used not for confirmation but to support exploration after data generation (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Byrne, 2022; Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis Phase 5. Defining and naming themes

Initially, I attempted to follow the guideline provided by Braun and Clarke (2020) by naming themes using positive or negative connotation and incorporating illustrative words from anecdotes. For instance, I named a theme on assessment practices, *'I wasn't assessing her; just helping her doing a fill-in-the-blank activity.'* to show the interviewee's negative connotation around assessment despite its implicit presence in their teaching practices. While this approach

enriches data interpretation, my primary objective was to identify the interplay among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy. To ensure clarity and avoid any ambiguity, I opted to rename the theme '*Assessment as Curriculum*' by using precise and explicit wording.

Data Analysis Phase 6. Producing the report

The exploratory qualitative research reporting based on Reflexive Thematic Analysis differs from traditional reporting styles, particularly due to the integration of the literature review into discussion section to emphasise discovery (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Terry et al., 2017). While I acknowledge the rationale behind this approach, I sought to minimise any imbalance that might be caused by omitting a standalone literature review. Therefore, I followed a conventional writing style while reporting my research procedure and methodological justification transparently. This approach allowed me to present my exploratory study in a structured and academically conventional manner.

Findings

This qualitative study explored the interplay among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy in a community English language programme, where neither curricular nor assessments exist. Three key themes emerged from the data: (1) Interaction as Assessment, (2) Assessment as Curriculum, and (3) Socratic Questioning as Pedagogy.

Each theme is explained based on the overall claim, excerpts with the question asked, and the connection between the excerpts and the claim.

Theme 1. Interaction as Assessment

This theme demonstrates how learner's learning needs are identified through interaction in a context without assessments. Below are the excerpts in response to 'Q4. Can you describe some characteristics of the students you have taught, such as their first language and proficiency levels?' and the follow-up question, 'How do you know your learner's level and their learning needs?'.

*I've built an understanding of what her level is and as I said it's based on her **reactions**, her levels of frustration where she starts getting bored, I always check, you know, how she **interacts** with the process and also how she relates to the subject matter and that's done through her level of competence shown by answering my questions and by showing interesting questions thrown to me. [P7]*

*Well, you'd make that decision on just the **interaction** you have with her and **observation**. Actually, I've only recently discovered in the last couple of weeks when we read something together. When I **asked** her to tell me what she's understood by what we've just read, she spoke perfectly, but then when I asked her to write out as much as she can, her spelling wasn't too bad, but sentence composition was, so you'd soon work out how much or how little she is capable of doing. [P6]*

The tutors mentioned that they can check their learners' proficiency level by observing their learners' responsiveness to the task, such as their level of frustration, answers, and questions they ask back to the tutors. While most tutors responded that they do not need assessment in this programme, hence not practicing any assessment, they actually use observation and interaction to check their learners' level of understanding, which is another form of assessment.

Theme 2. Assessment as Curriculum

This theme shows how tutors select a classroom material and plan their lessons. At the core is assessment that shapes curriculum. The excerpts below were from the responses to teaching practice retrospective questions (Q11.1-5), one of which was 'Which material and/or content do you usually teach?':

*For instance, with the 'thorough-through-and-though' um I just did a big sheet and took out those words and then she had to put the right writing of the words in the right spots... when we did like crosswords and all sorts of stuff like that she doesn't like it so we did a lot of **fill in the blanks or sentences** instead... I did not consider it assessment because I wasn't assessing her. She was just doing it with a little bit of help from me and it's just something again it was I would call that extending her vocabulary. [P9]*

... "Will you fail the students?" No, so you really have to prepare what the student wants out of this. Just what I was saying about here, you've got to work backwards, you've got to know what you need to do for those students to feel they've achieved from that piece of assessment. Okay, I want them to succeed. I want them to feel they're succeeding. [P5]

*My student's had to take **this driver's licence** so just working through with her all the **online modules** and helping her understand some of the complexity in the language that would be one of the activities that I do, which is sort of not strictly within the programme, but anything that helps develop her skills and her as a person. [P10]*

*She needs to get a **Certificate 3 in English** so she can do aged care certificate and she wanted to do that, but she can't do it now because her English isn't good enough. So, we're sort of working towards that and trying to get her to speak more and more, increase her vocabulary, increase her writing skills. [P6]*

*She just had to take her **citizenship test**, so we went through **the whole book** together, there was 46 pages and it took us four lessons. It's funny because I didn't necessarily want to do it, but she suggested, she said in a few weeks she had to take the test, so I helped her prepare for sure... you know, this is a library literacy programme, so in this context, it should be a cause for really just seeing their improvement in life. [P9]*

The first interviewee's response that they use fill-in-the-blank to help their learners to close the learning gaps indicates that they use assessment for learning materials while denying that it is not an assessment. Furthermore, some tutors said that they adjust their session content based on a learner's requests. As learners are mostly migrants, they need to take summative assessment for a visa, a citizenship test, or even a driver's licence test in English. Although tutors perceive assessment as something negative, they acknowledged the importance of the assessment results for their learners' life in Australia, deciding to help them prepare for the test by going through online modules together as curriculum.

