

# The Challenge of Classroom Assessment: Analyzing the Discourses of Primary School Teachers from Chile

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## Abstract

Research worldwide highlights the lack of teachers' assessment literacy and shows their beliefs and feelings about being unprepared to face classroom assessment. The same reality has occurred in Chile (Latin America), where participants in this investigation expressed their lack of assessment literacy during their tertiary education. Therefore, following the interpretative paradigm with a qualitative approach, this study tried to reveal how primary school teachers from Chile are prepared for classroom assessment, and if their knowledge of assessment literacy has an impact on their classroom assessment practices.

Primary school teachers and university tutor teachers were part of the study ( $n = 12$ ). Tutor teachers also shared their university study program of the assessment module they taught, which was analyzed and compared with the participants' answers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Themes and codes were defined to organize the data and were analyzed using the discourse analysis technique.

The findings of this study reveal that primary school teachers from Chile would prefer a better initial teacher education to improve their performance. Moreover, they manifested the necessity of ongoing support in their professional development to enhance their assessment literacy, and consequently, strengthen the quality of their teaching-learning process inside the classroom.

## Keywords:

Assessment Literacy, Classroom Assessment, Initial Teacher Education, Continuing Professional Development, Pre-Service Teachers, Primary School Teachers.

## Introduction

### Background

For 60 years, studies have revealed that teachers are not well prepared to make quality assessment; consequently, their assessment literacy impacts their classroom assessment practices (Campbell, 2013; Schelling & Rubenstein, 2023; Stiggins, 2004). In Chile, there are few studies addressing this issue (Ríos & Herrera, 2022; Roa, 2017); for that reason, this investigation aims to contribute to filling



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that gap by researching what is happening with the reality of Chilean primary school teachers, specifically regarding assessment literacy (AL) and classroom assessment (CA), and by exploring how they think they are prepared to face the challenge of CA.

On the other hand, this concern also comes from working for seven years in a public school in Santiago, where it was observed that the most challenging practice for teachers was CA (personal communication). Furthermore, teachers' national assessment outcomes show that 68% of teachers (in the last five years), obtained low scores in the assessment item (CPEIP, n.d.), a situation that is used by the public opinion (e.g. politicians, headteachers, students' families) to blame teachers for their low performance in the assessment area, and consequently, to justify the low student results on standardized Chilean tests under the same premise (Roa, 2017).

Therefore, this reality raises multiple questions such as: Why is it that different teachers of different generations have difficulties at the moment of assessment? How do schools take care of the teachers' concerns? How does the state accompany their teachers so that they can enhance their educational practices?

Hence, this investigation focused on deepening the understanding of the issues in initial teacher education (ITE) and revealed a gap between teachers' acquisition of assessment literacy (AL) during ITE and how later, in their professional development, they are supported (or not), to continue to improve their AL.

Without going any further, this investigation focused on four research questions, but concerning this paper, this research will seek to answer two main questions that will give us hints about what is happening in regard to the acquisition of AL and how that knowledge impacts classrooms through the assessment practices developed by teachers.

1. How are primary school teachers from Chile prepared for classroom assessment?
2. What impact does teachers' assessment literacy have on teachers' classroom assessment practices?

By responding to these research questions, this study will suggest recommendations to strengthen ITE and encourage a continuous accompanying program in teachers' ongoing practices for the acquisition of solid assessment literacy knowledge.

## Literature Review

### *Assessment Literacy*

AL is a concept that has been addressed by several authors (DeLuca, 2012; Popham, 2014; Ruiz-Primo

et al., 2010; Stiggins, 1995; Willis et al., 2013) who have drawn on it with slightly different views. For example, Stiggins (1995) established that those with a profound knowledge of AL can determine whether an assessment method is sound or unsound, as well as the proper moment to apply it. Similar to this definition, Ruiz-Primo et al. (2010) argued that it is essential for teachers to have substantial knowledge and skills in order to achieve successful classroom assessment. Furthermore, Popham (2014) claimed that AL is related to the capacity to understand the main concepts and procedures regarding assessment and how they impact educational decisions.

All of these definitions lie in the relevance of teachers having abundant assessment knowledge that they can apply in their teaching and students' learning assessment (McMillan, 2000; Volante & Fazio, 2007). Moreover, the definitions above show how the AL concept has been defined; however, it is still necessary to delve into it because AL needs to be considered not only as robust knowledge and skills about assessment in teaching and learning but also within a contextual framework. Therefore, it is essential to indicate that AL involves social practices within a dynamic context where teachers negotiate with their students to establish learning goals (Willis et al., 2013). Following this premise, the AL concept has evolved and can be considered a dynamic context that will constantly change, depending on the cultural or policy context in which it is being developed.

Furthermore, Xu and Brown (2016) elaborated a model that suggests a reconceptualization of AL. They named it "Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice" (TALiP) because the practice context strongly links teachers' knowledge about assessment. The authors highlighted that the development of AL "needs to be situated within the requirements of different educational contexts, and, thus, will have different priorities at different times and places" (Xu & Brown, 2016, p.155).

