

**ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND
USE OF CLASSROOM-BASED READING ASSESSMENT**

A Dissertation

by

YUEMING JIA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2004

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

**ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND
USE OF CLASSROOM-BASED READING ASSESSMENT**

A Dissertation

by

YUEMING JIA

Submitted to Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved as to style and content by:

Lynn M. Burlbaw
(Co-Chair of Committee)

Zohreh Eslamirasekh
(Co-Chair of Committee)

Nancy Allen
(Member)

M. Carolyn Clark
(Member)

Dennie L. Smith
(Head of Department)

December 2004

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

English as a Second Language Teachers' Perceptions and Use of
Classroom-Based Reading Assessment. (December 2004)

Yueming Jia, B.A., Jilin University;

M.A., Jilin University

Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. Lynn M. Burlbaw
Dr. Zohreh Eslamirasekh

The purpose of this study was to explore ESL teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based reading assessments. The research questions underpinning this study were: 1) What types of classroom-based reading assessments are used in ESL classrooms and how are they used? 2) What are ESL teachers' perceptions regarding the function and effectiveness of classroom-based reading assessments? 3) What and how do external factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments? 4) What and how do internal factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?

The participants of this study were six middle school ESL teachers and seven elementary school ESL teachers. Data consisted of interviews with the participating ESL teachers, classroom observations, and assessment materials.

The finding of this study indicated that there were three kinds of classroom-based reading assessments commonly used by ESL teachers in the classrooms: tests, observation, and using writing to assess reading. These classroom-based reading assessments served ESL teachers in two ways: helping teachers make decisions about individual students and helping teachers make decisions about instruction. In addition,

classroom-based reading assessments were viewed as effective instructional instruments. ESL teachers highly valued classroom-based reading assessments, considered them accurate and valuable, and thought these assessments could provide great help to the daily teaching of reading. Students, statewide mandated standardized tests, and districts were three major forces that influenced this assessment process.

Four conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, classroom-based reading assessments played a central role in ESL teachers' teaching and assessing of reading. Second, ESL teachers highly valued classroom-based reading assessments, considering them valuable, accurate, and efficient. Compared to statewide mandated standardized testing, ESL teachers preferred classroom-based reading assessments. Third, ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments was largely under the control of districts or school authorities and there were many disagreements on the ways of assessing reading of ESL students between teachers and the districts or schools. Finally, statewide mandated standardized testing had distorted ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments in practice.

To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee co-chairs, Dr. Lynn M. Burlbaw and Dr. Zohreh Eslamirasekh, for guiding me in this study. They have always been nice and patient to me. They kept challenging me and always brought great ideas and advice to me. I could not have finished this study without their guidance. I would like to give a big thanks to my committee member, Dr. Carolyn Clark, for her support and for her insight comments and suggestions. I especially like to express my thanks and gratitude to my committee member Dr. Nancy Allen for her great help in this study and for her professional guidance and emotional support throughout my graduate studies.

I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Chris Sloan and Dr. Patrick Slattery for their help and support during my graduate studies. I would also like to thank Hilary Standish for her help with editing my dissertation.

Most importantly, I would like to extend an individual thank you to my family. My husband, Zhen Zhang, has always been supportive of me. My parents have always trusted and encouraged me. I thank them and dedicate this dissertation to them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
 CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background to the Problem.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	9
Significance of the Study.....	9
Limitations of the Study.....	11
Definitions of Terms.....	11
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
Classroom-Based Reading Assessment for ESL Students.....	14
Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs.....	25
Summary.....	33
III METHODOLOGY.....	35
Research Design.....	35
Sampling and Selection Criteria.....	38
Data Collection.....	42

CHAPTER	Page
Data Analysis.....	45
Validity and Reliability.....	49
IV CLASSROOM-BASED READING ASSESSMENTS	
IN PRACTICE.....	54
The Methods of Classroom-Based Reading Assessments.....	55
The Functions That Classroom-Based Reading Assessments Serve.....	75
The Characteristics of ESL Teachers' Use of	
Classroom-Based Reading Assessment.....	86
Summary.....	92
V ESL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM-BASED	
READING ASSESSMENTS.....	95
ESL Teachers' Views of Classroom-Based	
Reading Assessments.....	95
ESL Teachers' Comments on Statewide Mandated	
Standardized Testing.....	103
Summary.....	108
VI THE FACTORS INFLUENCING ESL TEACHERS' USE OF	
CLASSROOM-BASED READING ASSESSMENTS.....	110
The Internal Factors.....	110
The External Factors.....	116
The Interaction between ESL Teachers and Influential	
Factors.....	132
Summary.....	134

CHAPTER	Page
VII DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	138
Conclusion and Discussion.....	141
Implications for Theory, Practice, and Research.....	149
A Concluding Note.....	153
REFERENCES.....	154
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	167
APPENDIX B: RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	168
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SUMMARY FORM.....	169
APPENDIX D: AUDIT TRAIL.....	170
APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM.....	173
APPENDIX F: A SAMPLE OF MH'S BOOK REPORT.....	174
APPENDIX G: A SAMPLE OF MODEL LESSONS.....	175
VITA.....	176

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
1. Ethnicity of Students and Teachers in Schools in District 1.....	39
2. Ethnicity of Students and Teachers in Schools in District 2.....	40
3. Ethnicity of Students and Teachers in Schools in District 3.....	40
4. Ethnicity of Students and Teachers in Schools in District 4.....	41
5. Teacher Characteristics.....	42

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
1. Data Analysis Model.....	49
2. The Interactions between ESL teachers and the Influential Factors in Classroom-Based Reading Assessment Process.....	133

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Learning is the eternal theme of education. All efforts related to education eventually point to one thing--making learning happen. Learning itself, however, is hard to witness. People have to resort to assessments to tell whether or not learning has occurred. Assessment, the medium that makes learning visible, ensures its role as a never outdated issue in education.

Assessment is a process of purposefully collecting and interpreting information about students' achievements and performances (Gredler, 1999), which can be divided into two major categories: district-level assessments and classroom-based assessments in light of the different purposes they serve. District-level assessments, which concern gathering information for monitoring educational programs or placing students to particular programs, are also termed accountability assessments or external assessments. Statewide mandated standardized testing is a district-level assessment. Classroom-based assessments, which aim to generate information for teachers to make instructional decisions within classroom setting, are also called internal assessments (Wixson, Valencia, and Lipson, 1994; Genesee and Hamayan, 1991). Based on the information collected by classroom-based assessments, teachers evaluate instruction and diagnose individual student's needs. Classroom-based assessment not only helps teachers "modify instructional strategies and identify instruction need" (Hurley and Tinajero, 2001, p. 7),

This dissertation follows the style of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

but also provides rich information about students' progress in learning, by which teachers can "assess developmental status, monitor student progress, and certify competency" (Hurley and Tinajero, 2001, p. 7).

English as a Second Language (ESL) students are often viewed as "special" or even "at risk," so their progress receives more attention and is monitored carefully (Genesee and Hamayan, 1991). The results of ESL classroom-based assessment are valued not only by teachers but also by people outside classrooms. In a way, ESL classroom-based assessment functions for both public accountability and instructional direction. The unique role that classroom-based assessment plays in ESL teaching and learning inspired me to conduct this inquiry. The specific emphasis on the reading portion of assessments is due to the consideration that reading is one of the most fundamental parts of literacy (Hurley and Tinajero, 2001).

Background to the Problem

Although classroom-based reading assessment has been part of teaching for many years, it is only in the last twenty years that it has begun to draw attention from educational researchers, administrators, and parents largely due to people's dissatisfaction with the overwhelming use of statewide mandated standardized reading tests.

The Debate about Statewide Mandated Standardized Testing

Standardized Testing originated in the form of intelligence tests used for army recruits during World War I. After the war, a similar Stanford-Binet test was developed and was

used for placement of elementary and high school students in United States (Resnick, 1982). At about the same time, the standardized reading test with the same style was developed and came into use (Hill and Parry, 1994). Standardized tests “consisted of a range of tasks designed to spread students along a continuum of performance” (Gredler, 1999, p. 6), are administered under uniform conditions, and are norm referenced with a multiple-choice format (Diaz-Rico and Weed, 2002).

Since the 1970s, media reports about the decline in Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores have aroused people’s concern and directed criticism toward American schools. Minimum competency testing was called for, and some states enacted laws for minimum competency testing as a requirement for a high school diploma (Gredler, 1999). Up to 1993, there were about 34 states using standardized testing as part of their statewide testing program (Barton and Coley, 1994). Over time, these statewide mandated standardized tests have gradually come to carry higher stakes for students, teachers, and schools. Scores on these tests shape major decisions such as student graduations, grade promotion, teachers and schools’ evaluation, curricula evaluation, and financial rewards allocation (DiCerbo, 2000; Urdan and Paris, 1994). The power of statewide mandated standardized testing grows stronger and stronger. Under the shadow of these tests, other assessment methods have been ignored and marginalized.

The overwhelming use of statewide mandated standardized testing soon caused the concern of some researchers and educators. Since the 1980s, statewide mandated standardized testing has encountered a number of critiques and challenges. Some educators (e.g. Bracey, 1989; Shepaz, 1991) pointed out that these tests fail to assess

higher-order thinking and problem solving skills and they result in teaching and learning being reduced to the basic memorization of isolated facts. Stiggins (1999) charged that statewide mandated standardized tests and the high stakes attached to them put great pressure on students which can, in some way, lead to “a sense of futility” and cause students to stop trying to learn. Huerta-Macias (1995) argued that the testing situation itself could create anxiety which may hamper a student’s performance at that particular time and, thus, challenge the validity of statewide mandated standardized testing.

Valencia and Pearson (1987) stated that these tests are incapable of providing information about the reading strategies students use while reading. Other literacy educators further have pointed out that statewide mandated standardized tests are unable to reflect the kind of meaning-based, learner-centered, and process-oriented literacy that they are trying to teach (Brindley 1989; Huerta-Macias, 1993; Wrigley 1992).

The involvement of ESL students in statewide mandated standardized tests is more problematic. Some researchers (Crawford, 1993; Rothman, 1990; Scarcella, 1990) claimed that these tests are based on Anglo upper middle class culture and are therefore culturally biased in both content and format. In addition, since statewide mandated standardized tests do not consider the language and cultural differences related to ESL students, their validity and reliability in assessing ESL/EFL students’ performance are questionable. Chamberlain and Medinos-Landurand (1991) specifically explained the cultural and linguistic factors that make statewide mandated standardized tests invalid when assessing ESL students. Wrigley (1993) mentioned that statewide mandated standardized tests have little meaning for assessing ESL students’ language ability

because they are incapable of gauging how well second-language speakers can use English in real-life situations. Parry (1994) further confirmed the inability of culturally biased tests to assess ESL students' reading competency in her study pertaining to reading tests in a Nigerian secondary school.

The dissatisfaction with statewide mandated standardized testing prompts researchers to explore more ways to conduct assessments. Research done in recent years suggested that classroom-based assessments have great potential for accurately registering actual student knowledge (Airasian, 1991; Shepard, 1995; Stiggins, 1999). It is only when a student's abilities and weaknesses are ascertained that plans can be made for improvement.

Classroom-Based Reading Assessment

Traditionally classroom-based assessment was called informal assessment and involved teachers' informal observations, casual questioning and informal paper and pencil tests. In the last twenty years, researchers have taken efforts to formalize its procedure, enrich its methods, and extend its functions (Darling-Hammond and Goodwin, 1993; Garcia and Pearson, 1994; Resnick and Resnick, 1992; Short, 1993; Stiggins, 1999; Wiggins, 1992). Now, classroom-based assessment is named in multiple ways, such as "alternative assessment," "authentic assessment," "performance assessment," "descriptive assessment," and "teacher-based assessment" (Hamayan, 1995; Wolf, 1993).

Unlike statewide mandated standardized testing that mainly contributes to public

accountability, classroom-based assessments have more power to evaluate instruction and identify students' personal needs. Airasian (1991) pointed out that classroom-based assessments "occupy more of a teacher's time and arguably has a greater impact on instruction and pupil learning than do the formal measurement procedures" (p. 15). According to Short (1993), classroom-based assessments are helpful because they can measure the progress and achievement of students, guide and improve instruction, and diagnose student knowledge of a topic. Classroom-based assessments provide real help with day-to-day teaching and learning which is the core and base for attaining excellence in education and school improvement (Stiggins, 1999). Shepard (1995) added that classroom-based assessments help teachers to find the weaknesses and strengths of instruction and encourages them to continuously search for better ways to teach. Specifically regarding reading comprehension, classroom-based assessments have a greater ability to measure complex reading tasks in a contextualized setting. It also can provide ample information about the use of reading strategies and skills by students (Garcia and Pearson, 1994).

As far as ESL education is concerned, Hamayan (1995) stated that ESL students could benefit from classroom-based assessments because it "allows for the integration of various dimensions of learning as relating to the development of language proficiency" (p. 214). In addition, ESL students are in a progressive period of language acquisition. It is very important for teachers to obtain information on the progress of students' learning so that they can notice students' needs in time and keep their instruction correlated with students' development. Classroom-based assessments allow teachers to monitor

students' development day by day (Darling-Hammond and Goodwin, 1993; Resnick and Resnick, 1992; Wiggins, 1992). Since classroom-based assessments are individually oriented, they run less risk of suffering from the cultural bias to which state mandated standardized tests are prone (Chamberlain and Medinos-Landurand, 1991).

Although some researchers strongly believe in classroom-based assessments, others do not trust this type of assessment method. Worthen (1993) pointed out that classroom-based assessment is unable to show convincing reliability and validity, so it hardly has a bright future. He also suggested that classroom-based assessments' heavy dependence on teachers might raise the concern of how fairly teachers can play the assessment games. O'Neil (1992) thought that most of classroom-based assessment methods were too informal and teachers needed to develop more expertise with them. In addition, some researchers (Norris, Brown, Hudson, and Yoshioka, 1998) assumed that classroom-based assessment is expensive, labor intensive and time consuming. Since everyday teaching activities already occupy much of a teacher's time, it can be difficult for teachers to find more time and energy to conduct this additional task.

Statement of the Problem

Research related to classroom-based reading assessment has flourished in recent years. Some have contributed to theoretical frameworks in this subject; some have focused on studying the application of certain assessment methods in classrooms. However, few studies have been done in understanding ESL teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based assessments.

Teachers are one of the most important factors in the process of classroom-based reading assessments. They have “meaningful goals for instruction and clear purposes for assessment” (Wolf, 1993). They decide what to assess, when to assess, and how to assess; they are the main interpreters and users of classroom-based reading assessment results. Also, they are the most experienced people in assessing students’ learning since classroom-based assessments have been a part of their instruction. Therefore, it is important to know how teachers perceive and use classroom-based assessments.

Johnson, Guice, Baker, Malone, and Michelson (1995) have conducted a study focusing on mainstream teachers’ perception and use of classroom-based reading assessment and instruction. In their study, Johnson et al. explored how teachers in language arts programs keep track of and make sense of children’s literacy development and of their own professional effectiveness in teaching children to read and write. They collected data from the interviews with teachers, classroom observations, and curricula document. Twenty-five mainstream classroom teachers were interviewed over a wide range of topics such as instruction planning, pupil evaluation, literacy instruction, integration of the language arts, familiarity with children’s literature, and library use. Their work suggested that assessment in classrooms is far from a merely technical tool but is deeply social and personal.

This study is similar to that of Johnson et al. in that the data consists of information gleaned from interviews with individual teachers. It differs in the population of interest as it is centered on the ESL classrooms and ESL teachers. The goal of this study is to investigate what goes on in ESL classrooms regarding reading assessment and

how ESL teachers make sense of their methods to keep track of students' development, to identify the difficulties ESL teachers encounter in the assessing process, and to ascertain what supports they need related to assessing reading performance in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore ESL teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based reading assessments. The research questions underpinning this study are:

1. What types of classroom-based reading assessments are used in ESL classrooms and how are they used?
2. What are ESL teachers' perceptions regarding the function and effectiveness of classroom-based reading assessments?
3. What and how do external factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?
4. What and how do internal factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?

Significance of the Study

The exploration of teachers' perceptions and beliefs is important because teachers are in the front line of education, heavily involved in various teaching and learning processes. Teachers are practitioners of educational principles and theories and "professionals with extensive knowledge of child development and learning" (Angaran, 1999). Teachers

have a primary role in determining what is needed or what would work best with their students. Therefore, it is significant to address teachers' beliefs and perceptions of students, learning, instruction, assessment, classrooms, and the subject matter to be taught.

Furthermore, a number of studies support that teachers' perceptions and beliefs do not only considerably influence their ways of teaching and acting in classrooms but also are related to their students' achievement (Grossman, Reynolds, Ringstaff, and Sykes, 1985; Hollon, Anderson, and Roth, 1991; Johnson, 1992; Morine-Dershimer, 1983; Prawat and Anderson, 1988; Wilson and Wineburg, 1988). Johnson's 1992 study, for example, indicated that ESL teachers' classroom practices and behaviors are congruent with their perceptions and beliefs. Prawat and Anderson (1988) also found that teachers' beliefs and perceptions influence their students' problem solving ability. Thus, knowing the perceptions and beliefs of teachers enables one to make sense of teaching and assessment practices in classrooms.

In this study, I interviewed individual ESL teachers, exploring their personal concepts, thoughts, and practical knowledge regarding assessments. The results of this study will help ESL teachers and administrators be more aware of the implications of classroom-based reading assessments, and will encourage ESL teachers to reflect on their own reading assessment methods and seek the best ways to conduct teaching and assessment in their classrooms.

This study also provides a description of what actually occurs in ESL classroom-based reading assessments. I have documented what is taking place in the classrooms

without intervening or manipulating any aspect of classroom-based reading assessment. A record providing a picture of classroom-based assessments is potentially significant because knowing about the current situation may:

1. Help to verify, clarify, or contradict common assumptions
2. Provide a foundation for recommendations regarding continuation or change in practice (Fitzgerald, 1995, p. 126).

In addition, the findings from this study add to the growing theoretical literature related to assessing ESL learners.

Limitations of the Study

This study only focuses on middle and elementary school ESL teachers. The results may have more relevance to this particular group and less to others. This is the delimitation of the study. In addition, this study does not take into account participants' cultural and language backgrounds, or the English language proficiency levels of the students that the ESL teachers teach. At last, this study does not involve students, administrators, and parents' ideas related to classroom-based reading assessment.

Definitions of Terms

1. Accelerated Reader: A reading program in which there are computer-based tests connected to each library book. Students read a library book first and then take a test about the book.
2. Assessment: A process of purposefully collecting and interpreting information

about students' achievements and performances (Gredler, 1999).

3. Classroom-based Assessment: An assessment method that is used in classroom context aiming at providing information for teachers to make decisions about teaching and learning.
4. Member Checking: The verification of data and interpretations gathered by the researcher through taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible (Merriam, 1998).
5. Plato: Software of reading assessment in which provides both reading tests and reading lessons.
6. Purposive sampling: A sampling procedure that is governed by emerging insights about which one can learn a great deal about issue of central importance to the purposes of the research (Merriam, 1998).
7. Standardized Test: A test that is administered at set intervals and is norm referenced with a multiple-choice format. Its purpose is to measure a student's performance in a variety of skills and compare those scores to students in other geographic locations (Hurley and Tinajero, 2001).
8. Statewide Mandated Standardized Test: A standardized test that is mandated statewide and serves for monitoring educational programs or placing students to particular programs.
9. Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS): A statewide mandated standardized test that was given to students in the third through eleven grades.

High school students had to pass all three parts of the exam-reading, writing, and math-in order to graduate. The purpose of this test was to measure proficiency of the objectives presented in the Texas curriculum. The TAAS test was replaced by the TAKS in 2003.

10. Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS): A statewide mandated standardized test which is taken by most Texas public school students in spring of each year during grades 3-11. High school students must pass exams in reading, writing, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science in order to graduate. The purpose of this test is to measure proficiency of student attainment of the objectives presented in the Texas curriculum. TAKS started in 2003 as a replacement for TAAS.
11. Test: A set of tasks or questions that usually is administered to a group of classroom students in a specific time period (Gredler, 1999).
12. Triangulation: The practice of using multiple investigators multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings (Merriam, 1998).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study mainly refers to two existing bodies of research: classroom-based assessments for ESL students and teachers' perceptions and beliefs. In this chapter, I will review the previous research findings in the two areas, laying the theoretical foundation for this study. The first portion of this review will highlight the content and methods of classroom-based reading assessments. The second portion will focus on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices and teachers' ideas and thoughts about classroom-based assessments. In addition, the influences of statewide mandated standardized testing on ESL teaching and assessment will be mentioned.