Theme 3. Socratic Questioning as Pedagogy

This theme illustrates how tutors without teaching qualification manage their class. As they lack systematic pedagogy, they rely on asking questions, unintentionally helping their learners think about their thinking process. When asked to talk me through about their one-on-one session procedure (Q11), which includes "How do you start your session?", the tutors said that they started with a small talk, followed by the processes below.

*... So, I said "Let's go through the instructions first because you've missed some tasks.", "**Why** do you think they are incorrect?", "**What** do you think the word should be?", "Let's write that down and then we'll get on to the ones you've missed." [P1]*

*.. she brings me article that she wants to write about or actually has written before she posts it, and we actually go through it, "so you wrote this, **what** did you write that I need to understand?" and sometimes ask "Explain the context of what you've done." [P2]*

The first interviewee used a problem-solving strategy, from problem justification ("Why do you think they are incorrect?") to potential solution ("What do you think the word should be?"). The second interviewee focused on pragmatics and contexts of their learner's writing by asking

them to explain the purpose of their writing. These show that they do not teach or provide a direct answer but ask questions, which can help learners reflect on their performance.

Overall, it is uncovered that tutors use interactions to assess learning needs, activities or summative assessment mock tests as curriculum and classroom materials, and Socratic Questioning as pedagogy to allow learners to think about their thinking process, eventually assisting them in engaging in their own learning process.

Discussion

Teaching is an iterative process of filling a learning gap for learners. Therefore, teachers should understand the learners' current level of understanding and the content needed to fill the gap. Without a proper learner evaluation and learning content, the act of teaching is meaningless. At the core of this complete cycle, *assessment-curriculum-pedagogy*, is assessment, one that can inform about the learners and their learning needs to initiate curriculum planning, followed by teaching.

The community-based literacy programme I investigated has no pre-determined assessments or curricular, resulting in distinctive teaching practices. Figure 1 illustrates how assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy are shaped based on tutors' self-identity and their (lack of) language assessment literacy.

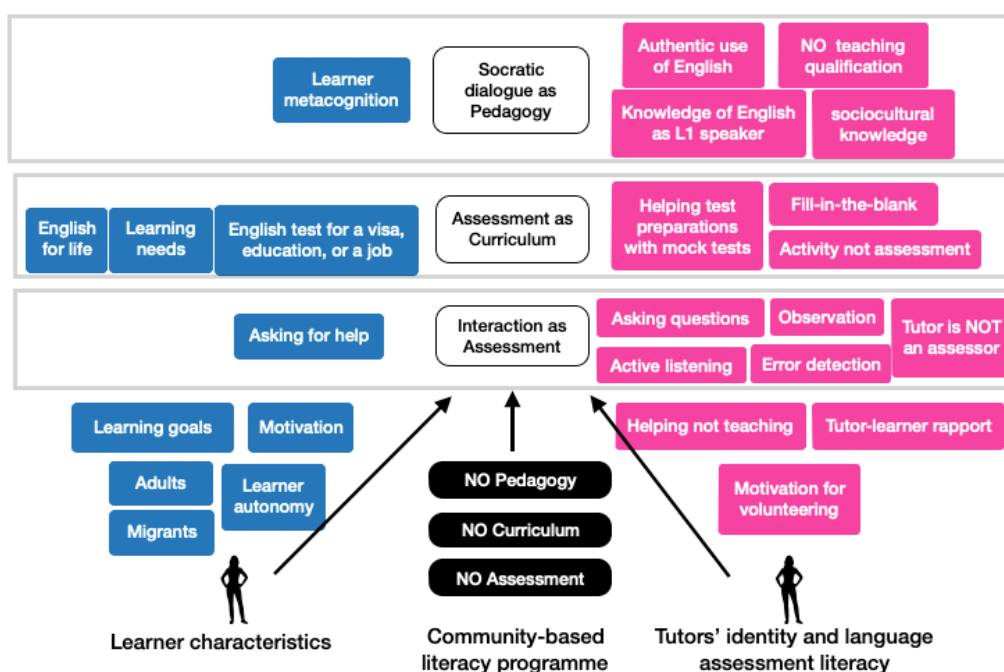


Figure 1. Interplay among assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy in the community-based literacy programme.

The left side of the figure outlines learners' characteristics in the programme, showing that they

are adult migrants with clear learning goals and motivation to learn English. The right side of the figure shows tutors' identity and (lack of) language assessment literacy. Tutors' motivation for volunteering in this programme is to help newly joined community members to settle in as a welcoming neighbour. Since the programme does not have a fixed assessment or curriculum and tutors are not required to hold teaching qualifications, they often begin first meetings with small talk, extending the conversation to build rapport with their learners. During the conversation, they observe their learners' responsiveness and detect errors through active listening, which acts as **assessments** that inform their learners' proficiency level and learning gaps for them to fill in.