This study will focus on Xu and Brown's (2016) ideas of AL because knowledge about assessment is necessary but not enough if approached out of context. After all, AL involves interrelated skills. Hence, situated processes are pivotal for the achievement of learning aims through effective and contextualized classroom assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2018).

Succinctly, a deep knowledge of assessment is essential to developing teaching and learning considering contextual factors (social, political and cultural), because knowledge about AL will be modified or adapted depending on the type of educational system in which teachers are developing their practices (e.g. rural, urban, private, public), which in turn will have a direct impact on the acquisition and development of AL (DeLuca et al., 2019).

### *Assessment literacy in teachers' initial education*

It is vital to draw on how AL is approached during ITE and through ongoing professional practices as knowledge develops over time. Therefore, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of what takes place in universities with the assessment module and what future teachers are learning about it. In the case of Chile, there is a lack of research on this issue; hence, this paper intends to fill that gap by exploring teachers' perceptions of their assessment learning experiences during their ITE.

As highlighted by Popham (2009), teachers learn little about educational assessment in universities because it is not usually required. In fact, he mentions that teachers should receive solid assessment knowledge during their initial education, not only a "brief mention of assessment in a course" (Popham, 2011, p. 265).

In order for teachers to have sound AL knowledge, tertiary education should encourage students to learn more about assessment, including developing assessment courses during their undergraduate years, as part of the curriculum, which would make them long to understand assessment more deeply (Willis et al., 2013). On the other hand, these courses must consider the barriers that could impact on their ITE, such as teachers' initial perceptions about assessment, or the recall of their own experiences, which can impact the acquisition of new knowledge; it has been highlighted that the affective dimension can have a strong influence on those perceptions (Coombs et al., 2018).

Research worldwide demonstrates the lack of AL that teachers receive during their ITE; consequently, this lack of training has a significant impact on their future practices as in-service teachers (Campbell, 2013; Coombs et al., 2018; Mertler, 2004). As a result, this situation represents an issue that diverse educational systems must face (Schelling & Rubenstein, 2023); therefore, not only must teachers develop AL, but those who educate them (e.g. tutor teachers) at universities and those who provide professional development in assessment for in-service teachers should also focus more on AL (Xu & Brown, 2016). Thus, other stakeholders need to develop AL too, such as school administrators, parents, students, and policymakers (Stiggins, 2014).

It would be expected that everybody in the educational communities would speak the same language regarding assessment, and they would support each other and really understand what assessment is about, to strengthen the teaching-learning process in schools, without forgetting that in-service teachers also need continued support and opportunities for ongoing development. Having that ongoing support, teachers could enhance their classroom practices, and as a result, students would be better taught (Popham, 2009).

In essence, the development of AL among teachers requires a comprehensive consideration of their prior beliefs and perceptions concerning assessment, along with the contextual factors of their work environment. Bridging theoretical concepts with practical applications in the classroom is also imperative. By recognizing the significance of assessment, learning conditions, ethics, feedback, and continuous reflection, teachers can refine and enhance their teaching methodologies. Thus, through participation in communities of practice and tackling challenging tasks, teachers can acquire new assessment knowledge, and improve their critical thinking skills and their AL.

### *Teachers' learning communities*

The literature reviewed in this chapter reveals a lack of teachers' AL and hence, difficulties with CA. In order to face those situations, researchers and teachers acknowledge the need to acquire and deepen their knowledge about assessment, but in a collaborative context. By sharing classroom experiences in learning communities, they can critically reflect on their assessment practice make decisions and negotiate with their colleagues because they have a common language. This means that teachers can have a space (e.g. in the workplace) where they can reflect on their daily issues regarding assessment. Additionally, they will have opportunities for professional development, where they can acquire tools to support their classroom assessment practices through peer collaboration (Xu & Brown, 2016).

International studies show the relevance of ongoing learning opportunities for teaching when teachers are working at an educational establishment (Schelling & Rubenstein, 2023). Thus, schools should open up spaces to share assessment practices between colleagues to enhance AL through exchanging ideas about CA. In the Chilean case, it is essential that the government analyzes these practices in order to be able to implement something similar to improve classroom teaching and learning practices (López & Manghi, 2021).

### *Classroom assessment (CA) and learning*

According to McMillan (2013, p. 4), "CA is a broad and evolving conceptualization of process that teachers and students use in collecting, evaluating, and using evidence of student learning for a variety of purposes". Moreover, CA is seen as a tool that teachers use in their classroom practices to gather data and information, allowing them to analyze students' learning and their own teaching practices, make decisions, and communicate students' achievements to them and their parents (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020).

For the purpose of this study, CA will be understood as an essential process that benefits students and

teachers and that can happen at any moment of an instruction (before, during or after) (Campbell, 2013). Furthermore, CA can be approached with summative or formative methods, both of which serve to support student learning and which can be used in different ways in order to give teachers different perspectives and feedback to analyze both student progress and their own practices (Black & William, 2018).