Classroom-Based Reading Assessments for ESL Students

In examining reading assessments in ESL classrooms, we are going to encounter two fundamental questions: what to assess and how to assess. The answers to those questions vary with the changing views of reading, instruction, and assessment. In the last twenty years, classroom-based assessments in ESL programs have experienced a profound change in beliefs, principles, and practice due to the paradigm shift in both reading and instruction research (Tierney, 1998).

What to Assess

Before discussing what to assess for reading, we must first clarify "what is reading." The definition of reading determines what is going to be assessed for reading. Reading was

defined differently in different periods. In the 1960s, reading was viewed as a text decoding process (Carrell, 1988; Carrell, 1984). Thus, reading assessments focused on examining students' decoding skill, vocabulary, and comprehension of isolated sentences or short paragraphs (Winograd, Bridge and Paris, 1991). The assessment information teachers gathered was usually factual recall, comprehension of the main ideas or events, and vocabulary in context (Paratore and Indrisano, 1987).

Beginning in the early 1970s, the psycholinguistic model of reading, schema theory, and the interactive model of reading were introduced into reading research, shaking traditional beliefs and principles of reading (Carrell, 1988; Goodman, 1967; Rumelhart, 1977). Reading has been more considered as a process that readers use all available sources to make sense of text (Valencia and Pearson, 1987) rather than just an outgrowth of the language learning. The attention on the product of reading also has been shifted to the strategic process that readers use while reading. Regarding reading instruction, teachers are encouraged to provide more reading strategies and metacognitive awareness training for students rather than simple word identification instruction. With the change of reading and instruction theory, reading assessment has been driven to a new direction. Winograd, Bridge, and Paris (1991) stated that since reading reflects both processes of learning and products of knowledge, reading assessment should provide measures of both. Paratore and Indrisano (1987) further argued, "The goal of assessment is not only to measure a student's present performance but to discover the range of possibilities, given both an appropriate setting and appropriate intervention" (p.778). Reading assessments are encouraged to examine not

only readers' final comprehension but also their abilities to use metacognitive strategies.

In response to the call for reading process assessments, some researchers designed and offered some specific methods, procedures and principles to assess students' controlling of reading strategies. Ellis (1989) presented a three-stage assessment model for assessing students' use of cognitive reading strategies:

Stage 1: Obtain product measures. Two product measures should be obtained.

The first measures students' decoding fluency levels. The second measures text comprehension.

Stage 2: Obtain process measures of strategic functioning via mediated cues. A simple way to determine this is to mediate the strategic procedure for students as they read the passage and then determine whether this mediation affects students' comprehension.

Stage 3: Conduct a metacognitive interview with the student. The purpose of interviewing students is to find out their perceptions of what they know about their own thought processes, how they perceive their own use of strategies, and how they perceive the mediation provided by the teacher. The interview should not be highly structured. Students' responses should dictate follow-up questions (p. 412-420).

Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) designed a self-report instrument, the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI), to assess readers' metacognitive awareness and perceiving use of reading strategies. MARSI includes thirty items with three strategy subscales or factors: Global Reading Strategy, Problem-

solving Strategy, and Support Reading Strategy. Suggestions related to administering, scoring, and interpreting results are provided. According to these researchers, the average administration time is between 10 and 12 minutes, depending on the students' grade level; teachers need to explain the purpose of the inventory to students. Students can do the scoring by transferring the scores obtained for each strategy to the scoring sheet; the interpretation of MARSII results can be grouped to three levels, high, medium, and low.

Peters (1991, p. 590) talked about material selection of reading assessment. He suggested that assessment material should:

1. Reflect important themes and ideas
2. Be consistent with the goals of the subject area curriculum
3. Be rooted in real-world experiences and have application to the world both inside and outside of school
4. Be sensitive to the developmental progression of students
5. Allow students to engage in higher order thinking

How to Assess

In the early days of American education, the major form of assessment used in classroom was oral questioning. Teachers measured students' reading performance by calling on each of them in turn to answer certain questions or to read a sentence aloud. Later, paper and pencil exams with spelling and essay questions became another part of reading assessment in classrooms (Gredler, 1999). For many years, these classroom-

based assessments have been ignored, and considered as informal assessments. Few researchers paid attention to them. However, since the 1980s, this situation has changed dramatically. Some researchers raise their interest in classroom-based assessments during the search for other ways to measure students' learning in addition to standardized testing (Brown and Hudson, 1998; Hamayan, 1995; Vecchio, Gustke, and Wilde, 2000). Those researchers claimed that classroom-based assessments have multiple advantages in measuring students' progress and evaluating teachers' instruction and should be recognized in the front stage of educational measurement and evaluation. Meanwhile, researchers have extended and formalized the assessment methods teachers originally used in classrooms, generating multiple systematized classroom-based assessment methods, techniques, and strategies, which often are called alternative assessments (Yochum and Miller, 1990; Rhodes and Shanklin, 1990; Robbin, Moss, Clark, Goering, Herter, Templin, Wascha, 1995; Johnson, 1996).

Brown and Hudson (1998) identified three types of assessment methods that could be used in ESL classrooms, selected-response assessments, constructed-response assessments, and personal-response assessments. In selected-response assessments, teachers "present students with language material and require them to choose the correct answer among a limited set of options" (p. 658). This kind of assessments is easy to administer and fast, easy, and relatively objective to be scored. The disadvantages are that they are difficult to construct and do not encourage students to use any productive language. True-false, matching, and multiple choices are the three types of selected-response assessments. In constructed-response assessments, teachers ask "students to

produce language by writing, speaking, or doing something else” (p. 660). This kind of assessments is appropriate for measuring the productive skills of speaking and writing, and also is useful for observing interactions of receptive and productive skills, but its scoring is difficult and time-consuming. Fill-in, short-answer, and performance assessments are the three common types of constructed-response assessments. Personal-response assessments involve conferences, portfolios, and self-and peer assessments, which allow students to produce language in different ways. This kind of assessment “assesses learning processes in an ongoing manner throughout the terms of instruction” (p. 663).

Genesee and Hamayan (1991) provided four specific ways to conduct assessment in ESL classrooms and three ways to keep records as well. The first method is observation. According to Genesee and Hamayan, observation is basic to assessment, which can be used to assess the daily performance of students and “can be done unobtrusively, without interfering with what is being observed” (p. 223). In fact, teachers have been using observation to assess how well students learn and how the instruction works for many years. Those observations, however, were fragmented and unorganized. Genesee and Hamayan suggested teachers organize and plan their classroom observation in an efficient and effective way and record the observation according to certain system so that valuable information will be recalled accurately and will not be forgotten. The second is conference, which refers to a conversation or discussion between the teacher and one or several students about schoolwork. In the conference, a teacher can talk with students about the work they have completed or task

that students perform in the presence of the teacher. The teacher can ask students about their difficulties in performing the task or the strategies they used to solve problems.

Conference assessment method can be very beneficial for teachers who are unfamiliar with the learning and performance styles of students from different cultural and linguistic background. The third is the student journal, in which students share their writing with teachers who in turn give feedback to students. Usually, student journals are useful in assessing students' writing skills and strategies they use when writing. The last assessment method is testing. Testing has several advantages; they have clearly defined criteria for assessing, they are good representation about learning objectives, and they can provide systematic and uniform feedback about students' learning. However, Genesee and Hamayan reminded teachers to carefully interpret ESL students' test scores because these students might do poorly on tests for various reasons. Test results cannot be the only source to make decisions.

Regarding keeping assessment record, Genesee and Hamayan mentioned three ways to keep records: student portfolios, narrative records, and checklists. A portfolio includes a variety of works such as students' artifacts, teachers' observation notes, and the student's own periodic self-evaluations. The use of a portfolio is a way for teachers to track a student's progress over the school year. Genesee and Hamayan pointed out that portfolios can "be particular important for ESL students because they can see the real linguistic progress they have made since the beginning of the school year" (p. 232). In addition, portfolios can be shared with parents to provide them with concrete evidence of their children's progress. Portfolio also is an important tool to develop students' self-

assessment strategies. Narrative records are used to keep teachers' spontaneous, unexpected, or unique observations, which can be made on file cards, adhesive labels, or clipboards. Narrative records will be more effective when used in conjunction with other assessment procedures. Checklists consist of a series of pre-designated items for recording observations which can be designed to meet different assessment needs of teachers. Students also can use checklists for self-assessment.

Specifically, on reading assessment methods, Hurley and Tinajero (2001) suggested the use of reciprocal questioning. An interactive approach, two or more readers ask questions of each other to express their understanding of the text. Hurley and Tinajero provided a model for conducting the process,

1. Examine the text and make predictions about the story. Teacher and student browse the reading material together and then teacher models questions and predictions and record responses from the student.
2. Read the story together orally or silently.
3. Summarized and make predictions
4. Create a question game. (p. 16-17)

Reciprocal questioning can provide information about students' text processing and thinking. Furthermore, Hurley and Tinajero discussed the three assessing stages: pre-reading assessment, during-reading assessment, and post-reading assessment. In each stage, teachers can use different strategies to assess students' reading comprehension such as anecdotal records, reciprocal questioning, a checklist, or journal.

Rhodes and Shanklin (1990) described how to conduct a classroom reading

miscue analysis. Miscue analysis aims to examine student's use of language cues and strategies, highlighting the assessment of reading process. According to Rhodes and Shanklin, it takes about 10-15 minutes to administer Classroom Reading Miscue Assessment (CRMA) to an individual student. Teachers can collect data on one or two students per day. The passage used for assessing should be 300-500 words long and challenging enough that student will make miscues that allow the teacher to observe the student's reading strategies but not so difficult that it causes the student to be frustrated. The student is asked to read the passage aloud and then retell what he or she can remember. As the student reads the text, the teacher determines which sentence to be semantically acceptable or unacceptable. A comprehension (in-process comprehension) score will be given according to the number of semantically acceptable sentences in the total number of sentences read. While tallying semantic acceptability, the teacher can also make general observations about the student's strategy and cue use. Finally, the teacher listens to student's retelling of the text, and record observations about the retelling (p. 253-254).

The cloze test is another useful classroom-based reading assessment method. In a cloze test, words are deleted from a given text at regular intervals between every five to ten words. Students have to insert the missing words according to context clues. No deletion is made in the first few sentences so that the reader can get some idea of the topic (Nuttall, 1982). Cloze test is flexible, easy to use, and appropriate for different size classrooms, and it is powerful in measuring comprehension or readability (Hurley and Tinajero, 2001).

Other researchers, such as Davey (1983), Yochum and Miller (1990), Olson (1990), suggested teachers to use observations, interviews, think-aloud, brainstorming, and problem solving to collect information about students' views of themselves as readers and the strategies that they use to solve their reading problems.

The Empirical Studies

In correspondence with the theoretical frameworks, some empirical studies were done in exploring the application of classroom-based reading assessments. Most of these studies focus on investigating the use of a particular classroom-based reading assessment method in the classrooms such as portfolio assessment (Bauer and Garcia, 2002; Heibert and Davinroy, 1993; Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, and Kearns, 2001; Moje, Brozo, and Hass, 1994; Smolen, Newman, Wathen, and Lee, 1995). The findings of these studies showed that classroom-based reading assessments usually have positive impact on teaching and learning.

Moje, Brozo, and Hass (1994) examined a teacher's implementation of portfolio instruction and assessment in a high school classroom. The study was done in a Midwestern University community. Most students in the teacher's class came from middle to upper-middle class background. Video recording and interviewing were the major ways used to collect data. The finding demonstrated while managing the portfolio use in a classroom, this teacher modified the hidden ideas of portfolio instruction and assessment to fit her teaching strategy. Also, students' expectations and perspectives played a dramatic role in the implementation of portfolios in this classroom which were

shaped by their past classroom experience, the value they placed on high school learning in general, and the relative value of school subjects. However, the teacher had her own expectation about how portfolios should be used in this classroom and the teacher's expectations did not match students' expectations. The conflict lead to rejection of portfolios by students. In the end, the researchers suggested some activities to implement portfolios in classroom such as starting with simple activities, negotiating firm deadlines for completed work, encourage students to set concrete goals, providing initial resources, and integrating other classroom activities with the portfolios.

Smolen, Newman, Wathen, and Lee (1995) investigated the use of portfolio assessments in an ESL classroom. They recorded a particular ESL teacher's work to promoting self-assessment by portfolio. The teacher used goal cards to involve students in the portfolio process. Students filled out personal goal cards based on self-evaluation of their work to decide their focus and goals on next learning period. In addition, a time planning sheet and daily learning log were developed as a part of the portfolio assessment procedure, which helped students schedule their own learning activities and help them stay on task. Most of all, the teacher built an assessment partnership between students and her. By doing so, students began to take more control of their own learning and learned how to use time more efficiently. Their self-awareness and self-confidence were increased too.

In addition, Francis (1999) carried a study to explore the application of cloze test in second language learning classrooms. Subjects involved 50 third graders and 54 fifth graders who possessed at least passive oral competence in Spanish and Na'huatl [an

Aztec language spoken in Mexico]. The subjects were provided a brief training session about cloze assessment activities with sample passages to demonstrate basic cloze test strategies. Then they were asked to complete one cloze test in Na'huatl. Before beginning the task, an overview of the story was provided orally in Spanish, introducing the characters and the setting. Scoring followed a rational cloze, qualitative rating procedure that included a seven-point scale. The results showed that cloze test offers the classroom teacher a relatively rapid estimation for group comparisons and assessment of the appropriateness of classroom texts. In addition, cloze test appears to present special advantage in tapping the processing phenomenon of interlinguistic switching, which is the object of wide spread interest among teachers working in bilingual schools.

Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs

Research regarding to teachers' thinking and beliefs began in the late 1970s and the beginning of 1980s and quickly grew into a large body of research (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Kagan, 1992). Some researchers (Ashton, 1990; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Clark, 1988; Putman and Duffy, 1984) believed that since behavior is guided by thought, knowing teachers' perceptions and beliefs would help better understand teachers' behaviors in classrooms and provide a guide for improving teachers' practices and pre-service teachers preparation.

On the other hand, research related to teachers' perceptions and beliefs responds to the calling for involving teachers in a discussion of educational research and policies. As mentioned before, teachers are one of the most important personnel in educational

system: teachers are in the front line of education, heavily involved in various teaching and learning processes, and also the final practitioners of educational principles and theories. For many years, however, teachers had been absent from educational research and policies and the voices of teachers were seldom heard in public (Dhunpath, 2000). Therefore, starting in the 1990s, many researchers (Angaran, 1999; Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseoglou, and Stogiannidou, 2000; Casimir, Mattox, and Hays, 2000; Commeyras, Osborn, and Bruce, 1994; Dhunpath, 2000; Good and Brophy, 2000) advocated introducing more teachers' ideas and thoughts to educational research.

The Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

So far, research regarding to teachers' perceptions and beliefs has experienced two periods. The first period was from the end of 1970s to 1990s. In this period, studies of teachers' perceptions usually concentrated on examining the relationship between teachers' belief and practices. The findings of most of these studies indicated that teachers' practices were usually consistent with their beliefs and thoughts and were related to students' performance (Fuchs, Fuchs, and Phillips, 1994; Johnson, 1992; Mangano and Allen, 1986; Rupley and Logan, 1984; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd, 1991; Wing, 1989; Wood, Cobb, and Yackel, 1990). For instance, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Phillips (1994) examined the relationship between teachers' beliefs about the importance of good student work habits and their responsiveness to student academic performance. One hundred and twenty-one elementary school teachers participated in this study. Teachers' beliefs were measured by questionnaires. The results indicated that

teachers with strong beliefs about good student work habits plan with greater responsiveness to student performance than teachers with less strong beliefs. Their learning-disabled students also achieved better than those with teachers who had less strong beliefs.

Ford (1994) investigated teachers' beliefs about mathematical problem solving in the elementary school. Ten 5th-grade teachers from four different schools in a large rural school district participated the study. This study focused on 5th-grade teachers' and students' beliefs about mathematical problem solving; attributions for the causes of performance in problem solving; and beliefs about the teaching and learning of problem solving in mathematics. Each teacher identified two students from her classroom to participate in the study, one student was perceived by the teacher as successful and one was perceived as unsuccessful in mathematical problem solving. Parallel interviews with teacher and students were conducted. The findings showed that students' beliefs about mathematical problem solving are mostly consistent with the beliefs held by the teachers. And teachers basically attributed success and failure in problem solving to differences in students' ability.

However, there were a few studies that did find some inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and their practices (Duff and Anderson, 1984; Sahin, Bullock, and Stables, 2002), and they suggested that the complexities of classroom life and some outside classroom factors contributed to these inconsistencies.

Addressing Teachers' Ideas and Thought about Different Educational Topics

In the past ten years, researchers examining teachers' perceptions and beliefs have focused on articulating teachers' voices in discussion of teaching, learning, and educational policies (Allen and Flippo, 2002; Commeyras, Osborn, and Bruce, 1994; Ferguson, 2003; Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris, 2001; Jegede and Taplin, 2000; Johnson, Guice, Baker, Malone, and Michelson, 1995; Ko and Lee, 2003; Peacock, 2001; Skelton, 2003; Urdan and Paris, 1994; Zimmerman, Deckert-Pelton, 2003). These studies have involved teachers in discussions of all types of educational topics. For example, Commeyra, Osborn, and Bruce (1994) explored teachers' ideas about the rationale for the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading. Zimmerman and Deckert-Pelton (2003) investigated teachers' perceptions of the principal's role in professional evaluation. Jegede and Taplin (2000) probed trainee teachers' perception of their knowledge about expert teaching. Skelton (2003) studied male primary teachers and their perceptions of masculinity.

In the following sections, I am going to mainly discuss research on teachers' perceptions related to the topic of this present study.

Teachers' Perceptions of Statewide Mandated Standardized Testing

Today statewide mandated standardized tests carry high stakes for students, teachers, and schools. The scores on tests shape major decisions such as student graduation, grade promotion, teachers and schools' evaluation, curricula evaluation, and financial reward allocation (Menken, 2000; Urdan and Paris, 1994). The overwhelming power of

statewide mandated standardized testing has raised concerns from many educational researchers and educators (Ayers, 2001; Bracey, 1989; Haladyna, Nolen, and Haas, 1991; Huerta-Macias, 1995; Shepaz, 1991; Stiggins, 1999). Researchers especially worried about the influences of statewide mandated standardized testing on teaching and learning in the classrooms. Ayers (2001) commented that when tests and test scores are used beyond their actual function, they could be a tragedy. Children are sorted into good and bad, intelligent and unintelligent only according to the test scores. Good teaching is measured by how well students do on tests, so teachers have to spend most of energy on teaching the test skills instead of motivating real learning. “Standard tests push both teaching and learning in the wrong direction” (p. 114).

To respond to these concerns, some studies have been done to investigate teachers’ perceptions of statewide mandated standardized testing and its influences on classroom instruction and assessment (Haladyna, Nolen, and Haas, 1991; Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris, 2001; Smith, Edelsky, Draper, Rottenberg, and Cherland, 1989; Urdan and Paris, 1994). The findings of these studies showed that teachers usually have negative perceptions about statewide mandated standardized testing. Also, teachers’ regular teaching and assessment in the classrooms are often distorted by these tests.

Urdan and Paris (1994) examined teachers’ perceptions of statewide mandated standardized testing. Surveys were sent to three hundred teachers and two hundred forty-five were returned. The survey included a wide range of topics such as teachers general attitudes toward schools, their perceptions of how others use and react to statewide mandated standardized testing, the ways in which teachers prepare their students to take

the test, and how much time they spend preparing for the test. The results show that most teachers have negative beliefs about the merits and validity of the statewide mandated standardized test. Especially, teachers of non-white students view the test more negatively and considered it causing more negative consequences for their students.

Later, Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001) iterated this inquiry, carrying out a survey about Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in Texas. The subjects were two hundred teachers in Texas. The survey consisted of 113 items related to the topics such as general attitudes of the respondent, perceived attitudes of others, test preparation and administration practices, uses of scores, effects of the TAAS on students, and overall impressions about TAAS testing. The findings revealed that teachers generally disagreed with many of underlying intentions of the TAAS and challenged the basic validity of the test, especially for minority students and ESL students. All of the subjects indicated that the preparation for TAAS begins more than a month before testing, but teachers almost always plan their curriculum for the year to emphasize those areas that will be tested on TAAS. Teachers also stated that many students experienced headaches and stomachaches while taking the TAAS test. In response to the questions about overall impressions on TAAS, teachers agreed that higher scores are the direct result of teaching to the test and they also thought the TAAS was incapable of tapping the higher level learning that is taking place in schools.