After they identify frequent errors through multiple interactions, this informs the content to teach and they use 'activities' such as fill-in-the-blank tasks or crossword puzzles to fill the gaps, shown as Assessment as Curriculum in the second layer of Figure 1. Due to their lack of assessment literacy and negative perceptions of assessment as a mere judging tool, they often deny their assessment practices, calling them activities. Often, motivated learners with their own learning goals like passing summative assessments (e.g., driver's licence, citizenship, or English proficiency tests) ask for help for test preparations needed for settling in Australia. These goals represent 'authentic learning' using 'authentic items' to enhance real-world English use. As tutors' motivation is to help their learners integrated in the community, they focus on learners' request, test preparations, as a curriculum, integrating assessment items into the **curriculum** (Yan & Boud, 2021).

As investigated by previous studies, tutors in community language education settings provide cultural and social inclusions to adult migrants through their sociocultural knowledge about their community and their identity as a neighbour helping their community members settle in. Interestingly, however, this study revealed that their lack of assessment literacy and teaching qualification actually promote Socratic Questioning by asking questions to allow for learners' metacognitive development, essential strategies for lifelong learning, rather than one-way knowledge transfer, showing positive **pedagogy**. This dynamic and collaborative model demonstrates assessment as the central element connecting curriculum and pedagogy.

Although positive, this interplay is an unintended positive consequence. Also, tutors' negative perceptions of assessment still exist, with lack of understanding of various types and purposes of assessment. Consolidating the positive practice means that practices should align with the intended purpose. Therefore, as highlighted in the previous studies, the needs for comprehensive teacher training, where they can improve their language assessment literacy, should be fulfilled. The question is, which elements of language assessment literacy should be provided in tutor training in the community-based literacy programme.

In the literature review section, four dimensions were identified as language assessment literacy required for tutors in community-based contexts: (1) *knowledge of educational philosophy*, (2) *purposeful practices*, (3) *context-dependent practices*, and (4) *educational impact* (in this article, p.3). As uncovered through this study, their (3) context-dependent practices and (4) educational impact are positive. However, (1) knowledge of educational philosophy, especially

about teaching content, should be incorporated in tutor training. Current practices only involve error detections and corrections, so expanding their knowledge of teaching based on sociocultural theory of learning could help them shape solid teaching practices, such as incorporating dynamic assessment as a systematic assessment, rather than from a small talk. More important is (2) purposeful practices, given their conflict perceptions about assessment as a judging tool (*Assessment of Learning*) while simultaneously using activities, such as quizzes and puzzles, as *Assessment for/as Learning*. Educating this clear demarcation among three -*Assessment of Learning*, *Assessment for Learning*, and *Assessment as Learning*- can help them use appropriate assessment that fits purposes. As much as tutor's use of assessment is core in teaching in community-based language education contexts, tutor training should provide language assessment literacy that can inform them to use assessment with intention in teaching for student learning. Future research can focus on concrete tutor training programme and its impact on learning.

This study offers both theoretical and methodological contributions. Theoretically, it identifies key language assessment elements required for tutor training in community-based language teaching contexts. Methodologically, it demonstrates meticulous application and transparent documentation of Reflexive Thematic Analysis and employs Castillo-Montoya's (2016) Interview Protocol Refinement framework to enhance the reliability of the interview design.

Conclusion

This study revealed how tutors in community language education settings unintentionally integrate assessment into teaching through interaction, curriculum adaptation, and dialogic questioning, fostering learner metacognitive development.

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the retrospective nature of self-report data captured tutors' implicit practices but not their direct impact on learner outcomes. Future research could combine tutor self-reports with observational data from tutoring sessions to compare stated beliefs with enacted practices. Second, collecting data at a single time point limited the ability to track changes over time. Longitudinal studies could explore how tutors' perspectives and practices evolve. Third, the study focused solely on tutors' perspectives so future work could incorporate learner perspectives to understand how the assessment-curriculum-pedagogy relationship is experienced from learners' perspectives.

The findings have several implications for multiple stakeholders. Language tutors in similar contexts can better support their learners by recognising and purposefully applying informal assessment strategies, such as questioning, scaffolded feedback, and task adaptation. For curriculum developers and programme administrators, designing flexible resources and guidelines that embed assessments as curricular into community programmes could help tutors connect informal practices with learning objectives. For teacher educators, integrating language assessment literacy training into tutor preparation courses can help build awareness

of how assessment informs curriculum decisions and teaching strategies by clearly explaining various assessment types and their purposes.

The shift toward assessment-centred pedagogy highlights assessment's new role in shaping curriculum and instruction, challenging the traditional divide between teaching and assessment and offering new opportunities to enhance learning in community-based contexts.

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