For an effective CA, it is necessary to have a clear purpose for the assessment and to define clear and explicit expectations for the learning and its objectives, as well as have ongoing communication with students about their assessment results. Therefore, it is possible to establish coherence among the objectives of assessment, the procedures for assessment, and the teaching practices designed to attain those objectives (Villagra & Riquelme, 2023).

Although there is much theory about it, CA is a complex process that stresses many teachers worldwide. This situation reveals an issue because CA impacts students' learning and its environment (Coombs et al., 2018).

Regarding those difficulties, Stiggins (1995) exposed two barriers that teachers have to deal with to improve CA. The first one is about the anxiety teachers feel when they assess because they recall their own negative experiences as students, which is why sometimes they reproduce those same assessment strategies in the classroom. The second barrier is that teachers have insufficient time to assess their students properly.

In Chile, we can find those two barriers, because teachers feel exhausted due to the long working hours and class sizes, so they feel they do not have enough time to effectively do CA (Stiggins, 2014). For that reason, it is fundamental that teachers can count on support to overcome those barriers and improve their AL through professional development opportunities because CA impacts and guides students' learning process, thus teachers need to be clear on why and how they assess and use proper assessment strategies related to their learning goals.

## Methods

This research aimed to explore how primary school teachers from Chile are prepared for CA, delving into their experiences, needs and demands concerning AL, and considering their thoughts and feelings regarding the whole picture of CA in the educational Chilean context. Hence, the study followed the interpretative paradigm with a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of all the participants who were part of this investigation and to understand them holistically; considering their context and their lived experiences as teachers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By examining

their views on educational issues, such as CA and AL, the study aimed to focus on individual perspectives rather than generalizing broader issues (Denscombe, 2021).

To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' voices, the study adopted a qualitative approach to explore their "meanings, actions, attitudes and intentions" (Gonzalez et al., 2008, p.3). This approach enabled a holistic comprehension of these aspects as an integrated whole, rather than as isolated factors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Through this paradigm and approach, this study will try to answer the following two research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How are primary school teachers from Chile prepared for classroom assessment?

RQ2: What impact does teachers' assessment literacy have on teachers' classroom assessment practices?

## Sampling and Participants

In accordance with the ethical guidance of BERA (2011) and the research ethics committee of the IOE, emails were sent to the Heads of the Educational Departments from diverse Universities in Santiago (Chile) that offer the "Pedagogy in Primary Schools" program (publics and privates ones). These emails provided information about the study and requested permission to contact tutor teachers who teach the Assessment subject at these universities. The tutor teachers were invited to participate in the research by answering an interview.

Invitations were sent to thirteen Head of Department of various Universities in Santiago. The selection criterion to choose those universities was that their Pedagogy in Primary Education careers was accredited, because according to the National Accreditation Commission (Comisión Nacional de Acreditación - CNA, n.d.), "the career accreditation certifies the quality based on its established standards and the criteria established by the respective academic and professional communities".

This decision was made because in Chile, since 2016, law N°20.903, which created the "Teacher Professional Development System", indicates that all universities that have careers in Education, for teacher development, must be accredited (Consejo Nacional de Educación - CNED, n.d.).

Concerning the thirteen invitations, only five Head of Department replied and gave their permission to contact the tutor teacher of the assessment subject. Those five tutor teachers were reached by email and three of them responded positively by attaching a

signed consent form to participate in the study. The three who agreed to participate include Pedro and Catalina, who teach at public universities, and José, who teaches at a private university. All three have a PhD in Education and between three to thirty years of experience working as tutor teachers in ITE assessment programs. Table 1 provides concise details about the tutor teachers and their respective universities.

On the other hand, social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn) were used to contact primary school teachers who studied at the Universities where tutor teachers teach (described above) and were currently working in a primary school.

Six primary school teachers who studied at the private university were invited to participate. Although all six agreed to take part, only three of them sent back a signed consent form. As a result, only those three were able to be included in the research.

Regarding primary school teachers who studied at the public universities, six of them replayed the email (three per public university) sending the signed consent form that allowed them to be part of the study.

The nine primary school teachers work in public and private urban primary schools in Santiago. These teachers have varying levels of experience, ranging from two to forty years. These criteria (years of experience) demonstrate that they already spent time putting into practice knowledge acquired at university or in courses during their work.

Furthermore, the nine participants attended the Assessment module during their ITE. However, only five of them reported receiving ongoing support through various in-service training programs, not limited to assessment. On the contrary, four of them stated that they only received assessment training during their ITE and had to learn about it on their own (as in-service teachers). Only one teacher received a master's degree training, but it was not in the assessment field. Primary school teachers' information is provided in Table 2.

### Data collection

Two semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were created, one for the tutor teachers from universities and one for the primary school teachers. The interviews were selected as the main data collection instrument for this study, because is the most prominent tool in qualitative research (Punch, 2014). Moreover, interviews allowed the researcher to collect and get access to the diverse perspectives, thoughts and reality constructions of the participants; by asking them questions (Jones, 1985; Punch, 2014).