Smith, Edelsky, Draper, Rottenber, and Cherland (1989) investigated the effects of external testing on teachers. The study focused on two elementary schools in a district. Data were collected by observation of classrooms, meetings, and school life and

interviews with teachers, pupils, administrators, and others. The results showed that the publication of test scores produces feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt and anger among teachers. Teachers intended to teach the tests though they were not confident about the validity of the tests. In addition, these tests also reduced the time available for instruction.

Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom-Based Reading Assessments

As mentioned before, research related to classroom-based reading assessment has flourished in recent years. Some have contributed to theoretical frameworks in this subject. Some have focused on studying the application of certain assessment methods in classrooms. However, only a few studies have been done in understanding classroom teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based assessments.

Allen and Flipppo (2002) examined the attitudes, concerns and understanding of pre-service teachers to the use of alternative assessments in literacy education courses. A total of 67 undergraduate students at a large southwestern University volunteered for participation in the study. A questionnaire with 20 items was used to collect data. Three subscales were identified including self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and instructor modeling. The questionnaires were then administered to two sections of a literacy assessment course as pre-and post-course assessments. The results showed that pre-service teachers preferred to use self-evaluation and peer evaluation in classrooms. They did not favor the idea of instructor modeling. Qualitative analysis of respondent comments supported the statistical findings.

Johnson, Guice, Baker, Malone, and Michelson (1995) explored how the language art teachers conduct classroom-based assessments and what their conceptions of literacy development, of their own professional effectiveness in teaching children to read and write. Twenty-five elementary teachers in mainstream classrooms participated this study. Data were collected by interviewing teachers, observing classrooms, and collecting curricula documents. The collected information included a range of topics such as teachers' own reading practices and knowledge of children's literature, assessment practices used in classrooms, instructional goals with respect to literature, students' literacy development and difficulties, what contributed to teachers' feelings of success and confidence, or of failure and insecurity. The results showed that teachers differed in their assessment strategies and in the language they use to describe students' literacy development and they also had different understanding of assessment. Some considered classroom-based assessment as unidirectional and did not share assessment results with students. Some viewed classroom-based assessment as a part of the ongoing instructional relationship. Teachers in this study also mentioned that the pressure from accountability assessment forced them to change the ways of their teaching and assessing in the classroom.

Even fewer studies focused on understanding ESL teachers' perceptions of and use of classroom-based reading assessments. This present study focuses on understanding what goes on in ESL classrooms regarding reading assessment and how ESL teachers make sense of their methods to keep track of students' development.

Summary

The present study is based on two existing bodies of research: classroom-based assessments for ESL students and teachers' perceptions and beliefs. For many years, these classroom-based assessments have been ignored and considered as informal assessments. Few researchers paid attention to them. However, since the 1980s, this situation has changed dramatically. Some researchers raise their interest in classroom-based assessments during the search for other ways to measure students' learning in addition to standardized testing. These researchers have extended and formalized the assessment methods teachers originally used in classrooms, generating multiple systematized classroom-based assessment methods, techniques, and strategies, which often are called alternative assessments. Some empirical studies were done in exploring the application of classroom-based reading assessments. Most of these studies focused on investigating the use of a particular classroom-based reading assessment method in the classrooms such as portfolio assessment, cloze test, and miscue analysis. The findings of these studies showed that classroom-based reading assessments usually had positive impact on teaching and learning.

Research regarding to teachers' perceptions and beliefs has experienced two periods. The first period was around the end of 1970s to 1990s. In this period, studies of teachers' perceptions usually concentrated on examining the relationship between teachers' belief and practices. The findings of most of these studies indicated that teachers' practices were usually consistent with their beliefs and thoughts and were related to students' performance.

The second period is from 1990s to the present. In this period, research regarding to teachers' perceptions and beliefs have shifted their focus to articulating teachers' voices in discussion of teaching, learning, and educational policies. These studies have involved teachers in discussions of all kinds of educational topics. Among them, some focused on investigating teachers' perceptions of statewide mandated standardized testing and its influences on classroom instruction and assessment. The findings of these studies showed that teachers usually had negative perceptions about statewide mandated standardized testing. Also teachers' regular teaching and assessment in the classrooms were often distorted by these tests.

Few studies, however, have been conducted in understanding classroom teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based assessments and even fewer was concentrated on ESL teachers' perceptions and the use of this kind of assessment. This present study focuses on understanding what goes on in ESL classrooms regarding reading assessment and how ESL teachers make sense of their methods to keep track of students' development.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore ESL teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based reading assessments. The research questions underpinning this study are:

1. What types of classroom-based reading assessments are used in ESL classrooms and how are they used?
2. What are ESL teachers' perceptions regarding the function and effectiveness of classroom-based reading assessments?
3. What and how do internal factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?
4. What and how do external factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology used in the present study, which includes six sections: research design, sampling and selection criteria, data collection methods, data analysis methods, reliability and validity, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), research design is “a flexible set of guidelines” (p.14) about how to proceed the inquiry, which involves the theoretical assumptions, the strategies to collect and analyze data, and the control of variance. For this study, I chose a qualitative research methodology, specifically a basic qualitative study design.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because the methodology best allows me to collect data to answer the research questions I am posing. Qualitative research or naturalistic research methodology rests on the assumption that there are multiple, subjective, and changing realities, which “exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the person who holds them” (Guba, 1990, p. 27). These multiple realities are related to each other and work together as a whole. Knowledge exists in the perspectives and experiences of people, and understanding the meaning inside those experiences is the way to obtain knowledge (Merriam, 1991).

Based on the above ontological and epistemological assumptions, qualitative inquiry pursues the interpretation of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). “How people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, how they structure their social worlds” (Merriam, 1988, p.19) are the main concern of qualitative researchers. The research questions focus on process rather than outcomes, otherness rather than commonness, and individual rather than generalization. Understanding, meaning, and action comprise the whole contents of qualitative research. Inductive strategy is primarily employed to build abstractions, concepts, and theories rather than to tests existing theory (Merriam, 1998). Data are usually collected through interview, observation and documents. Unlike quantitative researchers who have been struggling to keep objectivity and research distance, qualitative researchers themselves are the primary instrument of data collection

and data analysis in research. They directly interact with the subjects of research and look for meaning in context. The results of qualitative research are viewed as the display of how people think and interpret the world in a given time and situation, providing detailed information about how contextual factors work together and comparative information about descriptions constrained by other values and interests (Merriam, 1988).

Guided by the ontological and epistemological underpinnings described above, this study focuses on understanding the ways ESL teachers make sense of their assessment work in the classrooms as well as the ways ESL teachers use assessments in the classrooms. These kinds of information are hard to collect and represent by quantitative method. Qualitative methods such as interview, participant observation, and document analysis are well known to deal with such information. Therefore, I have chosen qualitative methodology for my research project.

Basic Qualitative Study

Qualitative research is a very broad term, which covers numerous different strategies of inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Merriam (1998) identifies five types of qualitative research used commonly in education; they are basic or generic qualitative study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. Basic qualitative study is the most widely used type in educational research. This type of study draws on theoretical support from sociology and psychology and seeks to understand the perspectives of a particular group or a process. Data are collected through interview,

observation, document, or informal conversation. Findings consist of description and analysis based on the theoretical framework. The results usually are presented as patterns “in the form of categories, factors, variables or themes” (Merriam, 1998, p.11). In this study, my goal is to understand the perspectives of ESL teachers and the process by which they use classroom-based reading assessments in their classrooms. Therefore, I have chosen a basic qualitative study design to conduct my research.

Sampling and Selection Criteria

In this study, I have chosen ESL teachers from several middle and elementary schools in different school districts. They are chosen through purposeful sampling, rather than the random sampling.

The key selection criterions for the participants include:

1. Certified in-service ESL teachers
2. At least one year teaching experience.

Choosing certified ESL teachers as participants for this research is based on the assumption that they will have reasonable knowledge base about methodology and theoretical knowledge of teaching English as a Second Language. First year teachers are excluded due to the possibility that they will be in more of a “survival” period. As such, first year teachers tend to be more focused on learning and knowing the working environment and process. Also, they tend to have limited experience with classroom-based assessments to draw on.

The key selection criterions for the schools:

1. Number of ESL students in the school (over 50 students)
2. Qualified teachers (Defined in the above)

Participants Description

The subjects of this study are seven elementary school ESL teachers and six middle school ESL teachers. They are from nine schools in four school districts. I will now briefly present an overview of the districts, the schools, and the teachers involved in this study. To maintain confidentiality, while referring to a particular teacher, school, or district in this dissertation, I use a pseudonym.

This study includes three schools in District 1: School A, School B, and School C. School A is an elementary school encompassing grades Pre-K-5. School B is a middle school encompassing grades 6-8. School C is a middle school encompassing grades 6-8. Table 1 shows the ethnicity of District 1 and the three schools.

TABLE 1. Ethnicity of Students and Teachers in Schools in District 1

		African American (%)	Hispanic American (%)	White (%)	Asian/Pacific American (%)	Native American (%)	% LEP students / %ESL teachers
School A	Student	17.6	77.7	1.4	3.2	0.1	60.6
	Teacher	25.9	30.5	32.7	10.9	0.0	59.9
	Total school student population (Pre-K-5) = 856; Total school teacher population = 46						
School B	Student	11.4	54.9	29.5	4.1	0.1	19.7
	Teacher	16.7	5.6	77.7	0.0	0.0	6.2
	Total school student population (6-8) = 603; Total school teacher population = 36						
School C	Student	10.4	88.2	1.3	0.1	0.0	20.4
	Teacher	34.6	12.8	50.0	2.6	0.0	9.0
	Total school student population (6-8) = 1,120; Total school teacher population = 78						
Total student population = 211,499		30.5	57.1	9.3	3.0	0.1	28.6
Total teacher population = 12,385		40	19.4	37.0	3.1	0.1	19.5

Note: Statistics are from Texas Education Agency (TEA) 2002-2003 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report.

This study includes one school, School D, in District 2. School D is an elementary school encompassing grades K-4. Table 2 shows the ethnicity of District 2 and School D.

TABLE 2. Ethnicity of Students and Teachers in Schools in District 2

		African American (%)	Hispanic American (%)	White (%)	Asian/Pacific American (%)	Native American (%)	% LEP students / %ESL teachers
School D	Student	89.9	8.4	1.6	0.1	0.0	3.8
	Teacher	74.7	0.0	25.3	0.0	0.0	4.6
	Total school student population (K-4) = 692; Total school teacher population = 44						
Total student population = 55,263		33.4	56.3	7.6	2.6	0.1	23.5
Total teacher population = 3,722		31.3	11.6	55.5	1.5	0.1	14.7

Note: Statistics are from Texas Education Agency (TEA) 2002-2003 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report.

This study includes two schools in District 3: School E and School F. School E is a middle school encompassing grades 6-8. School F is a middle school encompassing grades 6-8. Table 3 shows the ethnicity of District 3 and the two schools.

TABLE 3. Ethnicity of Students and Teachers in Schools in District 3

		African American (%)	Hispanic American (%)	White (%)	Asian/Pacific American (%)	Native American (%)	% LEP students / %ESL teachers
School E	Student	9.9	63.9	19.7	6.5	0.0	22.6
	Teacher	4.4	5.9	86.8	1.5	1.5	0.9
	Total school student population (6-8) = 893; Total school teacher population = 68						
School F	Student	12.1	26.9	47.3	13.3	0.4	12.7
	Teacher	4.7	7.8	86.0	0.0	1.6	4.3
	Total school student population (6-8) = 965; Total school teacher population = 64						
Total student population = 32,945		6.5	51.6	35.2	6.6	0.1	29.9
Total teacher population = 2,270		3.7	15.9	79.1	1.1	0.3	20.6

Note: Statistics are from Texas Education Agency (TEA) 2002-2003 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report.

This study includes three schools in District 4: School G, School H, and School I. School G is an elementary school encompassing grades K-5. School H is a middle school encompassing grades 6-8. School I is a middle school encompassing grades 6-8. Table 4 shows the ethnicity of District 4 and the three schools.

TABLE 4. Ethnicity of Students and Teachers in Schools in District 4

		African American (%)	Hispanic American (%)	White (%)	Asian/Pacific American (%)	Native American (%)	% LEP students / %ESL teachers
School G	Student	19.9	52.2	27.2	0.6	0.0	26.0
	Teacher	2.8	20.4	76.8	0.0	0.0	59.9
	Total school student population (Pre-k-5) = 492; Total school teacher population = 36						
School H	Student	31.8	44.9	22.6	0.7	0.0	10.2
	Teacher	12.4	1.4	86.2	0.0	0.0	3.1
	Total school student population (6-8) = 974; Total school teacher population = 70						
School I	Student	16.2	45.8	37.4	0.3	0.2	6.5
	Teacher	4.5	7.5	88.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
	Total school student population (6-8) = 899; Total school teacher population = 67						
Total student population = 13,927		24.8	36.7	37.9	0.6	0.1	10.8
Total teacher population = 967		6.1	8.3	85.5	0.1	0.0	6.1

Note: Statistics are from Texas Education Agency (TEA) 2002-2003 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report.

In total, thirteen ESL teachers in the four districts participated in this study. Among them, AB, KS, CI, and MC are from School A, RA is from School B, and AT is from School C in District 1. RL and CM are from school D in District 2. BG is from School E and AN is from School F in District 3. JI is from School G, PF is from school H, and MH is from School I in District 4. The characteristics of these participating ESL teachers are shown in the Table 5.

TABLE 5. Teacher Characteristics

District	School	Teacher	Length of teaching (years)	Gender	Ethnicity	Level of teaching
1	A	AB	Over 30	F	White	Fifth Grade
		KS	4	F	African American	Second Grade
		CI	12	F	Asian/Pacific American	First Grade
		MC	14	F	Asian/pacific American	Fourth Grade
	B	RA	2	F	White	Beginning level ESL
	C	AT	12	F	White	Intermediate level ESL
2	D	RL	6	F	White	Fourth Grade
		CM	3	F	White	Fourth Grade
3	E	BG	7	M	White	Intermediate level and advance level ESL
	F	AN	Over 30	F	African American	All level ESL
4	G	JI	3	F	Hispanic American	Fourth Grade
	H	PF	2	F	White	Beginning level ESL
	I	MH	7	F	White	All level ESL

Data Collection

In this study, I rely on methods such as classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis to gather data. The data sources are from different schools, classrooms, and ESL teachers. Through the use of multiple collection methods and data sources, I hope to triangulate the data in such a way as to enhance the validity of this study.

Observation

Observation is an important data collection method for qualitative inquiry. Through persistent observations, researchers can capture the ways people interact with their surroundings based on their understanding of the world. The aim of observation is to

grasp a person's motions, speaking, and unconscious behaviors that they express in a natural setting (Lincoln and Guba, 1981; Merriam, 1998).

In this study, there are multiple observations at different time in the same classroom with the same teacher. During each observation, I was an observer and did not take part in any classroom activity. Before observing a teacher's class, I sent a letter to the school principal and the teacher seeking their permission. During each observation session, I took detailed field notes, which includes two parts: description of classroom activities and my instant reflections. For most participating teachers, I have conducted at least two observations per teacher. The second observation was usually scheduled after the interview as a way of exploring and confirming earlier observations and statements in the interview. For two teachers, I conducted one observation for each. For one teacher interviewed, I did not get a chance to observe her class. After all observations with the same teacher were done, I sent the observation notes to the teacher to check if what I interpreted about his or her classroom situation provided a relative accurate reflection.

Interview

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, an interview is "a conversation with a purpose" (p. 268). Through interviews, qualitative researchers strive to understand the ways people reconstruct their experience and make sense of the world. In this study, semi-structured interviews are the main method that I used to probe ESL teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based reading assessments. These interviews were guided by pre-designed questions that corresponded directly to the research questions (See the appendix A and B

for interview questions and the relation table). The questions arising from each conversation were also added into the interview immediately.

One week before each interview, I sent the interview questions to the teacher so that he or she could have a general idea about the interview content. All interviews took place in the teachers' classroom, and they were face to face. Most interviews lasted 40-50 minutes and a few took a little longer. The whole process was tape-recorded. After each interview, I immediately transcribed the whole conversation into a word processor and started the first phase of analysis by writing an interview summary (see the appendix C), which included teacher' background information, key content of interview, and my personal reflection on the interview. Then I sent the interview summary and transcript to the teacher to see if I interpreted him or her in the right way. The member checking is one of the ways that I used to enhance the validity of my study. In addition, the interview also serves for confirming the information collected through the previous observation.

Documents

The documents I collected for this study include materials related to some schools or districts' files about assessment in classrooms and materials that teachers use in their classroom for the purpose of reading assessment such as work sheets, books, or paper and pencil tests. I obtained those materials by searching online resources, asking teachers' permission to copy their materials, or asking districts' personnel. Guided by my research questions and research purpose, I select some of those gathered documents to transcribe into a word processor and coded them later.

The Audit Trail

I categorize the collected data according to teachers. Each teacher was assigned an electronic folder named by his or her initial. Inside each folder, there were three sub-categories: interview data (ID), observation data (OD), and document data (DD). Inside the interview data folder, there were two files: interview transcript (IT) and interview summary (IS). Inside the observation data folder, there were: observation field note 1 (O1), observation field note 2 (O2), etc (See Appendix D).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process by which a researcher draws out “meaning” from the collected data. Drawing out meaning involves summarizing, interpreting, comparing, and categorizing what the study participants have said and how they have acted in a particular context (Merriam, 1998). The main part of data analysis is usually done after the data collection, but the initial analysis can begin during the data collection. In this study, I started to analyze the data immediately after the first interview was done. The material to be analyzed consisted of interview transcripts, observation notes, collected document, and interview summary notes. A qualitative data analysis program named Atlas/ti (Scientific Software Development, 1997) was used to facilitate the data analysis process. There are multiple ways to conduct a qualitative data analysis. The one I used in my project is “constant comparative analysis,” which is one of the most commonly used analysis method in qualitative educational research (Merriam, 1998).

Constant Comparative Analysis Method

The constant comparative analysis method was originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and aimed at building grounded theory. The analysis process involves “comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” (Merriam, 1998, p. 18), grouping data to different categories, searching for patterns, and finally formulating a theory. I choose constant comparative analysis to deal with my data because this method aids “in identifying patterns, coding data, and categorizing findings” (Anfara, Brown, and Mangione, 2002), and it was recommended to me as a tool I could use to make sense of the data in order to understand the perspectives of ESL teachers and the process of classroom-based reading assessments. Generally, there are three main steps in constant comparative analysis: Opening coding, forming categories, and formulating patterns.

Opening Coding

Opening coding is the process of using terms to label meaningful segment of text. The meaningful segment of text is a unit of data that “have something in common” (Merriam, 1998). In this step, “researchers look for what they can define and discover in the data” (Charmaz, 1988, p. 113).

Before starting the coding process, I first checked on each transcript or summary note and made sure that they were all clearly labeled so that I could easily track any data I wanted. Next, I put line numbers in every transcript or summary note. And then, I read through all my data twice and had an idea about what bits of information were most

germane to my research questions. After that, I imported my data into the Atlas/ti program. These data were organized into different units named after each teacher's initial. Each unit includes the entire document about one specific teacher such as interview transcripts, observation transcripts, collected documents, and summary notes.

Then I started coding the data in these units one by one. I read each sentence in every document very carefully and gave labels to the meaningful segments of data. The labels were named based on my research questions and problem statement, the theoretical framework in ESL education, and the participants' reflection or my own reflection on the study. After all the units' documents were coded, I re-read the document to check if the codes made sense or if there was any important idea overlooked. The code-recode strategy also helped enhance the reliability of my data.

Forming Categories

Forming categories is the second step of constant comparative analysis, in which the initial codes related to same topics are grouped and further formed into a set of categories. In this stage, researchers are looking to “develop categories rather than simply to label topics” (Charmaz, 1988, p. 116). The coded data are “compared within categories and between categories” (Anfara, Brown, and Mangione, 2002). Some codes are collapsed or dropped; some codes assume “the status of overarching ideas or propositions that will occupy a prominent or central place in the analysis” (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p. 193). In the process of category forming, the researcher will “discriminate more clearly between the criteria for allocating data to one category or

another” (Dey, 1993, p. 45). For the category construction, Merriam (1998) gives some guidelines:

1. Categories should reflect the purpose of the research
2. Categories should be exhaustive
3. Categories should be mutually exclusive
4. Categories should be sensitizing
5. Categories should be conceptually congruent (p. 183, 184).

After completing the initial data coding process, I listed all the codes together, and read through the codes one by one; I compared the codes with each other, then put the codes related to the same themes together, forming different big categories. After grouping codes, I compared the codes between different categories to make sure that they were mutually exclusive and put in the right category. Then, I went back to each category and assigned a name or category label to it. After labeling the first-level categories, I compared and grouped the codes inside one category, further forming the sub-categories. When the analysis was complete, four-levels of categories emerged in my study. At the end of this stage, I reread the codes again to check if those categories are qualified with the above criteria Merriam (1998) recommends.

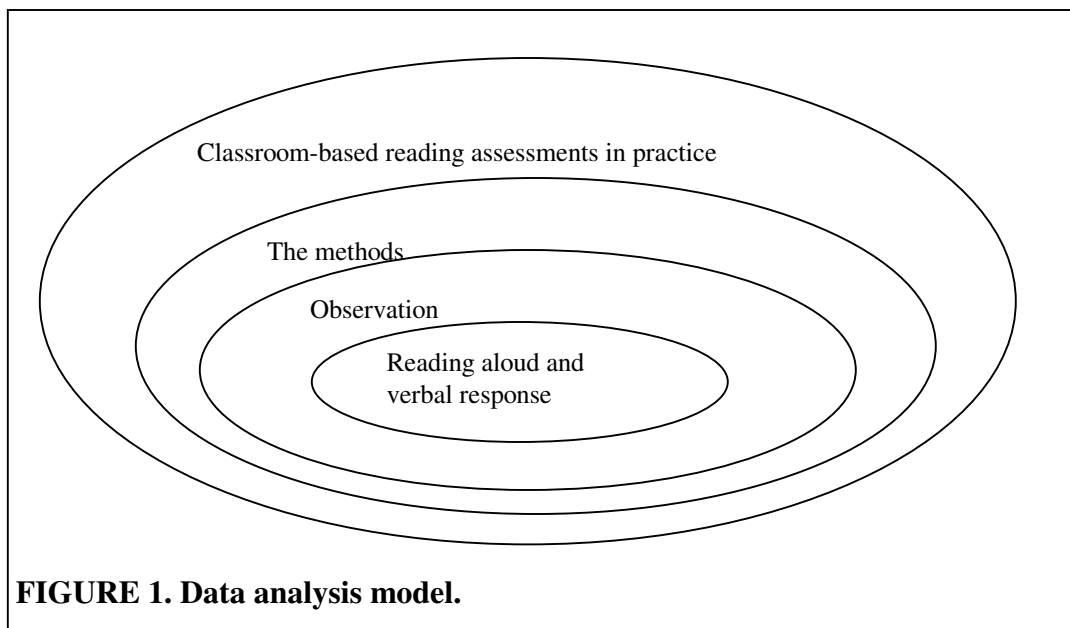
Formulating Patterns

The last stage of data analysis involves illuminating relationships between categories and further formulating patterns or a model, which is the phrase of “making inferences, developing models, or generating theory” (Merriam, 1998, p.187). In this stage, the

whole study will emerge as an integrated story.

After forming different categories, I thought over how these categories fit together and what their relationships are. I drew a diagram to help me figure out their relationships and finally identified a pattern. I also rechecked these patterns later to see if they made sense or fitted to the data.

The following is a sample of data analysis:



Validity and Reliability

Ensuring the trustworthiness of research is one of the most important things that researchers need to pay attention to while designing a study. Without establishing trustworthiness, there is little reason for readers to accept the findings or results of the research. Conventionally, researchers use “internal validity,” “external validity,”

“reliability,” and “objectivity” as the criteria to justify the trustworthiness of a study. In the following sections, I will discuss the validity, reliability, and objectivity of this study one by one.

Internal Validity

Internal validity refers to “how research findings match reality” (Merriam, 1998, p.201). In this study, as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, I went to the schools I meant to study, stayed in the ESL classrooms, got to know the participants as well as observing their activity in the classrooms; I conducted formal face-to-face interviews to record their ideas and perspectives. The prolonged engagement in the field and persistent observations also allow me to closely approximate the “realities,” and thus have a better understanding of participants’ viewpoints.

In addition, I use triangulation to secure the emerging findings. Denzin (1978) suggests that there are four modes of triangulation: multiple and different sources, multiple and different methods, multiple and different investigators, and multiple and different theories. The first two modes are used in the study. The participants of this study are teachers who are at different ages, from different schools, and have different teaching experiences. Data are collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The information collected by those different methods can confirm and clarify each other.

Member checking is another technique that is used in this study for the purpose of enhancing internal validity. After interviewing a particular teacher and observing his

or her classroom activities, I provided both interview summary and observation notes to the teachers for their opinions about whether or not my interpretation about what they said and what I saw were the real reflection of their views and classroom behaviors in the context.

External Validity

External validity conventionally refers to the generalizability of a study, which concerns “the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, however, generalizability is a troublesome concept. Because the qualitative methodology assumes that the world consists of multiple, subjective, and changing realities, and that there is no universal truth. The findings of a study merely represent the truth in a particular time, setting, and context. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative research’s generalizability is dependent on the readers’ finding insights from the study that may inform their own understanding of events. In another words, readers, not researchers, take the responsibility to make the decisions of generalization of research results. What researchers should do is to provide adequate information to help the reader make the judgment. Merriam (1995) suggests that qualitative researchers should provide rich, thick description of the study, describe how typical the individuals or programs being researched are, and use multi-site designs in the studies to make sure that their readers are well informed.

In this study, I provide very rich and thick description about the findings and

conclusions, the process, the context of this study. In addition, because my sample was selected from different schools and districts, I hoped to provide a relatively wide range of information so that readers can have more opportunities to match their own situation.

Reliability

Reliability in quantitative research is demonstrated by replication, which means replicating the study to see whether or not the same findings and results come out. This idea, however, is based on the positivist assumption that there is a single reality out there, so different studies related to same topic should get the same conclusions (Merriam, 1998). For qualitative researchers, however, the replicating or repeating of a study makes no sense because of the multiple and changing realities. The issues of “Reliability” in qualitative research are approximated through concepts such as the “dependability” or “consistency” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Both of these concepts concern “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 1998). Dependability of qualitative research can be ensured through the explanation of the investigator’s position, the triangulation of data collection and analysis, and audit trail (Dey, 1993; LeCompte and Presissle, 1993; Merriam, 1998).

In this study, I stated my theoretical perspective explicitly and then discussed my personal perspective and bias; I used triangulation (as discussed above) and provided audit trail of my study; Code-recode strategy was used during data analysis. All of these steps help to increase the reliability of this study.

Researcher's Role and Bias

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, which is beneficial because human being can “respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information” (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). However, it can also be harmful because the personal bias and characteristics can limit, confine, and even distort a study. To reduce this negative influence, researchers must consistently be aware of their own personal biases and the possible impacts that the subjectivity gives on research.

In this study, I am the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. And I am aware of that I, an international student, may have different assumptions about the educational principles and schooling from the subjects of this study and misunderstanding may occur; however, the member check helps me reduce the bias and subjectivity.

Another consideration for this study is the researcher's role in the interviews and observations. I am a graduate student, who is a foreigner, Asian, non-native English speaker, and have not had teaching or even studying experience in American K-12 schools. I do not have many commonalities with my participants for whom I am pretty much an outsider. The trust between my participants and me is hard to be set up in such a situation. Through some efforts, I do get along with my participants, but I think I may never overcome my participants' guardedness from me because of my status as a foreigner. These factors likely limited how much my participants shared of their experiences with me.

CHAPTER IV

CLASSROOM-BASED READING ASSESSMENTS IN PRACTICE

The purpose of this study was to explore ESL teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based reading assessments. The research questions underpinning this study are:

1. What types of classroom-based reading assessments are used in ESL classrooms and how are they used?
2. What are ESL teachers' perceptions regarding the function and effectiveness of classroom-based reading assessments?
3. What and how do internal factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?
4. What and how do external factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?

Three chapters are devoted to the discussion of the findings of this study: classroom-based reading assessments in practice, ESL teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards classroom-based reading assessments, and the factors that influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments. The first chapter, Chapter IV, concentrates on the major assessment methods and skills that are commonly used by ESL teachers to assess students' reading competencies and progress, exploring the ways these assessments are conducted and the functions they serve. The next chapter, Chapter V, focuses on examining ESL teachers' general conceptions, thoughts, and practical knowledge regarding to classroom-based reading assessments. Then, Chapter VI,

presents the major factors that influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments, discussing the ways and the extent to which they affect assessment processes.

The Methods of Classroom-Based Reading Assessments

According to the data collected for this study, ESL teachers generally use three kinds of classroom-based reading assessments to measure the reading skills and comprehension of their students. The first is testing, which includes short quizzes generated or assigned by teachers, formal reading tests encouraged by schools or districts, and computer-based reading tests. The second type is observation, which involves verbal responses, reading aloud, general observations, and conferencing. The last type is using written notes or essays to assess reading skills. In addition to these methods mentioned above, one ESL teacher, MH, has created a series of book reports for teaching and assessing reading in her classroom. In the following, one section will be devoted to a discussion of MH and her book reports.

Testing

As a traditional assessment method, testing still plays an important role in assessing students' reading competence and progress in today's classrooms. The tests ESL teachers used in this study in their classrooms for assessing reading can be divided into three different types: The first includes vocabulary quizzes, short grammar tests, and informal reading comprehension tests, which are usually assigned and generated by the ESL teachers themselves. The second is formal reading tests that are usually generated

by experts or commercial companies and are assigned or encouraged by school administrators or district authorities. The last is computer-based reading tests.

Short Quizzes or Informal Tests Generated or Assigned by Teachers

Reading tests assigned or generated by ESL teachers usually took a short time to administer, typically, ten to twenty minutes, and sometimes just five minutes. These were often integrated or combined with instruction; no interruptions to daily teaching. These tests did not have a strict time schedule to follow. ESL teachers themselves made decisions about when to give these tests and about how many tests should be given depending on changing instructional needs. These tests also took various forms. Some were worksheets that teachers generated based on different reading materials. Some were questions in textbook for students to answer; some were just five basic summary questions (who, what, when, where, why, how) for a piece of reading for students to answer. The grading system on this kind of tests was flexible, too. Teachers changed the grading rubrics and criteria, depending on the specific testing situations. Sometimes teachers had to make judgment calls about what needed to be graded, what they needed to leave un-graded, and when a grade was not necessary. Sometimes teachers even used different criteria to grade different students' work on the same test; for example, grading more strictly the students who have already grasped certain knowledge and skills in English and being easier on the beginners in learning English.

Formal Tests Assigned by Districts or Schools

Compared with the tests assigned by ESL teachers, the reading tests assigned by schools or districts took on a more formal style. These tests usually require a long testing period, at least two to three hours or even more and were held to a regular schedule prescribing the specific testing time and the number of tests. The grading criteria of these tests were predetermined and consistent for all tests takers. In addition, most of these tests were not directly combined with instruction and required an interruption of the teachers' daily teaching activities.

This study revealed that there are seven kinds of reading tests used by ESL teachers in this study in this category: Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), Stanford 10 Test, Nelson Reading Test, Snap Shot Reading Test, Reading Mastery Test, Reading Accuracy Test, and Quick Phonics Screening (Q.P.S) Fluency Probe. Different schools and districts had adopted different tests. The first five tests are paper and pencil reading tests. The last two are oral reading tests.

TPRI, Stanford 10 Test, and Nelson Reading Test are taken at the beginning, middle, and end of a year, and are mainly used for placing ESL students in a particular level of a literature series. The Snap Shot Reading Test is Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) oriented test and is taken three times a year prior to TAKS, examining students' preparedness for the TAKS exam. The Reading Mastery Test is a daily-based test. Every day teachers are required to teach one or two lessons from the reading mastery textbook and then test students on these lessons at the end of the day.

Concerning the Stanford 10 Test, one middle school ESL teacher, AR, criticized this test as being too hard for ESL students and failing to provide an accurate reflection of her students' reading competencies. She stated,

I think with the Stanford 10 test, I get hardly none...when I had a child here for two months taking the same test as the children who were born here and lived here all their lives and have a lot of support at home...That kind of test doesn't give me anything because I can look at the test and know at least my students are not going to do well on it because the vocabulary alone. They don't, their vocabulary is not that big in English...It is not an accurate great way for what my students are actually capable of...

No other ESL teachers gave such an explicit negative comment about this test though.

The Reading Accuracy Test is taken after each five lessons of reading mastery. In the process, each student takes a turn in the front of class reading a paragraph to the teacher. They have to finish reading in two minutes and cannot make more than five mistakes. The teacher will record each error a student made on a checklist. For Q.P.S Fluency Probe, students are asked to read to the teacher individually for four minutes and then summarize whatever they read in the four minutes. The teacher must grade both the student's summary and pronunciation. The two oral reading tests and reading mastery test are school-based (assigned by schools' authorities) and mainly used in elementary schools, which are also the tests with which ESL teachers have the most problems.

CM, an elementary school ESL teacher with three years teaching experience, felt that the Q.P.S Fluency Probe did not assess ESL students' true comprehension of reading and she gave the following comment,

It leaves out really true comprehension because they [students] read for four minutes and then they have to summarize whatever they read in four minutes. It doesn't help in assessing their [students'] reading because what I have found is the kids, who read slow at the beginning of the year, are still reading slow. I focus on not their speed but their understanding.

RL, an ESL teacher who was teaching at the same school as CM and had six years teaching experience, complained that the Q.P.S Fluency Probe took too much time and could not provide valid information that might benefit her reading instruction. She stated,

The Q.P.S Fluency Probe is the biggest waste of my time because I have to do each child one at a time and sit here with a stop watch and make sure everybody is busy working quietly because I have to listen to every word that child said whether they pronounce correctly or if they sound correct...I turn everything back into the office and I never hear anything, so I don't know what they are doing with the information, but they are not giving it back to me so if they don't give back to me, it's useless to me So I find no value in it because it means nothing to me. I am just doing all this work and I don't know what happens.

KS, an elementary school ESL teacher, had four years teaching experience.

The school where she was teaching asked ESL teachers to use the reading accuracy tests and the reading mastery tests to assess reading. She had a problem with both of them. According to her, the reading accuracy tests might distract the rest of the students who were not taking the test at the moment. The reading mastery test took too much time to administer and wasted too much time. She stated,

We have to teach two lessons a day and we have to grade all this stuff. You haven't even gotten to language arts yet. Some day, we finish reading mastery; we may start at 8:30 in the morning. If the student makes too many mistakes we have to start over. And then it can take even longer...on average, it takes about two hours, two and half hours on reading, just on the one program alone. That's each day...that is too much time...

Computer-Based Reading Tests

According to the data, there are mainly two kinds of computer-based reading tests used by participating ESL teachers in classrooms: Accelerated Reader (AR) and Plato. AR is a computer program in which there are tests connected to each library book. Students read a library book first and then take a test about the book on the program. Plato pinpoints students reading weaknesses and trains on those particular points. First, Plato gives students the initial reading test to identify their weak areas in reading and then provides them some specific lessons and exercises targeting their particular problems. After finishing the lessons and exercises, students take a test again. If they pass it, the program moves them up to a higher reading level: if not, the computer cancels things on

which they have already done well and picks up the remaining problems on which they continue to work. Students have to do exercises over and over again until they grasp all the reading skills they need. Most ESL teachers investigated in this study used AR. Only one teacher used Plato as well as AR in his classroom.

Although most ESL teachers introduced AR into their classrooms, they used it very differently and had different views about its validity and effectiveness. Some teachers considered AR as a major part of their assessing activities and paid great attention to it. For instance, BG, an intermediate level middle school ESL teacher with seven years teaching experience, favored using AR. BG stated,

I have kids on that [AR] all year long. I start on the first part of school with that and I encourage them to read what they are interested in as far as it goes. I give them time in the classroom, usually at least twice a week I give them thirty to forty-five minutes when they can read in class soundly and they can also go to the computer and take test.

He continued,

Also I keep track of that. This is the kind of things I look at: How many quizzes they are taking, how many they passed, and what their average grade level is, in other words, what level book they are interested in when they read, and then what their comprehension level is.

MH, another middle school ESL teacher with seven years teaching experience, was a supporter of AR too, and she believed that AR was an effective and reliable reading assessment tool. “For me, in my classroom, I believe that (AR) is very effective

because I reduce other sentences to get students to read, and it is very effective,” she said. However, MH did have one criticism about this program. That was the program just asked basic level questions and it did not offer an evaluation or a synthesis. JI, an elementary school ESL teacher with two years teaching experience, had the same complaint about AR. “It [the questions on AR] was at a low comprehension level (low on Blooms’ Taxonomy, for instance),” she said.

Compared to the above teachers, some teachers did not favor AR. For instance, RA, a beginning level middle school ESL teacher with two years teaching experience, did not feel confident about AR’s ability to assess ESL students’ reading. For her, AR was only a tool that could help students identify words. She stated,

For me though, you know, I don’t know how accurate Accelerated Reader is especially for these kids [ESL students]. I let them use their books when they take tests. It’s mostly to get them comfortable with recognizing that this word is the same as this word. It’s kind of looking on the computer, seeing the question, and being able to go back in the book to find an answer to that question.

Regarding the Plato program, BG was the only ESL teacher using this program and he had just started using it at the beginning of the semester. Based on his short experience with Plato, BG suggested that Plato was a good reading assessment tool that could help ESL students develop and solidify reading skills. “It is a good tool because the initial test tested them (students) on all subject, and the weakness they get repetition on it until they get proficient, and continue to test them,” he said.

One problem BG had seen regarding Plato was that it tended to overrate students' reading progress. He stated,

It's new, and I don't have a lot of data on it yet, but based on other things that I used for assessment, this thing is a little strong. I might be wrong, but that is my feeling when I run it.... Plato, it says they [students] are going up like four grade levels. That is not a realistic growth. It shows me some growth that is good but I don't believe that. All right, I don't believe that. There is something about that is over-inflated. I think that is a really good program but I think maybe the people who sell it have over-inflated.

Observations

Observation is another traditional classroom assessment method, and it involves verbal response, reading aloud, general observations, and conferencing. This study showed that ESL teachers constantly used the first three formats of observation in their daily teaching and assessing. Only one teacher, however, mentioned that she had used conferencing to assess her students' reading ability at the beginning of each year. Usually, these observations did not have a pre-designed format or a specific goal to assess a particular reading skill or strategy. For instance, PF, a middle school ESL teacher with two years teaching experience, stated, "I will ask them questions orally, well, give them reading questions to see if they understand, but as far as like, you know, following a guide if they [students] have done this, this, this. No, I don't have that."

In addition, the participating ESL teachers also did not keep any records about

the results of these observations. Most time, they got a good feel from these observations about what students understood and what students had trouble with; then they just kept these feelings in their minds, never producing any concrete evidence or systematic records for the students' files.

Reading Aloud and Verbal Response

In reading aloud, what the ESL teachers usually do is ask individual students to read some words or a paragraph aloud in front of the whole class and check to see if the student can correctly pronounce the words and read fluently. In verbal response, the teacher first presents one or several questions orally and then asks one student or the whole class to answer the questions orally. In this study, verbal response was seen in each ESL teachers' class during observations. From the ESL teachers' point of view, verbal response was an easy, fast and effective way to assess students' reading competence and progress. For instance, BG had such comment about verbal response as, "Oh, yes, always ask questions. Asking question is always a good way to assess how they (ESL students) are doing." AT, a middle school ESL teacher with twelve years teaching experience, also stated,

The one I probably used most is that having them read and ask questions. That is the one I probably used most. I like some of the others, but... So it's easy for me to assess what's happening if we all read together, just for me, I prefer that...

While presenting questions, the participating ESL teachers usually followed a

sequence of moving from general to specific questions. The following is one vignette of AT's class, from which you can see how the teacher kept asking one question after another to push students to give more detailed information about a particular reading.

T: What was the first story about?

ST:have a passion [someone said]...Dad [another said].. [Some speak Spanish; some speak English]

T: Passion or dad, what's the deal with those two?

S2: Passion just was artist?

T: Ok, for that artist, and then? What did he make?

S3: Una escultura [A sculpture]

T: Correct, melt sculptures, and what is the character doing? She is just watching and nothing else?

ST: Talla [Carving]

T: Ok, how is she helping?

(T=teacher, ST =students together, S# =particular student)

AT also mentioned that ESL students would especially benefit from a teacher's asking a series of questions. She explained,

ESL kids don't always understand what they read. Or they will read it and then they tell you, "Yes, I understood." Then when you say, "What did you understand," what they understood is completely different. They took one piece of information and came up with a whole different conclusion, so, yeah, it helps if asked a lot of questions.