The questions were designed to collect information that would aim to answer the research questions. In fact, the decision was made because of the richness of this type of interview, as is more flexible with the order of the questions and the interviewer can modify or adapt it; and also, ask the participants for more information (Fielding, 1993). Furthermore, the participants can deeply address the different themes, develop their ideas, speak widely, and emphasise relevant points (Denscombe, 2021).

**Table 1.**

#### *Tutor Teachers and Universities Information*

Participant (Pseudonyms)	University	Years of accreditation	Years of experience as tutor teachers	Name of the subject they teach
José	Teach at a Private University	6 years	3 years	Assessment in elementary education
Pedro	Teach at a Public University (referred as PU N°1)	4 years	30 years	Assessment for learning
Catalina	Teach at a Public University (referred as PU N°2)	2 years	20 years	Educational Assessment

Note: Own work.

**Table 2.**

#### *Primary School Teachers Information*

Participant (Pseudonyms)	University	Working in a primary school	Years of experience as primary school teacher
María	Studied at a Public University	Yes	20 years
Ana	Studied at a Public University	Yes	40 years
Camila	Studied at a Public University	Yes	9 years
Trinidad	Studied at a Private University	Yes	5 years
Doris	Studied at a Private University	Yes	8 years
Marta	Studied at a Private University	Yes	12 years
Juana	Studied at a Public University	Yes	2 years
Francisca	Studied at a Public University	Yes	2 years
Josefa	Studied at a Public University	Yes	2 years

Note: Own work.



The interviews were conducted online using UCL Zoom. They were conducted in Spanish, as this was the participants' native language and is also that of the researcher. Moreover, this match in characteristics established an environment of confidence and trust as the participants and the researcher spoke the same language and all are teachers (Cohen et al., 2018).

The ethics committee of the Institute of Education and Society (IOE-UCL) approved this research. All of the participants signed a consent form, their identities (in terms of both their names and the names of their institutions) were anonymized and the information they gave in the interviews was kept confidential.

**Pre-testing**

To validate the interview process, a protocol was created with a peer from IOE-UCL, following the guidelines of Robson and McCartan (2015) and was then validated by two expert professors in assessment from UCL. This process allowed the researchers to modify the questions, change the order, clarify the ones that could induce an answer, and remove words or eliminate those questions that were not related to the aim of the study.

As a first step, we decided our questions criteria, defining what to avoid in our questions, the prompts, probes, and the interview structure (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Robson & McCartan, 2015).

Second, we sent each other our protocol interview and gave us feedback regarding the questions' criteria previously established.

Third, the interview's questions were modified following the feedback received; changing the order of some questions, clarifying the ones that could induce an answer, removing those that pointed to the same as others, and eliminating the ones that were not related to the aim of the study. As Punch (2014, p.160) pointed out: "To maximise the quality of the data, one can anticipate and stimulate the data collection procedures; this will show the value of pilot testing any instruments and the procedures for using them".

Summarising, this process allowed us to improve our interviews protocol and at the same time, validate it.

On the other hand, to ensure the credibility of the data analysis, the quality of the qualitative data analysis was assessed by the researcher together with a peer from IOE-UCL, by sharing conclusions and giving each other free access to the original data, adding to this exchange a brief of the data and their interpretations.

The researchers gave each other feedback, by highlighting ideas or comments if they found something that was misunderstood. For this process, the data was anonymized to respect the identity of the participants.

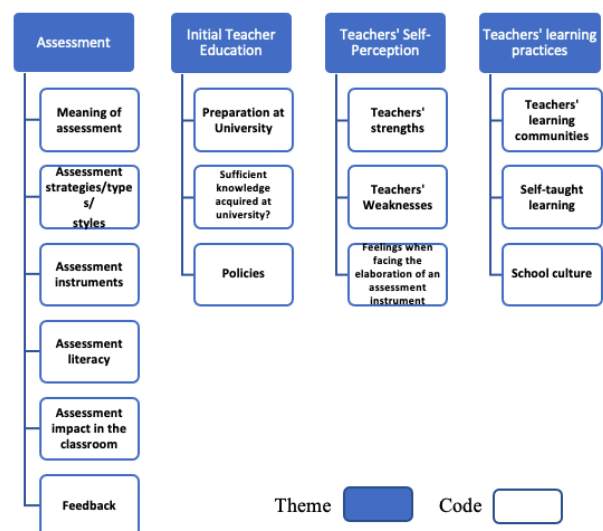
**Data analysis**

After completing the interviews, manual transcriptions were made and, when they had been completed, the interviews were listened to again to check the manual transcription's accuracy and amend it when necessary to ensure verbatim transcription. Previously, the participants had agreed to stay in touch by email if some doubt arose during the transcription and interpretation of the data; respondent validation was used and the accuracy of the data was checked with them if necessary, to ensure reliability (Denscombe, 2021).

The analysis of the university programs and the interviews was done using discourse analysis (Cohen et al., 2018). With this technique, meanings, categories, key issues and networks were analysed and interpreted, to deconstruct the data, read between the lines and look beyond the evidence (Denscombe, 2021).