She went on, “Plus the questioning part of it helps when they’re writing papers because they don’t write enough details in their papers. So the teacher has to ask a lot of questions that way too.”

General Observation and Conferencing

General observation refers to teachers assessing students’ reading by watching them working and performing in the classrooms. This study showed that to conduct general observation, sometimes ESL teachers divided students into several small groups and then took turns watching or working with each group on a certain reading assignment. Sometimes it could be one on one observation. General observation was also one of ESL teachers’ most favorite reading assessments because it put less pressure on students than other classroom-based reading assessments yet provided a great deal of information about students’ learning of reading. The assessing process of general observation was relaxed and non-threatening. RA gave further explanation about this point when she stated

The one that I prefer is really kind of one on one observation or the small group reading just because it is hard to assess someone when they don’t really want to read aloud to the whole class anyway, so they are nervous on top of not being able to read well, so I don’t really like to assess them in that way. This is why I try to do smaller groups or one on one if I can.

Conferencing refers to the practice of teachers scheduling a regular time to talk or discuss with one or several students about schoolwork. In this study, only one ESL teacher,

AB, mentioned that she had a conference with each ESL student at the beginning of each school year. During the conference, AB talked with the ESL student and gave him or her a very short comprehensive test including word study, vocabulary, and comprehension. With the information produced from conferencing, AB made decisions about where to place the student in regard to reading level. AB also mentioned that she preferred knowing her students' reading abilities by conferencing with them than by just checking their scores of placement tests. These ESL students have already taken placement test before the conferencing, but "I don't want to know that until I have personally interacted with each one of them," she said.

In addition, for many of the ESL teachers, checking on students' homework was also a good way to assess students' reading progress.

Assessing Reading by Writing

"All forms of students' writing can be used in assessment," said Heilman, Blair, and Rupley (1994). The written forms that ESL teachers in this study used for assessing reading were reading notes and general compositions. For each paragraph of a reading, teachers asked students to write a note about what they thought the paragraph was mainly about. By doing so, teachers could tell if students had a correct understanding about that particular part of the reading. Making reading notes could also help students concentrate on what they were reading, increasing their performances on reading comprehension. For instance, CM stated,

They concentrate more but only on small piece because a lot of kids,

especially ESL kids will look at three page passages, and they go, “I can’t do this, it is too long; I can’t.” So what they would do is to learn how to break it up into small pieces, so that [writing notes] makes it less painful for them. It also makes them concentrate, makes them slow down so they are actually thinking what they were reading when they were going along. And we saw them increase their performance as far as what they understand.

BG was the only teacher who used students’ general compositions to assess reading. About assessing reading by writing, BG had his own theory, “ESL students always are going to be good writers before they are going to be a good reader.” Therefore, reviewing the compositions of ESL students can be a very good way to explore ESL students’ reading ability before other assessment results have been made available. Using one of his students as an example, BG further explained,

This is one of my seventh graders, you see, there are not too many mistakes. There is an actual form to it, she uses a topic sentence when she introduces what she writes about. She uses transitional words when she transfers from one paragraph to another... When I can see the student doing this, I know she is going to do all right in her comprehension part of reading.

MH and Her Book Reports

MH was a middle school ESL teacher in a small city. She had been teaching ESL classes for seven years. In her school, MH was the only ESL teacher, teaching both beginning and intermediate level ESL classes. The book reports that she has been developing for

these years were the main tools that she used to assess ESL students' reading strategies and to facilitate teaching of reading as well. At present, she has generated three kinds of book reports, fiction book reports, non-fiction book reports, and biography book reports.

Fiction Book Reports

There are two versions of fiction book reports. One targets beginning level ESL students. The other targets intermediate level ESL students. In the basic fiction book report, the teacher used the following questions to assess students' reading:

1. Describe the story's setting.
2. Write a summary of the story.
3. Which is one emotion the main character felt, and what event caused the character to feel that way?
4. How is this story connected to your life?
5. What was your favorite part of this book? And why,
6. The author writes this story to describe something to me, to inform me about something, to persuade me to do or buy something, or to explain how to do something?

For each question, MH explained how it was set up and what purpose it served for. For example, she stated,

About this question, "Which is the one emotion that the main character felt?" students can practice emotional words and then they need to give me an event. If the event and the words were connected, that means that they

understand what a problem is and what a solution is...“How is this story connected to your life”, which asked students to connect the story to their living, so they always have to feel something. There is no option to say, ‘It isn’t.’ I help them; sometimes I have to help them connect the story to their life...About this question “The author wrote story to what?” this assesses the skill that is required in State of Texas. It is a very important skill because students have to know the intention of the author, the motivation of the author.

The fiction book report for intermediate level includes many questions similar to the basic one, like “the title, the author, describe when, where it takes place, the problem and solution, one emotion, two opinions, and the connections to your personal life.” It does, however, involve two more complex questions.

The first is “pick one main character: think of the shape, the color, animal, or weather condition that fits the personality. Give evidence to support the metaphor you give. ” According to MH, this question could not only help her explore students’ ability to understand metaphors in reading but also help her assess and develop students’ higher-order thinking ability related to reading. “I am trying to get the kids to think in a higher level, make abstract connections,” MH said. The second question is “if the story happened a long time ago, how it was different from the time today?” This question is designed to assess students’ ability to compare and contrast.

Non-Fiction Book Reports

The non-fiction book report has also two versions: basic and intermediate levels. The basic one includes the following questions:

1. What is the subject (theme) of this book?
2. Write three important facts you learned.
3. Which is your favorite part of this book, and why?
4. How is this subject connected to your life?
5. The author wrote this passage to (describe, inform, persuade, or explain)?

The intermediate level nonfiction book report expanded and specified the questions in the basic level version. For example, regarding the subject, students were asked not only to write down the title of the subject, but also to provide a general description of the book based on the table of contents. According to MH, the main purpose of this question is to encourage students to pay attention to tables of contents, knowing how to use it figure out the rest of the book. In addition, this book report asked students to write both the facts and the opinions in a book, from which the teacher could tell students' ability to distinguish the two concepts.

Another interesting question in the book report was "A book cannot tell everything there is to know about a subject. Write a question about the subject that the book did not answer." Regarding this question, MH mentioned that in fact, she could not be sure whether or not students have given a correct answer to this question since she did not read all the books that students read. However, this question encourages students to think and makes them conscious of asking question as they read.

At last, students were asked to record the page numbers of Glossary, and then choose two words from the glossary and write what the words reminded them of. This question focused on making students use the glossary, knowing where to find the words.

Biography Book Report

The first issue of the biography book report deals with was the concept of “name.”

Students are asked to write a biography of the featured person’s name and birth name if different. For this question, MH explained,

They have to write the biography of the person’s name, the birth name if it is different because a lot of time the birth name is different. For instance, while students are reading about Rosa Parks, Rosa Louise McCauley, they are confused at the very beginning because they don’t realize this is the same person.

Then, the report asked a series of question such as:

1. When was this person born? Are they still living, if not, when they died?
2. What struggles, mishaps, and disappointments did the person experience?
3. What are their accomplishments, victories, or wisdoms? Who is someone to help them? How did this person help them?

For the second question, MH explained that everybody would have a hard time and bad experience in their life and it was important for students to see. In addition, the report also asked students to write down a “Quotable Quote”---something meaningful that the featured person said and explain what he or she meant by this. According to

MH, this was a skill that the state tests were expecting ESL students to grasp. She stated,

They (students) should be able to choose in their minds what a person tries to understand, and it can't always be concrete; it has to be a little abstract. Many of these things people said are abstract, so it gets them (students) thinking at this level.

As seen in the above discussion, these book reports designed by MH not only work as an assessment tool to pinpoint whether or not the ESL students have grasped certain reading skills or strategies but also work as an instructional instrument helping MH to develop and solidify these reading skills among the students.

The Process

Before asking students to complete book reports individually, MH would explain each question to all students and show them a model. For example, with a fiction book report, she would read a story with students and then discuss with them where the story takes place and when it happens. She would also give students words for settings to get them familiar with that concept.

Then, as soon as students got started, MH would go around the class checking and helping students make adjustments to their work. If the student's work was correct, she would put a check on the paper. If it was not correct, she would talk about the problem with the student immediately.

Sometimes, MH saw a few students struggling with questions and they were not successful. At these times, she would locate a simpler book report for them. She

described, “I have some adjustment, it still connects to, they still need to practice the skill, but I am going to find them something they won’t have to struggle as much with in order to be successful.”

In addition, these reports were subject to change and modification. After each semester, MH would review all questions on these book reports and make a few changes based on what she learned from using them in the current semester. She also involved her students in the development process, having discussions with them about which questions were not appropriate or what kinds of questions should be added into the reports.

The Advantages and Disadvantages

Based on her experience in using these book reports, MH summarized that the main advantages of this strategy were revealing whether or not a student was using reading strategies while reading and, at the same time, developing reading skills students needed for improving reading. She stated, “I think they are effective in the sense they develop the skills that students need....they do develop the skills that students need to improve their reading and to understand their reading more.”

MH also mentioned that with these book reports, teachers did not need to struggle with reading every single book that students read and writing a test for every single book any more, but still got a good idea about students’ reading ability and progress. The strategy of checking and talking about the reports while students were working on them also helped teachers with managing their time because three activities-

administrating, checking, and instructing-could be done at the same time.

While talking about the possible disadvantages of these book reports, MH admitted that they might not be reliable indicators of students' comprehension for a particular book. She explained, "The book reports assess whether they use reading strategies. It is limited! In that, it doesn't show me in the individual way comprehension for that particular book because I do not have the questions targeted on the specific book." She continued, and defended the book report a little bit, "Because, otherwise, I have had two hundred different question pages." Finally, MH mentioned that her class would do newspaper reading soon, so she is currently developing a report for newspaper reading now (See Appendix F for a sample of MH's book report).

The above list is not an exhaustive one of all reading assessment methods that ESL teachers used in their classrooms. A few methods are not be discussed here because they are either rarely used or do not get much attention from teachers. The methods that are specifically discussed above are just the ones that ESL teachers mainly depend on for assessing teaching and learning of reading in their classrooms.

The Functions That Classroom-Based Reading Assessments Serve

This study indicated that classroom-based reading assessments mainly served ESL teachers in two ways: helping teachers make decisions about individual students and helping teachers make decisions about instruction. In addition to serving as a tool to assess the results of teaching and learning of reading, classroom-based reading assessments were sometimes used as an instructional instrument.

Helping Teachers Make Decisions about Individual Students

According to the ESL teachers in this study, they primarily used classroom-based reading assessments to investigate an individual ESL student's reading level, progress in reading, and problems he or she had with reading. The information revealed by these assessments helped teachers make decisions about where to place a particular student, what kind of help should be provided to the student, and what kind of books should be selected for the student. In addition, teachers would also use this information to discuss with parents about their children's learning or to help students become aware of their own reading progress.

Placing a Student in a Particular ESL Class or Group

While learning English, ESL students' English level typically changes over time. As soon as they reach a certain literature level, they should be moved to a higher level ESL class or group so that they can receive the instructions appropriate for their current English learning stage. Classroom-based reading assessment is one of the tools that can tell teachers whether a particular student is ready to move up. In this study, it was not always an upward move; sometimes, a student was moved down to a lower level class or group due to his or her poor performance, as measured by these assessments, in the current group. For instance, AT stated, "I use the outcomes (of classroom-based reading assessments) to decide if they have learned the material they need to learn, enough even to be moved from my class to a higher-level ESL classes. I use them for that." CI presented a similar statement. She said, "To place the kids in the right groups if I feel

this kid, if he continues to, you know, to do poorly on the test, then maybe I need to switch him, and put him into a different group where, you know, he is functioning, you know, at level he should be.”

The placement decision about a particular student was usually supported by the results of different kinds of classroom-based assessments or the results of multiple uses of an assessment. Teachers believed that students’ performance would change with the time, place, and personal situation, so they did not like to make any major decisions about a student based on any single test or single observation. BG claimed,

But you know, the important thing is when you run numbers for a child, you look at everything you assess them on. It should be pretty even, and basically what most of my students are. Sometimes you will see they really did poor when they first took this Nelson reading test and the rest of the year maybe they are showing growth. The other thing is, like anything else, they had a bad day or took a test they did not do well on. I mean what is the nicest thing about Nelson or Plato, they have initial test; they have test at the end of the year. So we can look at the growth. The important thing is don’t label inflation like Plato, don’t let it make decisions for you. Look at everything.

Knowing a Student’s Reading Level

“They (the classroom-based reading assessments) are valuable because you are assessing where the student is,” RL said. By the different kinds of classroom-based reading

assessments, teachers could be informed in a timely manner about each student's current status of learning such as: who was making growth, who was still staying at the same place, who was doing fine, and who needed extra help, thereby noticing a student's problems before he or she fell further behind.

AB, an elementary school ESL teacher with over thirty years teaching experience, stressed, "Each assessment should show growth. Every assessment should show that and, if it doesn't show that, either the student is not focused or something is missing." And KS believed that the assessments she used could "soak everything up," letting her know who was getting off the track or how well the students were. RA also agreed that classroom-based reading assessments could show her who needed extra help. She stated,

They tell me whether, you know, I need to really work a lot with this one student and the other ones are kind of giving them a guide where they need to be going, and kind of working out on their own so they can do their own thing.

Knowing Who Needs What Assistance

In addition to showing a student's general performance of reading, these classroom-based reading assessments can also reveal the specific reading problems that a student may be having, by which teachers would know "who needs what?" and thus be able to provide the student with help targeting on his or her special needs. For instance, RA pointed out, "it (the classroom-based reading assessment) tells me what skills or strategies those students are having problems with." MC offered a similar comment, "It

(classroom-based reading assessment) is able to diagnose the needs of the kids, where do we need remediation, what skills, in what skills the kids are very strong and what skills the kids need aids...who need help on a particular skill.” CI further noted that the classroom-based reading assessments she used could inform her about a student’s comprehension knowledge and phonic knowledge. JI stated that some classroom-based reading assessments could tell her “whether or not the students are merely decoding the stories or decoding with comprehension.” MC also agreed that classroom-based reading assessments could tell her each individual student’s reading problems or strengths with a particular aspect of reading. She claimed,

This assessment, of course, gives me an idea on how rich their vocabulary has already been, if they are able to summarize a text...it gives me an idea of who among my kids are able to practice higher levels of thinking or who among my kids can only answer the basic level thinking questions.

Choosing Appropriate Books for Students

This study also showed that classroom-based reading assessments could reveal the particular reading level of a student which teachers could use as the basis for choosing or assigning appropriate books to the student. For instance, JI stated, “I think the most important elements of teaching reading are determining the appropriate individual reading level of each of the students and giving them plenty of materials to read.” She went on,

Obviously, if I notice verbally or on paper that they cannot answer

comprehension questions accurately, I will reevaluate their reading level and materials. It is important not to give them material too easy nor too hard... It [classroom-based reading assessment] allows me to determine their appropriate reading level, and assign appropriate books to each of them individually.

RA also emphasized that classroom-based reading assessments helped her with selecting books for students. She stated that with the results of these reading assessments, “When we go to the library, I can help them pick books that are, you know, going to be on their level so that they are going to be able to read and understand.” MC addressed this function of classroom-based reading assessments too. She claimed, “Based on the results, I am able to select the materials that would be appropriate for the kids. The material I would select for the kids will depend on the results of these assessments.”

For Parents’ Meetings and Student’s Self-Monitoring

Teachers have the responsibility of informing parents how their children do in school and answering parents’ questions about their children’s current learning. The results of classroom-based reading assessments were persuasive evidence that teachers could use to explain to parents how and what their children were doing in school. CM offered a vivid illustration for this view in the following,

The parents, you know, they want to see all the cute activities and stuff, but when you are trying to assess whether a child needs to go on or they need to stay, they don’t want that cute stuff, they want black and white, they want to be

able to see, “OK, what is the objective? What questions they are missing? And why they are getting this wrong?”

In addition to informing parents, ESL teachers also discussed results of classroom-based reading assessments with the individual student. For instance, KS stated that after the results of assessments are compiled, “I use those results of those assessments to set up my little meeting with them if I need to talk to them to let them know where they are, so they can improve or stay where they are.” In doing so, students would be aware of their own pace of progress and learn to conduct self-monitoring. MC also reported this particular function of classroom-based reading assessment in the following statement,

I notice when my kids do reading work and were able to discuss it immediately after they have [finished reading] and I mark their papers and give it back to them, they appreciate that because then they can also keep track of their progress.

Helping Teachers Make Decisions about Instruction

As discussed above, classroom-based reading assessments indicate an individual student’s reading weakness and strengths, helping ESL teachers to make decisions about the particular student. When putting the information about each individual student’s reading ability together, however, these assessments further provide a picture of general performance in a whole class that may have instructional significance. Based on the general performance of a whole class, teachers can evaluate the effectiveness of their

teaching and lessons plans and then make decisions about what to add, what to repeat, and what to teach in the future classes.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Instruction

Classroom-based reading assessments may help ESL teachers in instructions in multiple ways. One way that was observed in this study is by helping teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their own instructions. For instance, CI stated,

Well, if the group does poorly on the overall, let's say, I test this group, and I look at the scores, and they all did poorly that means I need to go back and re-teach. The group is not ready to move on to next lesson. Or if this group is doing such a good job, then maybe we can skip some lessons. So it gives me feedback on my teaching effectiveness, telling me if I am doing a good job in teaching the lesson. ? Maybe I didn't do a good job in teaching a lesson, so we just go back and re-teach it.

AT had a similar comment. She noted,

It helps me know whether or not, we got different classes, sometimes a word slips through the cracks or different terms slip thought the crack, and they weren't familiar with that. [Then I know] I had not devoted enough time to them for them to learn it like they need to know for the test. For the other words, they know it immediately, even the children who are little slower know them, which means I have worked on those more and they understand them better.

As seen in the above statements, through classroom-based reading assessments, teachers were able to know if their teaching had successfully reached the goal and to ascertain if most of the students grasped the knowledge being taught, if certain content needed to be repeated, or if they should create a new way to impart a particular content.

MC and PF considered classroom-based reading assessments as tools that could help them manage the paces of instructions. MC stated,

It helps me adjust. If I can see based on those assessments my kids are having trouble on a particular objective, that gives me impression that I need to stay longer at that topic and not advance to the next level activity. So it gives me an idea on the pacing of my instruction.

PF remarked,

I often modify my lesson plan from day to day. Because, OK, I know they didn't understand, then I need to explain it further. Or, Well! They get that, I was expecting to have spent more time on it, so I can change.

MH and AT, however, thought that classroom-based reading assessment could reveal instructional failure and remind them that it was time to create new ways to explain and convey certain knowledge to students. MH commented,

Like as I am walking around, I can help them to make individual adjustments here. But sometimes, I see patterns, I see patterns where many students are not getting this right, and many students are not getting this right, and that tells me I can do something instructionally, like instructionally I missed something...but if there is a pattern, it is something

I have to do, something I need to do differently.

AT made a similar remark,

Sometimes, I find that I need to vary a lot more; not too much of the same thing. Sometimes, I found that maybe it is too difficult for them, so I have to create ways of explaining it...So what kind of influences they had, it does, it will affect, whether I need to bring them a visual aid; whether I need to give more explanation or whether I need to make it more difficult.

At last, CM summarized that classroom-based reading assessments told me “what I need to do in the classroom.”

Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Materials

Another function of classroom-based reading assessments is to evaluate instructional materials' quality. For instance, BG mentioned that through classroom-based reading assessments, “I get an idea about what kind of material works with them [ESL students].” MC also added that classroom-based reading assessments showed her “the quality of the materials I should give my kids. Maybe the materials are not appropriate for them.” RA extended this point in the following statement,

They help me know when I need to ask for books or ask for supplies or materials, they help me to know what I need to ask for. If I need to ask for ABC letters or I need to ask for third grade chapter books.

Instructional Instrument

In addition to assessing the results of teaching and learning, classroom-based reading assessment also functioned as an instructional instrument, helping ESL teachers impart and explain knowledge to students. For instance, AT stated,

Well, you know, it is kind of interesting because everything ultimately boils down the two things: instruction and assessment, ultimately. And instruction time tends to be very dry in a lot of ways and it does a lot of teacher talking, teacher, teacher... which is not effective. So the assessment side whether you have them doing a project or doing class-work, I mean seatwork whether you are having them just do that oral response, it is more effective for them, the students, to learn whatever they are learning.