Codes that emerged from the research questions were created before the analysis of the data. While reading the transcriptions, codes (labels) were decided on and these were then used in the analysis. Open coding categories were created to organized and group similar codes that had things in common, into themes, related to the research questions. The following themes and codes were defined (see Figure 1) to analyze, compare and reduce the data, to identify the key issues, and then to turn those into findings.

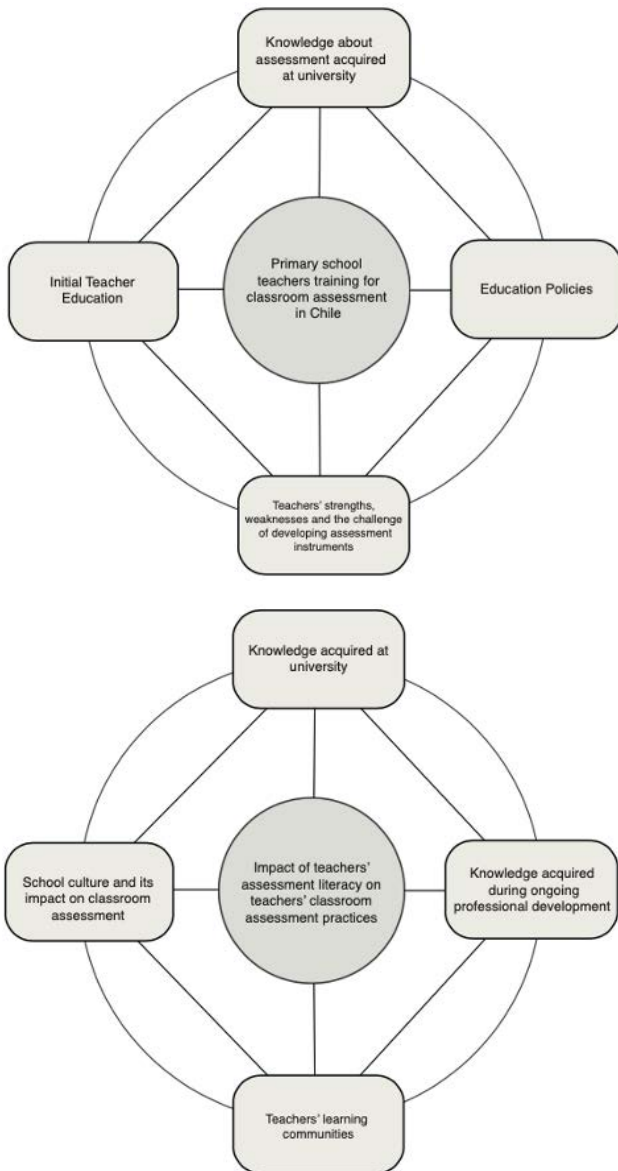
**Figure 1.**  
*Themes and Codes*



**Findings and Discussion**

Based on the interview data, two main dimensions and eight sub-dimensions (see Figure 2) were identified to provide a comprehensive response to the research questions. The evidence presented through this approach will contribute to fostering a discussion in the field of CA in Chile.

**Figure 2.**  
Findings Scheme



Note: Own work.

**Dimension 1: Primary school teachers training for classroom assessment in Chile.**

Reflecting on how to improve CA in Chile is a main issue, as well as exploring how ITE influences how assessment is approached at classrooms. This interest was the driver of this research. The four sub-dimensions presented below provide a more insightful picture of the issue.

**Initial Teacher Education**

It is known that during their ITE and continuing professional development (CPD), teachers should acquire and develop diverse skills that allow them to plan their assessment strategies, give effective feedback to their students, support them in teaching and learning, and so on (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020). Nevertheless, research worldwide shows that although this premise is the ideal, in practice the picture is very different (Mertler, 2003; Popham, 2011).

Based on the results of this study, it seems that the type of university where participants complete their ITE does not significantly impact their overall experiences.

Regardless of whether they had attended a public or private institution, individuals reported similar experiences from their respective programmes.

*At the university, I had an assessment module where they taught me diverse assessment instruments; however, I feel that the assessment module could have been much more useful if it had been done parallel to a professional internship (Sofía).*

*I feel like I had the tools to be able to assess but I had to look for more information elsewhere (by myself). I think that the assessment modules (that I had) were good, but I think I would have change the semesters were we had the module, that way, it would have coincided with the practice (internship) (Juana).*

These opinions reflect the answers of the majority of the participants. These teachers believed that they had learnt about assessment and received good knowledge about the different approaches (during ITE), but needed more practice linked to the theory. This is an issue that they repeated in their answers and is something that even the tutor teachers claimed: "They feel (students) that we lack space for us to discuss problems emerging from their practices (internships). Rather than the place or the quantity in the career, it is like being able to accompany the assessment practices better" (Catalina).

Moreover, in regard to the program (curriculum) of the assessment module of the public university where she worked, it mentions: "Theory will always appear linked to practice and from a historical and political contextualization of evaluation in childhood" (Public University Curriculum [PU N°2], June 2022). However, even though it is reflected in the study program, the participants still believed that this situation is due to a lack of practice during ITE, since the module is not taught in parallel with students' internships.

This is something that institutions that provide ITE should consider; since we cannot separate theory from practice, it is something that must be worked on together. Furthermore, the theory highlights the need to incorporate practices when pre-service

teachers are learning about assessment (Schelling & Rubenstein, 2023; Xu & Brown, 2016) because the theory is necessary but not enough, since external factors as well as teachers' own beliefs have an impact on how CA practices are addressed when they become in-service teachers. According to Schelling and Rubenstein (2023) when teachers receive assessment training linked to the classroom reality, they find it more helpful and beneficial for them to apply that knowledge in practice.

In summary, the perceptions of primary school teachers and tutor teachers from universities are related, and point to the urgent need to increase internship opportunities, linking classroom practices with the ITE assessment modules and the knowledge they offer. It would be better if pre-service primary school teachers were to receive more specific knowledge about CA to be more prepared and have more tools to face its challenges.

#### **Knowledge about assessment acquired at university**

Even though some primary teachers believed that they had received good, general knowledge about classroom assessment, they felt that it was not sufficient: "No, it was not enough, and looking back it had a much bigger approach to summative assessment. Now while I'm working, I have learned more about other assessment types" (Sofía).

Participants thought that they had received little preparation at their universities to do CA. Still, with ongoing practice and collaborative work with their colleagues, they were improving their knowledge regarding AL and gaining tools to face the challenge of teaching.

Nevertheless, these responses highlight the complexity of acquiring knowledge about assessment at university and during professional development. A recent study conducted by Schelling and Rubenstein (2023) in the United States addressed this same issue and found that participants in their study, who were pre-service teachers, received only one course on assessment during their ITE program, as well as limited or no additional training in assessment during their professional development.

This reality is something that the institutions that provide ITE must consider by facilitating effective development of AL, since it is not possible for teachers to continue feeling that they are not prepared to face CA. Therefore, it is important that actions are taken in this regard to improve the quality of education that is given to future teachers, since their practices will have a direct impact on the development of the teaching-learning process in the classroom (DeLuca, 2012; Mertler, 2004).

#### **Education Policies**

This section seeks to show that not all of the responsibility regarding assessment practices in the classroom falls on teachers; national public policies and institutional policies (of schools) influence the acquisition of knowledge about assessment and how this knowledge is put into practice.

*I think that it is important to analyze what happens with ITE (at universities), such as what are the mechanisms that are regulating what these programs offer, what happens with educational policies; for example, decree 67 is installed, but there is no associated training program (Catalina).*

In Chile, schools must consider in their practices decree 67 (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile - BCN, n.d.-a), a law that seeks to improve practices in regard to formative assessment and includes assessment as a part of daily work in the classroom. However, in reality, many schools do not know how to put this new decree into practice, and the reasons for this are diverse, such as the lack of AL of the different stakeholders, the lack of accompaniment for its implementation in schools and the diversity of contexts between schools.

*One thing is what the law says (Decree 67), and the other thing is how schools apply it. I have classrooms with 45 students and teach in eight grades, so I have more than 200 assessments to mark. By having a classroom with 45 you cannot spend the time that every student deserves (for feedback) because you do not have time (Josefa).*

In Chile, by law, schools should have a maximum of 45 children per classroom (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile - BCN, n.d.-b); hence, according to the participants, the number of students per class is a major problem, as well as schools' infrastructure. They do not have enough space to work with that class size; consequently, they almost run out of space to move around the room, which clearly impacts the application of the decree.

The participants highlighted that schools and their internal policies do not consider a space to work deeply in their assessment; therefore, they do not have time to give effective feedback to their students (referring to formative assessment).

The perspectives of these participants align with previous studies that examine issues regarding CA in relation to national policies, regulations, and school environments (Scarino, 2013; Xu & Brown, 2016). Those studies identified the challenges that teachers encounter when attempting to adopt CA strategies or implement innovative approaches, as well as the obstacles they must overcome to do so. Consequently, incorporating strategies such as formative assessment or assessment for learning (AfL) (Popham, 2014) in the classroom presents a difficult task for teachers who rely on their determination and creativity to enhance



teaching and learning processes.

Yet, despite teachers' will and the belief that AfL practices are beneficial, they need support to do this. There is an urgent need for necessary measures be taken, both at the macro level (public policies) and the micro level (schools) so that the accompaniment and support for teachers is real and sustained over time. Then, it will be possible to improve CA practices and, as a result, implementing new decrees that favor those practices will make sense and will be applied accordingly.

### **Teachers' strengths and weaknesses and the challenge of developing assessment instruments**

Acknowledging strengths and weaknesses is necessary to improve teaching practices and to reflect critically on how they impact on the teaching-learning process.

Most of the participants highlighted creativity as a significant strength of primary school teachers. They also mentioned their ability to work collaboratively, their ethic at work, their sense of justice, and their dedication to their jobs. "I think that all primary teachers have this strength of doing diverse things, but by doing it, one gets very tired. Another strength is being able to work as a team and exchange opinions with the group" (Ana).