As seen in the above statement, classroom-based reading assessments were not only used as an instructional instrument, but also were considered more interesting and effective than the actual instruction.

In MH's class, reading assessment and reading instruction were integrated into a whole. For example, the book reports she used in her classroom worked for both assessment and instruction. Before students filled out the book reports, the teacher gave a model lesson about how to answer the questions in the report, which in fact was an instruction about reading strategies and skills related to different types of reading. In addition, while students worked on the book report, the teacher would go around the classroom, check students' answers, and further discussed the reading skills and strategies mentioned in instruction with students.

In a word, classroom-based reading assessments were an indispensable part of ESL teachers' daily teaching, helping teachers with both instruction and assessment.

The Characteristics of ESL Teachers' Use of Classroom-Based Reading Assessment

The majority of students ESL teachers teach are those who are non-native English speakers and are learning English as their second language. Compared with native English speaking students, ESL students are more vulnerable and less confident of learning the English language, which always is the primary concern of ESL teachers in their teachings. So, while conducting classroom-based reading assessments, the participating ESL teachers usually took great effort to make the procedure flexible, supporting, and encouraging.

Assessing without Threatening

While assessing ESL students, ESL teachers were very sensitive to the assessment environment and the ways that assessment was conducted, making sure students felt safe, comfortable, and relaxed in the whole process.

To make students feel more comfortable and relaxed, AT invented a new way to conduct an assessment. First she presented students several questions, and then let students write down answers on their small boards [slates]; at the same time, she would write down the correct answer on a small board too. At last, both the teacher and students showed their answers. AT stated,

It's non-threatening. They show what they came up with and they can

compare answers. A lot of time, you would be able to see who always gets it right, who gets it right first; you can see who doesn't understand, who is falling behind, and, but it is not graded, so they do not feel threatened by that.

RA also mentioned that most of ESL students were afraid of reading aloud in front of the whole class, so she preferred to use one on one observation or small group reading to assess students. "They are nervous on the topic of not being able to read well, so I don't really like to assess them in that way," she said.

AB's primary concern when assessing ESL students was to provide a trustful and comfortable environment so that students felt safe and relaxed interacting with her. She stated,

They have to understand that there's nothing bad going to happen to them. They have to feel safe; they have to feel valued...No one is going to talk to me in any language unless they feel safe...I have so many strategies I have to use in order to make them comfortable with where they are and what they can do. I just have to modify specific assessment, the tests or the observations that I made and remember their limitations.

Assessing with Support

As found in this study, most ESL teachers agreed that as second language learners, ESL students were vulnerable and unconfident in many ways, and needed more support from teachers. While assessing their students, those ESL teachers always looked for different

ways to provide as much support for their students as they could. For instance, what BG did was allow students to pick books by themselves and take a test on AR. He commented,

Just get them interested in reading, get them used to doing some reading because if they don't have something they like, I am afraid they would not read... They get to choose which book they want to use. I don't grab something even if they are reading something a little bit below their level I don't grab anything for them. I allow them to read it and test on it.

MC liked to help students pick out reading materials, but while choosing these materials, her primary concern was what would interest the ESL students. She explained,

I also, like if a student is coming from a family whose family members do not speak English at all, then I know that kids need to be encouraged more in reading English books because at home they are not able to practice the English language. And whatever interested them; whatever interested them, if I could find a reading material that would be of interesting to them, that is what I would consider most of time.

In addition, for some ESL teachers in this study, most of their students were Spanish speakers and they [the teachers] could speak Spanish as well. Those ESL teachers usually took advantage of their own language priority to support students in the assessing process. Like PF noted, "Most of my students speak Spanish, and I can speak Spanish too. That is helping me a lot. We can translate from one language to another language." And in AT's classroom, the teacher allowed students to answer questions in

Spanish.

T: Yeah, they worry about them, and they also, then they give them

[interrupted by a student who tries to give another answer]

S5: ...[Mumbles and answer]

T: Say that again.

S5: Dijo Algo como esta` [I said something like this]

T: Oh, good, good, she is giving another piece of information. Alice likes to paint this kind of creature that you see here [point to the picture that the student is showing]. You need to pass it around because it is so vivid.

(T=teacher, S#=Student 1, Student, 2...)

While assessing students, AT noticed that some assessments did not always function well for all of her students. Sometimes, a certain assessment would underrepresent a few students' performance. To make up for the underrepresented students, AT either singled out them to ask questions or provided them with one on one help. She stated:

Group assessment... It does not work well for the really low people because they are not going to respond; they are not going to participate and it is harder to see whether or not you actually get through to them... The same kid likes to answer all the time which is why I have to single out some kids, ask them separately.

Grading with Support

When talking about grading, most ESL teachers agreed that their grading mainly focused on what their ESL students could do rather than what they could not do. They also stated that grading should serve for encouraging students, not frustrating them. For instance, AT noted that when a student could not finish all questions after having really tried on an assessment, she would grade only the questions the student had done and crossed out or eliminated the incomplete ones. She stated:

You have to go on what grade you got, and quite often that failed kids if they just can't keep up. You have to modify, you have to decide, do I grade the whole thing or do I just grade what they got to, depending, you know, how do you want to do it. With ESL students, I found that you have to modify a lot...In my case, if they really try and they get five, then I just cross up the others, I grade on what they did. So I modify that way, you know, but it is quite often very individualized when I do that.

MH claimed that her grading principle was “setting up high expectation but providing support at the same time.” She stated,

About the grading, I grade students' work while they are writing. If I see they leave a blank, I will give them the first letter as a clue to motivate them to recall the whole word. If they recall them finally, I will give them full credit. I believe if they can recall by a little support, that means they get it, and the supporting is important for them to learn too.

She continued on, “Also, I always give them high standards, for any test, I ask them to

be over 90 percent, not just pass it, because if you just ask pass they all become nervous.” AB, however, believed that while grading teachers should always remember to encourage ESL students and make them feel more confident about English learning instead of frustrating them by the assessments. “Many of them just have to start having a better self-worth, they just don’t think they can speak English, and they can’t, unless I convince them that they can,” she said.

In addition, ESL teachers mentioned that, in grading, they would consider both the students’ past learning and their current performances on the assessment, giving credit to any progress they have made. For instance, RA mentioned, “I do have to really sit down to think, “ok, this child has had all these such education, so yes, I am going to assess him a little bit harder than this child who has hardly any education.”

Knowing the Student

After the results of assessments came out, teachers had to make some judgment calls such as, “Was this grade good enough for the particular student?” “Had the student made progress or should he or she be pushed more?” “What caused the student’s failure?” Most ESL teachers agreed that knowing the student helped them make correct judgments. According to AT, knowing students helped her know how far she could push them. She stated,

Because I know that is the circumstance with him, so that makes a great deal of difference, as far as, you know, different kids, and a case like that I am not making him do the work. ...So it does change, it changes things a

lot. And so you can decide, do I give them more time, is this excuse valid, am I too hard on her, you know?

BG further confirmed this view with the following analysis,

You really need to know your kids, too, when you sit down to review a student's file at the end of year. Because he is not doing well on math and science does not mean it is his English language, might be just he is running with his friend; he is not doing his study and work.

In addition, one ESL teacher, RA, mentioned that it was very hard for her to tell what was happening with a particular ESL student when the background information of this student was not available. She stated,

What I don't know is that how much schooling they actually have had. I do not know whether their reading abilities are because they are so low in English or because they are so low in their language, which makes it even harder for them to learn English.

Summary

Findings indicated that there were three kinds of classroom-based reading assessments commonly used by ESL teachers in their classrooms at present, which were testing, observation, and writing. Testing includes small quizzes generated or assigned by teachers, formal reading tests encouraged by schools or districts, and computer-based reading tests. Observation involves verbal response, reading aloud, general observation, and conferencing. Writing refers to using writing notes or essays to assess reading. In

addition, one ESL teacher used a series of high quality book reports created by herself for teaching and assessing reading in her classroom.

These classroom-based reading assessments serve ESL teachers in two ways: On the one hand, the results of these assessments can provide teachers information about individual students' reading strengths and weaknesses, with which teachers can tell who is right on track, who is falling behind, who needs extra help, and who needs to be pushed more, and thus be able to offer each individual student help targeting his or her personal learning needs.

On the other hand, these assessments also reveal the general performance of a whole group, a pattern, a common problem or general achievement, based on which teachers are able to evaluate the effectiveness of their instructions and make decisions about future teaching. For example, a general achievement usually means that the instruction successfully reaches its goal, no need to repeat the particular content, and students are ready to move on to next step. On the contrary, a common problem usually suggests an adjustment of the instruction or a repeat of certain content was necessary.

In addition to serving as a tool to assess the results of teaching and learning reading, classroom-based reading assessments are also used as an instructional instrument, helping ESL teachers convey new knowledge of reading to students and facilitating learning of reading.

The findings also indicated that ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments shared particular characteristics such as: assessing without threat, assessing with support, and grading with support. While assessing ESL students, ESL teachers

were very careful with the assessing environment and the way that an assessment was conducted, trying their best to provide students a comfortable and pressure-free environment. During the assessment procedure, ESL teachers would also offer a great deal of support to students. As for grading, ESL teachers mainly focused on what students could do rather than what they could not, using the grade to encourage students to learn. In addition, ESL teachers have paid attention to learning as much about their students as possible, and used this knowledge to help with interpretation of the results of these assessments.

In this chapter, I specifically described the methods, the functions, and the characteristics of ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments. In the following chapter, I will discuss ESL teachers' views and perceptions of classroom-based reading assessments.

CHAPTER V

ESL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM-BASED READING ASSESSMENTS

The discussion of this chapter will concentrate on ESL teachers' general conceptions, thoughts, and practical knowledge with regard to classroom-based reading assessments. When talking about their attitudes towards and perceptions of classroom-based reading assessments, the ESL teachers also gave comments on statewide mandated standardized testing (usually meaning the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in this study) to make a comparison. Hence, this chapter will include a discussion of ESL teachers' attitudes toward statewide mandated standardized testing.

The first portion of this chapter will highlight the ESL teachers' common views on the value, the accuracy, and the effectiveness of classroom-based reading assessments. The second portion will focus on ESL teachers' attitudes toward statewide mandated standardized testing as a comparison to classroom-based reading assessments.

ESL Teachers' Views of Classroom-Based Reading Assessments

They Are Valuable

All ESL teachers in this study agreed that classroom-based reading assessments were very valuable for them, especially the ones assigned by teachers themselves. For instance, RA claimed, "The assessment that I give [emphasizing], I feel that it is valuable to me." CI also mentioned, "I think they are very important because if I don't

assess the kids, then I am not sure if they are learning or not, if they are where they should be.” KS had a similar point, “I feel the assessments are very important...it is important; it is needed, that is why we definitely need it in order to see how well we are doing.” CM and PF further confirmed this view with the following analysis. According to CM, “The teacher assessments are valuable because my assessments drive my instruction...it is very valuable! The function it serves us is letting them know where we need to be in our instruction.”

PF concurred,

Yes, it is very valuable because I often modify my lesson plan from day to day because, ok, I know they didn’t understand, and then I need to explain it further. Or, Well! They get that, I was expecting to have spent more time on it, so I can change there, it is always consider as a good thing.

As seen in the above statements, ESL teachers thought classroom-based reading assessments valuable because; they are tied to instruction, helping teachers evaluate and modify instruction of reading; they provide teachers information about individual students’ general performance of reading, reminding teachers of who is falling behind and who needs extra help immediately; and they show teachers which specific reading skills or strategies a student has problem with and what kind of help the student needs.

They Are Accurate

ESL teachers were confident about the quality of most of the classroom-based reading assessments they used. They believed that these assessments could accurately reflect the

reading competencies and progress of students. For instance, KS stated,

For the quality, for the most part the assessment I give them, they are very good quality...the assessment, they give me quality information as far as being able to help my students. They give me information that I need to prepare them...so it is accurate enough to help with the main goal.

MH also felt confident about the quality of classroom-based reading assessments she used, but she expressed this idea in an implicit way,

Ok, I am hoping, I am hoping the quality of information that I am getting is good. I mean, because I am creating these materials. I am experimenting, so I am hoping that what I think it's giving me is the "thinking." They are thinking; so I think the quality, we will see it in the end of the year for the test because they have to. But even before end of the year, I am seeing that they are thinking a lot more than they did, or they are expressing their thinking more than they did at the beginning of the year. So, again, I hope the quality of assessment is good. And I am seeing, I mean, I cannot measure how well, but I see progress, so that is good....

AT agreed that classroom-based reading assessments could provide accurate information about students' learning, and she further explained that these assessments' quality could be secured by teachers' continuously assessing,

It is pretty accurate. I can, just by my style of teaching, I can usually tell which one is ultimately, yes, understanding and which one is ultimately no, so, it actually ultimately is overall good information.

CM felt the same way as AT,

It is hard to, I have to take it on like, you know, I can't worry about assessment giving me a lot of information in like one week or two weeks, but in like six week periods or like two months they can show me, "are they improving their vocabulary building? Do they still need to work on vocabulary? Do they still need to work on summary?"

MC and AB, however, considered that teachers who were in charge of the whole assessing process were the major factor that determined the high quality of most of the classroom-based reading assessments. MC argued,

Since it's really made by the teacher herself and she knows the level or the reading capacity of the students, I think it is very effective in diagnosing what the students really need so I guess it's effective information. I would think it is very effective since the teacher herself or himself is the one preparing the assessment and selecting the materials for an assessment.

AB stated,

Any kind of assessment will be more valuable when you know the person you are talking to. My assessment for my students is more valuable than if I give it to another fifth grade teacher. It won't be the same. They know my voice; they know my thinking; they know my phraseology... I just think the more you know your students, the better you prepared them.

As seen in the above statements, participating ESL teachers believed that most classroom-based reading assessments were accurate and of high quality because this

kind of assessment was an continuous process. Also, most of classroom-based reading assessments were designed, assigned, administered, and interpreted by ESL teachers who were currently teaching the ESL students, and knew them best, which further raised the quality of such assessments.

They Are Efficient

The ESL teachers considered most classroom-based reading assessments very efficient, especially the ones that were assigned by teachers themselves and used most frequently in the classrooms, such as general observation, verbal response, book reports, reading aloud, and so on. According to the ESL teachers, these assessments were fast, short, and information-rich, allowing teachers to know students' current learning level in a very short time. For instance, RA stated,

Yes, Yes, and a lot of them, you can, you know, just you can walk around with a piece of paper, and kind of listening to what they are doing, and you can get a feel as whether they understand what they are reading about.

Subjective or Objective

When talked about the issues of subjectivity and objectivity related to classroom-based reading assessments, the ESL teachers expressed quite different perspectives. Some teachers stated that most of the classroom-based reading assessments they used were objective and they did not worry much about subjectivity in their assessing process. For instance, MH claimed, "I do not see the subjectivity in my assessment. Sometimes my

judgment may be a little subjective, but it is always temporary. The long time work I am with my students gave me time to provide an accurate assessment of them.”

CM also mentioned that most of her assessments of reading were objective assessments.

I like objectivity. I try to give a variety of objective assessments like where I use my rubric and the objective, the ones, you know, they are right or wrong. This is the right answer, that’s the wrong answer...

On the contrary, some other teachers did admit that the classroom-based reading assessments they used involved subjectivity, but they did not consider it a big problem that would impair the quality of these assessments. For instance, KS stated,

Ok, as far as the assessment how I view the student, well I mean I think that the assessments we give, they are pretty accurate...but I do know though, there is, there can be like differences with, with the teachers, you know, how they review something...So I do acknowledge that teachers can have different views about the kids, they really can, but the assessment for the most part, they are good enough to where you can be on the same page.

MC further expanded this view and contented that the so-called subjectivity in classroom-based reading assessments should not be considered in a negative way, and in fact, it could be an advantage of this kind of assessments. She stated,

I would not want to consider it really subjective. I just would want to qualify it as more sensitive to the needs of the learners and since I go with the thinking the teacher who is contacting with the students would know better what material should be selected for the kids because we always

think of the learners, right? So I would not want to really call it very subjective. I like to consider it more sensitive, it is an advantage for the kids because the teacher itself that's the selecting.

There were also some teachers who admitted that many classroom-based reading assessments they used had the subjectivity problem, and they felt that it was hard to fix this problem. For instance, AT claimed,

Yes, it is very based on what the teacher knows... So, yeah, it's very difficult, but it does go a lot with instinct, what I know about this kid based on what I have seen already. Is he just performing badly today or it is two weeks ago, what's the deal with the child... But it's very, very difficult if it is just one person.

AB also complained,

It is very hard! It is very hard! You can have a little checklist. They are obvious, you know, how many words the student misses like we did yesterday on your observation... that's an objective thing you can do... Comprehension is another thing... You can read a sentence and tell me what it means. Anyone could, but to be able to take a whole paragraph or a whole story and pick up one or two sentences to tell me that. You can do it objectively but the subjectivity of the new answers on reading is so varied... So my job is to understand first of all what they already know in their own language, and take that make them strength. That's the subjectivity of it. I am happy when they can do their objective part, "Tell

me this is a prefix and that is not.” But until I can put all those things together, there is no great happiness.

In general, ESL teachers perceived that most classroom-based reading assessments were valuable, accurate, and effective. Yet, there were several classroom-based reading assessments that ESL teachers did not consider them qualified for the above description, which were usually the tests that assigned and pushed by schools or districts, such as the Q.P.S Fluency Probe and reading accuracy test. About these tests and ESL teachers’ critiques of them have been discussed in the previous chapter.

Formal Paper and Pencil Testing

Formal Paper and Pencil Testing is a traditional assessment method and is still used a lot in today’s K-12 classrooms. Most of the ESL teachers in this study, however, were not in favor of this particular assessment method. According to teachers, many ESL students did not have much experience with such a test; they were either easily threatened by them, feeling nervous and disappointed during testing, or they just ignored those tests and did not realize that they needed to try their best on them. So, for most ESL teachers, the formal paper and pencil test apparently is not an appropriate and effective way to assess and encourage ESL students’ learning of English. For instance, AB gave strong support to this view in the following statement,

The assessments often are misleading. I rely more on my interaction than I do on the reading test with them. Most of ESL students at the beginning level are afraid of the paper and pencil tests. If I can get them to interact

with me and talk with me, what I learn is much better than from paper and pencil tests. I do not have a lot of confidence with the validity of those at the beginning level.

PF also contended, “I do give them tests, but I do not average them into test grades, because I just don’t feel like that is appropriate with this group. Some of them just really are afraid of tests.” Another teacher, MH, argued that she did not want to use tests or quizzes because they were proved ineffective in her classroom.

Although ESL teachers did not prefer formal paper and pencil tests, there were still many such tests taken in their classrooms because all districts or schools requested ESL teachers to use certain amounts of formal paper and pencil tests to assess students’ progress. Sometimes, districts or schools would present some particular formal paper and pencil tests and ask teachers to use them. ESL teachers did have to follow the requirements of districts or schools, even though they did not always agree with them.

ESL Teachers’ Comments on Statewide Mandated Standardized Testing

Too Hard for ESL Students

As far as most of the ESL teachers are concerned, the statewide mandated standardized test is usually unrealistic and too hard for ESL students. For instance, BG commented that the statewide mandated standardized test was too far from his students’ current learning zone. He further explained this view in the following analysis,

You take somebody from another country, another culture, and another language, after three years they have to take the tests. The test (TAKS) examines their ability in Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) level, which is kind of unrealistic to start with. Well, to get a CALP level you have to have a deep understanding of the language. We know, I mean the data tells us [that it takes] five to eight years [for a ESL students to reach CALP level]. Plus, most of kids are from the country where they spent more time in the field than going to school, it takes longer... We start to measure them in two or three years so it is hard be get accurate evaluation about these students based on that. You have to take that into account that they are not going to be there.

RL also complained that the statewide mandated standardized test set a too high standard, that was far beyond most ESL students' reach in certain time. She stated,

My kids come to me showing the portfolio, writing nothing but Spanish, no English. I get them at the middle of August and I am teaching them punctuation, capitalization, complete sentences that they should have learned when they were in first grade. But, at the end of February, they are going to take the writing composition test (TAKS). And they are supposed to have enough knowledge and be able to stay on topic and write a fluent flowing composition in four or five months, as if they have been writing and reading English all their life. I have a problem with that.

RA had similar comments on the statewide mandated standardized test. She stated,

I don't really see those being a value to me at all. Because like I said, I can look at those books and look at those stories that they are giving, look at the questions they are asking, and I know from having my students even for half of a year, they are not going to be able to do very well on those tests, so no, I don't feel standardized tests will help me at all.