Regarding weaknesses, the participants felt insecure when they had to create an assessment instrument and manifested that elaborating on an assessment instrument was difficult for them. "What makes it most difficult for me is to make the rubrics. I feel that I am very insecure for the assessment process, assessment itself is what costs me the most" (Doris).

The feeling of insecurity and overwhelm that teachers felt when they faced the challenge of elaborating on an assessment instrument was repeated by five of the nine participants in this study. This could be the product of the ITE they received because they should not feel insecure if they have acquired a good base at university.

*I love to create assessment instruments, first because I feel I have a good base (from university), then, when I have to face the construction of the material, I have the confidence to do it because I know that I am not so lost in time and space (Camila).*

These different lenses reveal that ITE is a factor that impacts AL and, consequently, the feeling that teachers have when they have to face the elaboration of classroom assessment instruments. Those who thought that they had received a solid knowledge of assessment at university felt more secure than those who had not. By contrast, as addressed in the literature review, there are diverse factors that influence AL, as

well as ITE, such as teachers' experiences in their CPD and their own experiences as students, access to resources, and how the external and internal policies (national curriculum and internal school curriculum) contribute with materials to support the enactment of the curriculum, and hence, the creation of assessment instruments.

*Although sometimes my coordinator checks my assessment instruments, I feel that I am missing the conversation with a peer because that is enriching. I feel that the assessment process is very lonely, and you also tend to make a lot of mistakes (Doris).*

Based on the participants' responses, it was found that teachers require assessment education, not only during their ITE but also during their CPD. This aligns with similar findings from studies conducted in Canada (Volante & Fazio, 2007; Deluca & Klinger, 2010). These studies emphasized the need for teachers to have better access to resources, opportunities, and support in their practices, because the lack of AL experienced by teachers can undermine their confidence while developing their teaching practices in the classroom.

### **Dimension 2: Impact of teachers' assessment literacy on their classroom assessment practices.**

Based on the findings, it is evident that the participants strongly believed that their AL significantly impacted their CA practices. They acknowledged the importance of what they had learned at university and their CPD.

#### **Knowledge acquired at university**

Even though some primary teachers believe they received good but general knowledge about CA, they felt that it was not sufficient.

*They were not enough (knowledge acquired at university), I think that assessment is something that should have much more transversality in the university. I think that this whole process (CA) could have been different if I had had more assessment tools during the assessment module (Sofia).*

Sofias' statement represents the perceptions of the majority of the participants and it reveals that the reality of Chile is similar to what happens in other countries, such as United States and Canada, where a study shows that during their ITE, teachers feel unprepared to face CA and that "assessment remains a significant gap in preservice programs" (DeLuca, 2012, p.577). Therefore, it would be important that actions be taken in this regard to improve the quality of education that is given to future teachers, since their practices have a direct impact on the development of the teaching-learning process in the classroom

#### **Knowledge acquired during continuing professional**

**development:**

Regarding the knowledge that teachers can acquire during their professional development, the reality is not different from the one explained above. In fact, primary school teachers and tutor teachers agreed they need more tools and opportunities to enhance their AL.

*I have not taken any course because we do not have much time, I have only educated myself in a self-taught way, the school has not sent us to training. I think that schools could train us more (Doris).*

*CPD is necessary in order to be able to deepen and give meaning to the assessment practice and not only from university classrooms. In particular, much of the learning that we have had after our undergraduate education occurs within the framework of professional teaching development (in schools) (Pedro).*

Chile is having the same problems concerning ITE and CPD as other countries, no matter the differences regarding social contexts. A study from Australia reveals the necessity to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the ITE programs and teachers' practices during their professional development (Green et al., 2018), because teachers manifest their concern about the little connection between the theory and practices regarding classrooms' realities.

Thus, improving ITE and CPD is essential, due to the impact that they have on CA (Roa, 2017). By strengthening these areas, the teaching-learning process could be enhanced as a whole and benefit the entire educational community. As highlighted by Meriläinen and Piispanen (2022), pre-service and in-service teachers have varying needs, but the goal is the same: to make their teacherhood stronger. Hence, addressing these concerns necessitates a collaborative effort involving schools, learning communities, universities, and public policies at all levels (Mertler, 2003).

**Teachers' learning communities**

All of the participants manifested the relevance of collaborative learning in the process of improving their AL. "I am in a school where its strength is collaborative work. Sharing experiences makes us strengthen our knowledge in assessment and therefore improve the instruments we use for that purpose" (María).

Nevertheless, the programs (curriculum) of the assessment modules of the three universities did not refer to the relevance of promoting learning communities for professional development in schools, maybe because their focus is on the general proposes of the module. Albeit some schools are implementing learning communities, there are others that do not have the space for them, perhaps for diverse reasons, such as the variety of contexts, time or resources:

"Assessment is a collaborative work and it must be collaborative, it makes it difficult for me to have to work alone because you need a peer from your area, a peer that makes you reflect on your own instrument" (Doris).

When it comes to the importance of learning communities for teachers and understanding the preferences of primary school teachers in Chile, it's essential for schools across the nation to create opportunities for educators to collaborate and develop their expertise by working alongside their colleagues.

Additionally, universities must prioritize this aspect in their programs to prepare future teachers for such collaborative environments, which will be critical for their professional growth. These communities can facilitate knowledge acquisition, sharing of experiences, and discussions on teaching and assessment practices. By fostering strong networking among colleagues, learning communities can promote continuous dialogue and self-reflection on daily teaching practices, ultimately enhancing their AL during professional development (Koh, 2011).

**School culture and its impact on classroom assessment**

Schools have their own diverse contexts, which gives rise to unique school cultures (Coombs et al., 2018). The participants in this study described these situations as issues that interfere with teachers' practices during CA. This is because some schools have curricula or guidelines that contradict what teachers have learned during their ITE.

*I felt all the time like how do I do this to feel true to myself (regarding to what she learned about assessment during their ITE), if the school demands something very different from me, then how do I make strategies to get both things together? (Francisca).*

According to the participants, it is common for classrooms in Chile to face barriers when it comes to implementing innovative assessment practices. Teachers may have great ideas and a strong desire to innovate, but the unique contexts of their school cultures can impede their progress (according to the political, social and cultural context of each school).

Furthermore, teachers feel tension when they have to face those barriers, due to the lack of autonomy they experience within their schools. As a result, this situation represents a challenge because they have to try to adapt their own beliefs to the school's views regarding CA practices (Xu & Brown, 2016). A study conducted in Finland (Meriläinen & Piispanen, 2022) revealed that students often encounter traditional school cultures that do not align with the more comprehensive approaches they learned about in their ITE. Consequently, they may experience feelings

of disappointment. In these scenarios, it is essential for teachers to receive support from the educational community to feel confident in their teaching practices.

Thus, in order to address this concern, schools should ask teachers to follow the school and national curriculum but allow them to have autonomy in terms of the teaching-learning processes or methods that they decide to follow in their classrooms. In the end, teachers are the ones that better know their students; therefore, they are the most suitable to decide the learning assessment practices according to the characteristics of their class and the purposes and learning objectives they have in their classroom.

### **Limitations**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. On the one hand, due to the one-year time constraint, it was not possible to include a more diverse range of voices that could have provided valuable insights into the issue of CA and AL, such as headteachers, students and policymakers. On the other hand, the location of the participants was limited to Santiago de Chile, due to economic resources and the limited timescale of the research. It would be interesting to hear from rural teachers and those from other cities in the north and south of Chile, as their unique contexts and resources could shape their ideas about CA and AL.

Despite these limitations, rigorous processes were followed to ensure the validity and credibility of the interviews. The data obtained from the interviews provided key and valuable information to contribute to the assessment field in Chile. Additionally, participants from both the public and private sectors of tertiary education were included, to analyze ITE and the CPD of primary school teachers.

### **Conclusion**

It is worth noting that primary school teachers in Chile experience insecurities and fears regarding CA. This research explored how they were prepared for it and found that in-service teachers, whether they had two or forty years' experience, felt that their ITE was insufficient. In addition, the study reveals that their professional development lacked necessary support and accompaniment from their superiors in the school and from the educational system as a whole. Therefore, it is vital to prioritize ongoing collaboration and support across all levels of the educational community and the educational system to ensure successful implementation of education reforms in order to improve CA processes.

Furthermore, the study highlights the following suggestions related to the two main approaches that the research discloses.

In terms of tertiary education, it has been found that universities often rely on highly skilled educators for assessment and even contribute to shaping educational policies. However, it is interesting to note the disparity between what experienced teachers teach to pre-service teachers and what pre-service teachers actually absorb, as the participants manifested a lack of preparation at university level. It is possible that there are a lack of implementation strategies in universities to establish a solid assessment program that is applicable to all modules that pre-service teachers must learn during their ITE. For that reason, it is recommended that tutor teachers take into account the diverse contexts of schools in Chile and the pre-existing beliefs of pre-service teachers about assessment in their teaching and module curricula, as these factors shape their AL. Additionally, ITE programs should increase their internship opportunities to bridge the gap between theory and practice and link the assessment module with other modules in the undergraduate degree.

By connecting modules and practices, pre-service teachers will have a better understanding of CA practices, and will know the different realities that schools have. As a result, they will be able to take those experiences and address them during their assessment modules.

In respect of the educational system, it should give assessment the attention and emphasis it deserves. Therefore, assessment should not just be seen as a way to hold schools or teachers accountable for their performance. The educational system should promote policies that support and assist teachers in their CPD, providing ongoing opportunities for improvement and the resources to enhance teaching and learning.

It is hoped that teachers in Chile will receive the necessary training and support to effectively face CA, and that they will not doubt their skills or feel overwhelmed, but instead, feel empowered to embrace and strengthen the assessment process.

On the other hand, it is essential to consider that assessment is a key aspect of the learning experience and that how it is perceived can influence teaching practices. Therefore, ITE and CPD should focus on learning-based assessment methods, such as AfL, rather than just teaching-oriented ones. Besides, there is an urgent need to continually innovate and update assessment approaches to promote a fair and equitable process to face the challenges and diversity of Chilean classrooms.

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