As seen in the above statements, ESL teachers believed that compared to classroom-based assessments, the statewide mandated standardized test is less valuable and less accurate because it is insensitive to individual ESL students' English learning experience and educational backgrounds, ignores the essential principles of second language development, and tests ESL students at a unrealistically high level.

Isolated from ESL Teaching

In addition to being too hard for ESL students, the statewide mandated standardized test was also criticized by ESL teachers as being disconnected from the ESL curriculum and as being no help to ESL teaching. For instance, AT complained that the statewide mandated standardized test was a great deal harder than most of her classroom assignments. AB, however, directly stated, "I am not a big fan of standardized tests. I think they are an unnecessary evil" and "I can't teach a Spanish-speaking person all these little intricacies...the little variation, the language..." RA also thought that statewide mandated standardized testing did not provide any benefit to her teaching. She noted, "The standardized assessment they have to, all of the kids have to take. That is what they go by."

It Could Be Helpful in Some Way

Of course, the ESL teachers did not say that statewide mandated standardized testing did no good at all. Most of teachers admitted that, in a way, this test could be helpful. For instance, RL, who had many critiques about statewide mandated standardized testing, also stated,

The assessment like, you know, when we saw the scores that is the assessment that we get from the statewide mandated standardized test, and that does help us because it tells us what reading levels they are. For instance, this particular child (pick up a writing sample of a student in the portfolio pile)...her total score on the average for vocabulary and comprehension would be ninth grade six month, computation total math will be twelve-grade nine month. She is real smart, and she is an excellent writer. That is what it can tell me. You can see her scores just way up there. She wasn't too good in accent, but it tells me a lot, you know, so I can push her harder than everybody else. And pretty much when I know she does it well, I don't have to worry about her much; I don't need to work with her too much.

Later, she had further comments,

There are still a lot of people who don't like the TAKS test. There is going to be some formal standardized testing, there always will be, so whether you like it or not you are going to, if you don't do TAKS, there is going to

be something else.

AB also gave some credit to statewide mandated standardized testing despite having a lot of problems with it. She stated, “They are just benchmarks; they help with moving the child into their best learning environment. When they are leveled, they come to me, and I see they are at level two. Then I don’t have to start at level one. I can start where the previous teacher stopped.”

Different from the other ESL teachers, CM really appreciated the statewide mandated standardized test, and considered it a big help for her teaching. CM stated,

Even if you just are talking about teacher assessment, I am also considering the results of standardized tests like...As I have shown you, every time I got the results from the district on the standardized test of my kids, I try to look at them individually first and see what the particular boy or girl still needs to improve on. Then based on that, I try to sit down and plan the type of assessment and instruction I should deliver to them. I am very glad that we have that because then I would just have to look at their results and I can have a clear picture of where the class is. It is very, very helpful.

She continued, “My assessment is very much related to the standardized test like we go together. I guess they really go together.”

In general, the ESL teachers had more negative views about statewide mandated standardized testing and considered it as a less accurate and valuable assessment than classroom-based reading assessments. Yet, inevitably, ESL teachers have to constantly

deal with statewide mandated standardized testing in their daily teaching because it has been institutionalized in current educational system. No teacher is able to avoid it. In the next chapter, I will discuss in detail statewide mandated standardized testing's influence on the ESL teachers' assessment activities.

Summary

Findings indicated that the ESL teachers highly valued classroom-based reading assessments and considered them as an important part of their teaching of reading. They believed that classroom-based reading assessments were valuable because they were clearly tied to instruction, provided teachers with information about individual students' general performance of reading, and showed teachers the specific reading skills or strategies a student may be having problem with and what kind of help the student needs. The ESL teachers also considered that classroom-based reading assessments are accurate and of highly quality because they were a continuous process. In addition, many classroom-based reading assessments are designed, assigned, administered, and interpreted by ESL teachers who were currently teaching the ESL students, and know them best, which further raise their quality.

While talking about the issue of subjectivity and objectivity related to classroom-based reading assessments, the ESL teachers showed quite different perspectives. Some teachers thought that there was no subjectivity problem in their classroom-based reading assessment. Some did admit the existence of subjectivity, but did not think it detracted from the quality of these assessments, and they also argued that sometimes the

subjectivity could be an advantage to students. Just a few teachers expressed their worries about subjectivity and they felt that it was hard to fix this problem.

Although ESL teachers perceived that most classroom-based reading assessments were valuable, accurate, and effective, they expressed concern about some tests assigned by districts or school administrators and considered these test as useless and a waste of time. In fact, not only those particular tests, the ESL teachers had problem with assessing their ESL students by any formal paper and pencil test. According to these teachers, many ESL students do not have much experience with tests; they are either easily threatened by it, feeling nervous and disappointed during testing, or they just ignore these tests and did not realize that they needed to try their best on them. So, for most ESL teachers, formal paper and pencil testing apparently was not an appropriate and effective way to assess and encourage ESL students' learning of English.

To make a comparison, the ESL teachers also commented on statewide mandated standardized testing. They claimed that the statewide mandated standardized test was unrealistic and too hard for ESL students and failed to provide accurate and valuable evaluation of ESL students' reading progress and competency. In addition, the ESL teachers also complained that statewide mandated standardized testing couldn't provide them with information that would benefit daily teaching of reading.

In this chapter, I have discussed ESL teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards classroom-based reading assessments and statewide mandated standardized testing as well. In the following chapter, I will explore the internal and external factors that influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments.

CHAPTER VI

THE FACTORS INFLUENCING ESL TEACHERS' USE OF CLASSROOM-BASED READING ASSESSMENTS

In this chapter, I am going to discuss the major factors that can influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments. This discussion of factors will be divided into two sections: the analysis of internal factors and the analysis of external factors. The internal factors, for the purpose of this study, refer to the subject, the process, and the material of an assessment such as students, assessment materials, and time. The external factors refer to the elements that did not have direct relations to classroom-based reading assessments and were outside of a classroom such as parents, districts, school administrators, statewide mandated standardized testing, and teamwork.

The Internal Factors

This study revealed that there were mainly three kinds of internal factors influenced the ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments: students, materials, and time.

Student Factor

The Wide Range of Reading Ability

Although in most schools, ESL students were divided into different groups or classes according to their reading levels, the range of reading abilities was still very wide inside each group or class. PF stated,

There is a very, very big range. This year I think I have one student, he has not been school at all for years and he does not have any reading ability even in his own language. I have another boy, I thought that he never read anything before.

Jl mentioned, “There is a variety of reading abilities within my classroom.” MH also claimed,

There is much difference in each level... the girl I just spoke about, the new girl; she may not be able to read five, even three or four sentences, with comprehension. She’s very low for a lot of reasons. Ok, I have students in the same class as her that read chapter books with comprehension.

The large range of reading abilities has troubled ESL teachers in many ways. Like AB said, “Yes, they are, they have a large range. It affects my assessment because simply I have to give two or three tests in some situations.” For Jl, the variety of reading levels in her classroom caused more work in choosing materials. She pointed out, “One difficulty is the variety of reading levels in one classroom. So I have to be sure to have a variety of reading materials.” AT, however, complained that the large range of reading abilities made it very hard to get all students to stay on the same timeline while assessing,

It [diversity] makes it very difficult to assess because some children get done very, very quickly with an assessment if it is a group assessment. Others take a long time. For example, the warm up, some of those kids

never get finished.

To deal with this problem of a large range of reading ability, ESL teachers often tried to provide more individualized help to the students who might be only partly included in the assessments. JI said, “I give much more personal attention to my low readers, constantly making sure they have many opportunities to practice reading.” RA also mentioned, “So it [diversity] just takes a little more thinking on that part as how I am going to assess each individual child.” Yet, that created other problems. PF said, “I try to give them some individual attention, but that creates discipline problems. If you were sitting and working with one student, then everyone else thinks you should work with them.” JI also experienced the same problem, “I feel if I give too much attention to one student, another student suffers.”

Too Many Students

For many schools, there were just one or two ESL teachers dealing with a number of ESL students with multiple learning levels in one school. Teachers sometimes had to provide six different lessons in two days, which doubled or tripled a regular teachers’ work. The heavy workload and limited time circumscribed teachers’ opportunities to further develop these reading assessments. This situation often made teachers very frustrated and, sometimes, they even blamed themselves for that. For instance, PF said, “I don’t have a formal way of doing it (assessment). I wish that I did, but... I am considering grouping those kids in ability groups and trying to give them original projects. If I were an excellent teacher, I think it would be a nice way to go....”

Students' Attention

Students' attention was another internal factor that ESL teachers worried about while conducting these assessments. Teachers felt that it was hard for them to get an accurate idea about students' reading competence if the students did not try their best in the assessments or did not pay attentions. AB stated, for instance, "When the students do not put forth the best effort they can, I always think that they can do better. It bothers me." AT was also concerned about the attention problem, which could be seen in the following description,

It is very, very easy for the kids to get off task... They look like they're paying attention but they don't know what's going on...and it is hard to get a good feel all the time because they do jump, they don't stay with you like they should on different kinds of things.

MC, however, was worried more about the outside factors that may distract students' attention in the assessments. She stated,

I am more worried about the condition of the students who are taking the assessment. Some of them, when they report at the classroom, I know they are smart, I know they have the ability to really score high on reading but they are coming from a family which is unstable. Sometimes, the assessment, the questions are suitable to the kids but the results still are not very good because they do not prepare to answer those questions or they have not learned those skills but it is because the state of their minds, it's outside factors.

Two Kinds of Students

One ESL teacher, CM, claimed that while assessing students' reading, she had a problem with two sorts of struggling students,

One sort is the child that has a fluency problem where they do not read orally well. Their comprehension is pretty good, but their decoding skills while they are reading are poor. So they might be able to muddle along with the B or you know, C, the average grades, but really their ability to read is kind of stifled by their, may be their vocabulary, maybe their own phonics. OK, that's one area. The other area that I struggled with is the kid who reads beautifully, but doesn't understand what they read. They sound like high school students when they read. They read with a lot of inflection, they read with a lot of enthusiasm, they get all the words right, but when you ask them, "Why is this setting so important to the story?" and they ask, "Setting?" "What setting?" or, you know, "What about character..." any basic comprehension questions, especially the brain questions or the higher order thinking questions they can't get those because they are not thinking while they are reading. So those are the two main problems.

Lack of Appropriate Material

While talking about assessments materials, most ESL teachers in this study agreed that they had plenty of materials to use to assess reading and they felt satisfied about the quality of these materials and supplies. Yet, there were two teachers who felt the lack of

appropriate materials for assessing reading. According to JI,

I wish I had easy-to-give assessments that would ask higher-level questions. I guess since I'm out of practice of asking the higher-level questions, I don't ask them as much. I also wish that already-made assessments that come with books would also ask higher-level questions.

RA also complained,

I need low-level books, and being in a middle school when I say low level, I think that some people get impression that I am talking third or fourth grade. I am talking kindergarten or first grade level where there are three words on the page, and there are a lot of pictures going on with the three words, and the next page, it is just the repetition, and next page the repetition. That's the kind of book that I need.

Time Factor

Time was another internal factor that mattered because teachers' schedules were always tight. Most classroom-based reading assessments did not take much extra teaching time to administer and were coordinated with daily teaching. But there were a few assessments, especially the ones assigned by schools or districts, that required teachers to devote a lot of time to them. In addition, some classroom-based reading assessments could generate a great amount of grading which required energy and extra time from teachers too. CI commented, "The time, it takes so much time, it really does...but I think this is the time factor, you know, it does take a lot of time." KS agreed, "They take too

much time...that is too much time, and that is what you don't have, and everybody wants that from you." This view is repeated by AT, who said, "It does indeed create a lot of burden and it does take a lot of time depending on how you want to do it. You know, they do take a lot of time, that is no question...and burdens? I get a whole pack of burdens over there I need to grade. You know, it creates, generates a lot of paper work."

As seen in the above discussion, while using classroom-based reading assessments, the ESL teachers had to deal with a number of problems such as limited time, high amount of daily work, large numbers of students, the wide range of students' reading abilities, all of which have made classroom-based reading assessments very challenging work.

The External Factors

Although classroom-based reading assessments are supposed to serve and function inside a classroom context, they are still limited and influenced by multiple factors outside a classroom since the whole modern education system is a tightly interrelated and interactive system. This study indicated that there were four major external forces that influenced the ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments: Districts and school administrators, statewide mandated standardized testing, parents, and teamwork.

The Influences from Districts and School Administrators

Great Influence

When talking about the influences of the district or school on their use of classroom-based reading assessments, the ESL teachers often used such words like “yeah, a great deal!” “a very big influence” or “the influence is great” to express their feelings about the impact of districts or school administrators. AT stated, for instance,

The basic guideline is they want two grades per week. It usually works out that there are more grades than that. There are model lessons we are asked to follow and at the end of each one, end of the lessons, they actually have the assessment actually designed into them we are supposed to be following. So do they influence what we do? Yeah, a great deal! (An example of district model lessons can be seen in Appendix G)

MC gave a similar statement,

Since we are using the project curriculum, the district has a formal curriculum that we should follow. We are using model lessons. We have model lessons for language arts and reading and they also give us the reading materials we can give the kids...The assessment, the teacher assessment that I do in classroom should be related to what the district is requiring us to do. It does have a very big influence.

As seen in the above statements, both ESL teachers’ teaching and assessing activities were greatly influenced by the districts. MH also claimed that the district confined her assessment activities in many ways, and she quantified the impact from

district as 80%.

Very much so, because the assessments I used have to be aligned with these assessments [district required]. If it is not, then I may be teaching the students wonderful things, but if they can't fulfill the district requirement they will not graduate to the next grade. So it does, it has to be very aligned, so it influences us greatly, I would say eighty percent. That twenty percent is my own personal contribution.

CM stated that most classroom-based reading assessments in her class were centered on district requirements too, "We do formal and informal assessment. Most of our assessments come from whether or not the children are mastering the school district benchmarks...Our assessments are mostly district-based."

Leaving No Room for Teachers

As mentioned above, the ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments was under the control of districts or school administrators. However, the extent of control among these districts or schools varied greatly. Some districts or schools just provided general guidelines for teachers to follow. Others, however, had very detailed regulations about the ways or even the specific steps that teachers should follow when conducting classroom-based assessments, leaving little room for teachers to make their own choices. For instance, in KS and CI's school, the school authorities required all teachers, grade one to three, (including ESL teachers) to join a "reading mastery" programs in which each step of teaching and assessment of reading has already been specified. All the

teachers in the program were allowed to do was to follow the program. Like KS said, “They [school administrators] make sure we have enough tests to give: like I said that the school is in reading mastery program, so we are doing things they ask.” CI also mentioned, “The way I assess is what they tell me to do. This is a program. I just follow exactly what the program tells me to do.” She further implied that she was powerless to effect any change,

And we have to correct them, if they make mistakes, we have to do it, we have to. That’s part of program. I have a coordinator. She comes and she assesses me every week. She comes in and she sits down and she observes me. So if I am not doing what I am supposed to do, she will take points off.

According to CM, her school administrators especially pushed and controlled the formal paper and pencil tests and she did not have power to make any decision related to that assessment. She stated,

So the school administrators, they tell us when and how often to give tests. There is no given room. If I don’t want to give test, I don’t have a choice. Every six weeks, you give the test. Here is your window of opportunity. Give it this week and have it. I have no influence at all. I am powerless as far as that is concerned.

Teachers’ Complaints

Not only did the ESL teachers have to follow what districts or school administrators told them, they had problems with some of policies and requirements imposed by their

schools or districts. Sometimes, teachers found that particular policies were not appropriate for ESL students and they had to modify them slightly in practice. For instance, PF stated,

The district has grading standards where it says that you have to have a reading grade, so many reading grades per grading period, which is six weeks, and the tests cannot be worth more than 40%. Your test grade is 40% and your daily grade will be 60%. But I just average everything in. I do give them tests, but I do not average them into test grade, because I just don't feel like that is appropriate with this group (ESL).

Sometimes, teachers felt that it was so hard to follow certain rules of districts or schools. AT complained that she was so confused by some district guidelines, and she had to create a new assessment to get along with the district's rule, which put more pressure on her and created extra work.

What I have trouble with is the assessment tends to be very general, for example, it will say, for example "Assessing formally through conferencing as students work on the organizer, so you just talk to them. Well, that works all right for getting a good feel for what they actually, what they are actually understood, but it doesn't give you a grade in a grade book. Ultimately you are required to have a grade in a grade book. So I do have a problem with a lot of this...I have to create the other kinds of assessments to go along with them.

The ESL teacher also complained about some specific tests assigned by schools

or districts were a waste of time and ineffective. RL mentioned that one kind of reading test required by the district did not pay attention to updates over time and thus failed to provide accurate evaluation about students' reading competencies. She stated,

I like what I use myself better than the districts [assessment]. I found the district used something very similar to this, but it is the same passages every year and the kids know it. I don't think it tests realistically. They [students] have seen this before.

Later, she mentioned that another reading test required by her school was a waste of time too. "That test over there, I don't know who draws that up in this school and I am sure they meant well, but that is the biggest waste of my time." KS also had the same complaint about the reading program in her school, "They can, the reading mastery program, they definitely can, they take too much time, waste too much time."

Finally, some of the ESL teachers also felt uncomfortable about the way that their school administrators pushed them to work on preparing students for the statewide mandated standardized test. For instance, RL had such a complaint in regard to her school principal, "She (the principal) shoves the TAKS test down our throats...and her salary is based on how well we perform. So, you know, we are constantly being threatened." BG also gave a similar critique of his school administrators,

Their [the school administrators] rewards are based on percentile, how many passed the test. They don't care if the students have only been in the United States for three years. They want them to make seventy or eighty percent on that test [TAKS]. A lot of time that is just not realistic.

Support

Certainly, the ESL teachers did not always have a negative view about the influences of districts or schools. Teachers admitted that districts and school administrators could be helpful sometimes. For instance, AB mentioned,

They [the school and district administrators] are great! They have made sure that we have what we need and when we needed it, on time. We have in-services, seminars. We have everything we need...we have a committee in ESL/Bilingual. And any questions we have, we direct to them. They have a great deal of knowledge in ESL/Bilingual and district requirements, and they help us; they answer any questions we have about that.

MH also noted the administrators in her school allow her do whatever she wants and give her as much support as they can. BG, disagreed with the ways that administrators push the statewide mandated standardized test on him, yet he appreciated that the administrators gave him a lot of freedom on his assessment work, “They don’t get involved too much in our assessment and how we place kids.”

The Influence from Statewide Mandated Standardized Testing (TAKS)

It Has Changed Everything

Most of the data in this study was collected in Spring 2004, the time period during which TAKS was administered, which gave me a good chance to view how statewide mandated standardized testing influenced the lives of teachers and students within these schools and the pressures they exerted on ESL teachers. According to this study, TAKS

interrupted teachers' regular teaching schedules. During one or two months, until after the test, these teachers had to only teach and assess the specific subjects that the upcoming test would test on. According to RL,

January, the beginning of the January to the end of the February, I didn't teach reading at all. We did compositions all day long with about an hour and half to do math. And that was it. And my partner and I had forty kids in this room. And my teaching partner was right here and all we did was writing, and writing, and writing. And as soon as the writing test was over in February, then we have to start doing that with reading, so we haven't read much since the end of February.

BG also mentioned, "In February, the seventh graders have to take the writing test. So that is what our priority was. And in the spring that is how it works."

The ESL teachers had to constantly shift directions of their teaching and assessing to adapt to the changes in TAKS. Sometimes they felt very disappointed about these changes because in a way that could invalidated their' past teaching. As AT described,

A lot of times, what happens is when you teach students and you think that is OK they got a pretty good handle of this knowledge, it is working pretty well, and then, the test changed to another direction. Then suddenly, all of the things start to pump up, then you are thinking, 'wait a minute, I didn't teach them this, then we are in trouble' ...then suddenly, you like, 'my goodness, I got to shift,' so it does either invalidate what you are teaching already, or cause you to shift

what you are teaching to something else.

TAKS not only changed teachers' daily teaching and assessing, but also put great pressure on the teachers and made them suffer. While talking about the statewide mandated standardized test, RL said to me, "All those books over there on the counter are all TAKS stuff and it's, you live, eat, breath, and fear of this test." AT also complained, "We have so many tests; it will blow your mind. We have test, test, test..." For CI, the first grade ESL teacher, her students did not need to take TAKS until they went to the third grade, but she also could not escape from the influence of TAKS. During the interview, she kept talking about how her current work could help students pass the TAKS when they went to the third grade. She directly mentioned "TAKS" twice and "the third grade" eleven times in the forty-minute interview. This is one piece of her speaking in the interview, "Yes, it is, now, you know, why we do so much reading in first grade because they have to pass TAKS, the state test in third grade. When they get to the third grade they need to know that."

In addition, CI also added that teachers were not the only ones who felt the pressure of TAKS. School administrators had to endure the same pressure too.

They are spending a lot of money. It is a lot of money! Because we have to purchase more books, textbooks, and you know these presentation books. Just one box is probably over one hundred bucks. We spend so much money on reading because, you know, that's the district expectation. We have to get these kids ready for the TAKS test.

Preparing Students for the Statewide Mandated Standardized Test

The statewide mandated standardized testing has changed and influenced everything in the schools. The ESL teachers in this study believed that they have responsibility to get students to pass TAKS. They focus their teaching and assessing on preparing students for the test. As CI described,

We do teach the kids the skills that are covered on the test. So whatever, you know, the kids need to do all the skills like recognizing compound words. What we teach in reading has to reflect what is covered on the test too.

CM also mentioned that she believed in preparing students for the TAKS test.

Well, I believe in preparing the students for the test...So yeah, the state mandated test does have a big impact on my reading assessment because at certain points throughout the school year, we take practice test, and I really look hard on the test to make sure there aren't certain objectives that they are really doing poorly in. If they are, I try to work with those kids individually or in small groups or have a pull-out group where we can work on those objectives because, you know, it's not everything we teach but it is big part of our responsibility to make them be able to pass the TAKS.

MH directly spoke out, "I start from the test and work back." JI showed the same emphasis on preparing students for the statewide mandated standardized test in the following statement,

A big influence! I try to get my kids on reading level as quickly and easily as possible. Then I try to familiarize them with the format of reading questions from

the state- mandated standardize tests. This is so that they can transfer their knowledge of reading and comprehension and apply it to a variety of questions. And these questions are hard! We practice a lot!

The Influences of Parents

Parent Involvement and Higher Scores

The ESL teachers in this study believe that parents play a significant role in classroom-based reading assessments. As AB said, “They have been terribly influential.

Sometimes, parents are the ones who have to be convinced that English, learning the English language is important for their students. Sometimes they have to be convinced first.” CM also claimed, “I think the parents do have a big influence on the classroom-based reading because they need to be reading with students at home.” And she went on to explain this idea,

I can tell the students that sit down with mom and dad every night and read, and compare them to the ones who don’t because that progress my kids need to make, need to make in a year is not made easily if nobody at home is reading with them. If all they are doing is watching TV or going outside to play, there are some parents in this school district who don’t see reading with their children as priority ...They are not reading with the kids at home and then that makes a direct impact on how they (the kids) are doing in class because we can’t do everything in an hour to an hour and a half every day. We can’t. They have to practice at home.

According to the ESL teachers, the impact of parents on classroom-based reading assessments was mainly reflected on students' scores. The ESL students whose parents are actively involved in their reading often performed better and read better than the students whose parents were absent in their learning process. MC, for instance, stated, "Those kids whose parents monitor their reading progress are the ones who succeed in the classroom. Those kids whose parents don't bother to check on their reading progress are the ones who were behind in their reading class." KS had a similar view, "Those who are getting help from their parents; they are able to learn whatever they need to learn." RA also mentioned, "Of course, you know, they [parents] are very involved that leads to better testing scores."

The Language Barrier

Although parental involvement was considered important to students' learning, there are in fact few ESL students' parents involved in their children's learning. According to the participating teachers, the main reason is the parents' lack of English language skill. As AT said, "They support what happens, but they can't help it at home because they don't speak the language." RL also mentioned, "I think some parents don't know what to do to make things better. I really do, especially those who can't read and write in English. They don't know how to help." In addition, based on his own experience, BG suggested that teachers should pay attention to finding a way to communicate with the parents who do not speak English,

I don't speak Spanish, so when I have students I have problems with, like they

are not doing their work, they are not turning in their homework, their behavior problems things like these, what I do is I take them up to the front office where we get Spanish assistant staff to call parents. A lot of times they (the parents) are surprised even by the grades. They didn't see the previous report; they don't see report cards. Kids intercept that sometimes, so it is really important if you have students who speak another language you need to find a way to communicate with parents. Because you just give them a bad progress report, you give them a failing grade on a report card, does not mean that parents have any idea about that.

The Influences from Teamwork

Teamwork was another important factor influencing ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments. In this study, most ESL teachers revealed that they were very fond of the idea of teamwork, and they thought that communication with other teachers could help them with both their teaching and assessing works.

Despite the fact that most teachers agreed that teamwork has a positive impact on their assessment work, the extent of influence was different. For some teachers, they would have regular meetings with other ESL teachers or language art teachers, discussing specific teaching and assessment methods and making decisions about what, when, and how to teach and assess in their classes together. BG, for instance, stated,

Oh yes, like I said, there is only one other ESL teacher who works with intermediate and beginners in my school. She happens to be the head of our

department. We get together at least once a week, sometimes two or three times. We don't have same students but we use the same book for teaching students. We use the same type of strategies. You know, we do a lot of communication to make sure that we are standardized. ...Usually I develop the final for intermediate students. The other ESL teacher develops the final for the beginning students, and she uses my final on her intermediate class...

CM stated, "We have worked together to design reading strategies for them to use to get through reading passages either in a TAKS format passage which would be just story following questions, or the basal." AB also mentioned that the team would decide specific assignments that she would give to students,

Absolutely, we have to, we have to work as a team to make sure that we are modifying correctly and work following all the guidelines and the teams are good. We try to stay on the same reading and math assignments with all the students in fifth grade so we check to make sure we are doing that.

In JI's school, teachers of the same grades work together and use the same type of assessments. She said,

Well, all of us in the third grade give about the same types of assessment. A quick one that we all seem to use is the summary method where the student traces his/her hand and labels each finger as follows: who, what, when/where, why, how. They fill in each finger with the information from the story, and then combine it all into one or two sentences to create a short summary. We also practice the same types of state mandated test questions in hopes that our

students will pass that test.

For some teachers, the influence of teamwork was limited to exchange of experience, techniques and methods of teaching and assessing. CI gave an example of how teamwork issued by her,

I did discuss the different ways that I assess students because we share, we do have grade level meetings and we discuss some of the strategies and things we do in our classrooms, you know, to help kids be successful. So we do share and with other ESL teachers, we discuss and talk about, like, “I have this child or student, I don’t know how to motivate him to sit and read with me or learn with other kids.” Maybe another teacher may have a way to, you know, to motivate that child, “Maybe you should try this, or maybe you should try doing it this way.” We do share and we do collaborate.

MH also mentioned that for her, teamwork provided a chance to exchange or share ideas and methods of teaching and assessing.

Everything I can think about I definitely share with them. Sometimes they like it, I mean, these are ideas coming out of my head...but other times, they don’t. So the times they don’t, I am like “Ok, I need to look at that again to make sure,” I mean, there are haven been times that I said, “Is it good thing? And I look at it again, and I say, “Yes, it is great thing, hold on to it, keep using it.”

Teamwork, however, helped RL to unite her ways of teaching and assessing with the lower grade teachers so that students would have a smooth transition when changing to different grades,

Yes, yes, we discuss the methods. I have met with the third grade ESL teacher, tried to find out what he is doing because when I get the kids and I teach them the reading strategies, sometimes it confuses them because they learn in different ways in third grade. That is why I tried to talk with him and say, “What do you do, so maybe I can do it too, or let me show you what I do so you can kind of show them, so it will be a smooth transition.” And so we do discuss it. It really doesn’t affect my assessment design. Sometimes I have to tell kids that I know Mr. XX, he did it this way, but I am going to show you the way I like for you to do it. And then there are times when I say, “[I] don’t care whichever way works best for you, as long as you use strategies to help you get the right answer.”

In addition, some ESL teachers did not have many chances to communicate with other colleagues though they really appreciated the value of teamwork. For instance, AT commented,

There are three ESL teachers in this school, but there is only one beginning, there is only one intermediate, there is only one advanced teacher. Then one or two transitional teachers, but we are on different, the levels are so different and what the kids can do in each different level...What you are doing is group ESL modify, but we modify to different levels since our kids are in different levels, so we don’t spend a lot of time actually collaborating between us on assessment methods.

RA encountered the same problem as AT, which could be seen in the following excerpt

from the interview with RA,

YM: Do you discuss assessment methods with other ESL teachers?

RA: No, not really, because I am the only ESL teacher.

YM: How about with other language teachers?

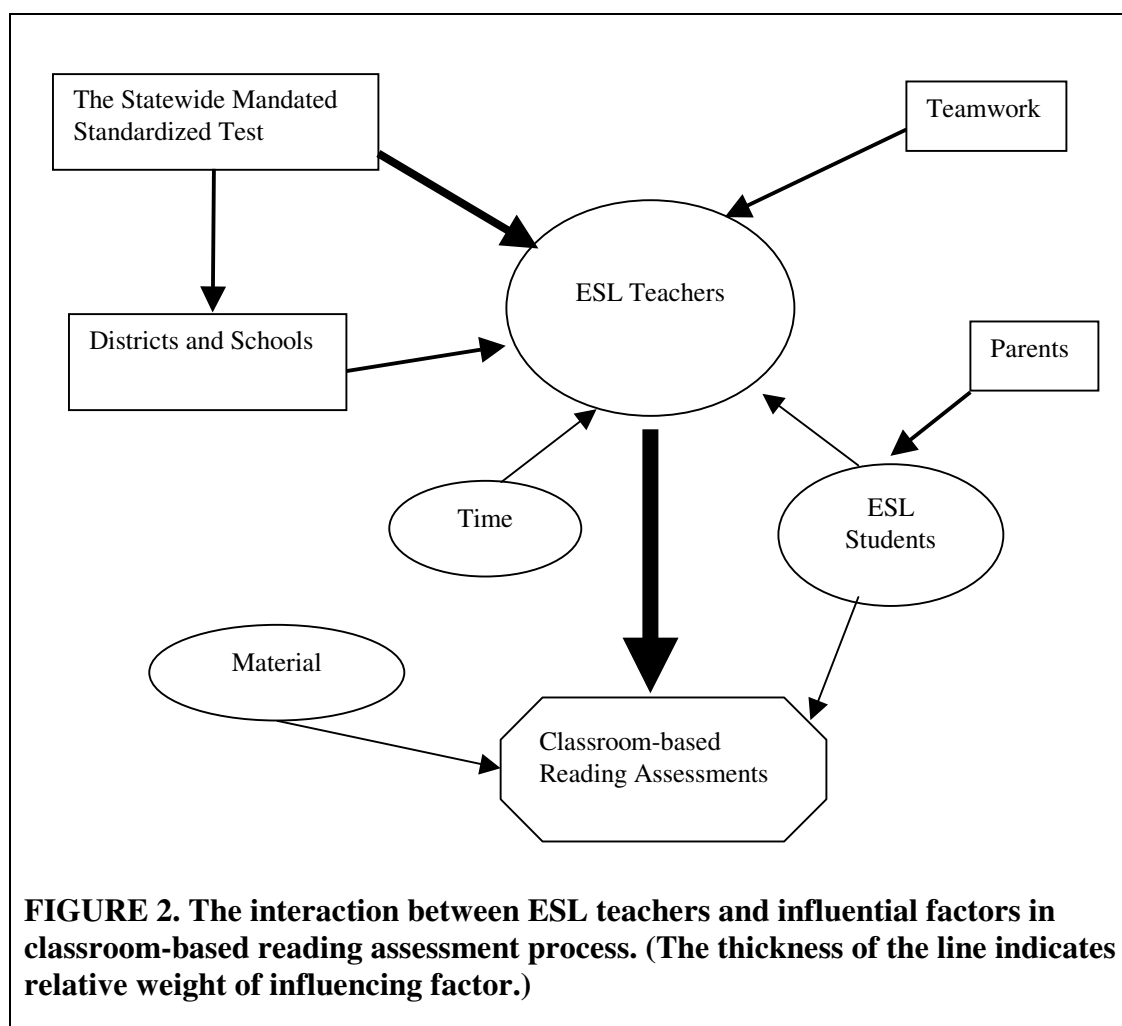
RA: There is a little bit, not a whole lot because what they are teaching is so different from what I am teaching, so not a lot, no,

MC also complained that it was hard for her to find a time to communicate with other teachers,

Not regularly, just briefly I guess because see, in very informal ways, and in ways that are not really planned. If I go to the restroom I see a teacher then I take a chance to try to discuss something with her. But on an ordinary day it is really hard to find a time to speak to another colleague although I really, really appreciate the importance of interacting with my colleagues, especially with other ESL teachers.

The Interaction between ESL Teachers and Influential Factors

In this chapter, I have discussed the major factors that influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments and the ways to which they affect the assessment processes. The following diagram will provide further illustration about how ESL teachers interact with these factors in this assessment process.



As shown in the above diagram, ESL teachers, the main conductors of classroom-based reading assessments, have direct control of this assessment process. Students, time, and materials are the internal factors influencing ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments. Students' influence is reflected in two ways. On the one hand, the large number of students and wide range of reading ability of these students complicate teachers' assessment work. On the other hand, students' attention

has direct impact on the result of this assessment. The limited time circumscribe teachers' abilities to give further development to this assessment. Materials have influence on the quality of this assessment. Statewide mandated standardized testing, district and school administrators, parents, and teamwork are the external factors influencing this assessment process. Statewide mandated standardized testing changes every aspect of ESL teachers' teaching and assessment: the content, the schedule, and the methods. District and school administrators guide and partly control the ways ESL teachers conduct classroom-based reading assessments. Statewide mandated standardized testing also puts pressure on district and school administrators who transfer these pressure to teachers. Teamwork increases teachers' assessment skills. Parents' involvement increases students' scores on classroom-based reading assessments.

Summary

The findings indicate that there were mainly three kinds of internal factors influenced ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments: students, materials, and time. The influences from students were reflected in three aspects such as: wide range of reading ability, increasing populations, and students' attention. Although in most of schools, ESL students were divided into different groups or classes according to their reading levels, the range of reading ability was still very wide inside each group or class. The wide ranges of reading ability complicate ESL teachers' assessment work.

The increasing ESL population in schools and classrooms also affected ESL teachers' assessment work. For many schools, there were just one or two ESL teachers

dealing with a number of ESL students with multiple learning levels in one school. Teachers sometimes had to take six different lessons in two days, which doubled or tripled a mainstream teacher's work. The heavy workload and limited time circumscribed teachers' abilities to give further development to these assessments.

Students' attention was the other thing that ESL teachers worried about while conducting these assessments. Teachers felt that it was hard to get an accurate idea about a student's reading ability if that student did not try the best in the assessments or did not pay attention.

Time was another factor that mattered because teachers' schedules were always tight. Most classroom-based assessments of reading did not take much extra teaching time to administer and could correlate with daily teaching, but there were a few assessments, especially the ones assigned by schools or districts, that did require teachers to devote a lot of time to them. In addition, some classroom-based reading assessments could generate a great amount of grading work, which required much energy and extra time from teachers too.

While talking about assessment materials, most ESL teachers in this study agreed that they had plenty materials to use for assessment of reading, and they felt satisfied about the quality of these materials and supplies. Yet, there were still a few teachers felt a lack of appropriate materials that could focused on specific levels of ESL students and that asked higher level thinking questions.

The external factors included districts and schools, statewide mandated standardized testing, parents, and teamwork. Districts and schools often had many

guidelines and requirements about classroom-based assessments for all teachers to follow. Teachers had to follow what the districts or schools told them to do, but personally they did not always agree with these instructions and restrictions. Sometimes teachers would make modifications to schools or district policies in order to involve both the authorities' requirements and their own ideologies of education into ESL teaching and assessment.

In most of today's public schools, statewide mandated standardized testing was pivotal to school activities. Within this field of influences, teachers' teaching and assessment could possibly be the ones that were most affected by this test. According to the participating ESL teachers, statewide mandated standardized testing changed every aspect of their teaching and assessment: the content, the schedule, and the methods. Preparing students for this test has become the center of ESL teachers' daily teaching and assessment.

As for parents' influences, most ESL teachers agreed that the ESL students whose parents were actively involved in their reading often performed better and read better than others. The parents of most ESL students, however, seldom showed up or became involved in their children's school lives. Teachers thought that the language problem might be the major cause of the absences of involvement of ESL students' parents, and they also considered that as a teacher, they had the responsibility to figure out appropriate ways to communicate with these ESL parents and get to them involved in their children's reading.

Most ESL teachers appreciated the value of teamwork and believed that

communication with other teachers could help teachers with the work of both teaching and assessment. ESL teachers' teamwork took various forms; it could be very tightly structured, like teachers worked together on each step of the assessment they used in the classrooms. It could also be just an exchange of experience, techniques and methods. Some teachers had regular and frequent discussion with other teachers. Others rarely had a chance to communicate with other colleagues.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore ESL teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based reading assessments. The research questions underpinning this study are:

1. What types of classroom-based reading assessments are used in ESL classrooms and how are they used?
2. What are ESL teachers' perceptions regarding the function and effectiveness of classroom-based reading assessments?
3. What and how do internal factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?
4. What and how do external factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments?

The data for this study was mainly collected over two periods, three months per period, in three elementary schools and five middle schools, the spring semester of 2003 and the spring semester of 2004. In addition, a few observations were conducted in the fall semester of 2004. The participants of this study are six middle school ESL teachers and seven elementary school ESL teachers. During the data collection, I conducted interviews with the participating ESL teachers, observed their classroom activities, and collected assessment materials.

Findings of this study indicated that ESL teachers commonly used three kinds of classroom-based reading assessments in their classrooms: testing, observation, and using

writing to assess reading. In addition, one ESL teacher used a series of high quality book reports created by herself for teaching and assessing reading in her classroom.

These classroom-based reading assessments served ESL teachers in two ways. The first was in helping teachers make decision about individual students. The results of classroom-based reading assessments could provide teachers information about individual students' reading strengths and weaknesses, with which teachers could tell who was right on track, who was falling behind, who needed extra help, and who needed to be pushed more, and thus be able to offer each individual student with help targeting his or her personal learning needs. Second was helping teachers make decisions about instruction. Classroom-based reading assessments could also reveal the general performance of a whole group, a pattern, a common problem or general achievement, based on which teachers are able to evaluate the effectiveness of their instructions and make decisions about future teaching. In addition to serving as a tool to assess the results of teaching and learning of reading, classroom-based reading assessments were also used as instructional instruments, helping ESL teachers convey new knowledge of reading to students, facilitating learning of reading.

Findings also indicated that ESL teachers highly valued classroom-based reading assessments and considered them a big part of their teaching of reading. They believed that most classroom-based reading assessments are valuable, accurate, and effective. However, they concerned about some tests required by districts or school authorities and considered these test as usefulness and a waste of time. In fact, ESL teachers not only have problems with those particular tests, but with assessing ESL

students by any formal paper and pencil test in their classrooms. They considered formal paper and pencil testing as inappropriate and ineffective ways to assess and encourage ESL students' learning of English.

To make a comparison, ESL teachers also commented on statewide mandated standardized testing. They claimed that these tests are unrealistic and too hard for ESL students and fail to provide an accurate and valuable evaluation of ESL students' reading progress and competency. In addition, ESL teachers also complained that the statewide mandated standardized test could not provide them with information that would benefit daily teaching of reading.

Analysis revealed that there are three internal factors and four external factors influencing ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments in practice. The internal factors include students, time, and materials. The influences from students are reflected in three aspects such as: wide range of reading ability, increasing populations, and students' attention. Time is another factor that mattered. Most classroom-based reading assessments do not take much extra teaching time to administrate and could coordinate with daily teaching, but there are a few assessments, especially the ones assigned by schools or districts, that do require teachers to devote a lot of time to them

The external factors include districts and schools, statewide mandated standardized testing, parents, and teamwork. Districts and schools often have many guidelines and requirements about classroom-based assessments for all teachers to follow. Teachers have to follow what the districts or schools told them to do, but personally they do not always agree with the districts or schools. For most of today's

public schools, statewide mandated standardized testing is the pivot of school activities. Among these events, teachers' teaching and assessment are the ones that are affected most by this test. According to the ESL teachers, statewide mandated standardized testing changes everything in their teaching and assessment -- the content, the schedule, and the methods -- and preparing students for the standardized test has become the center of their daily teaching and assessment. As for parents' influences, most ESL teachers agree that the ESL students whose parents are actively involved in their reading often perform better and read better than others. The parents of most of ESL students, however, seldom show up or become involved in their children's school lives. Teachers think that the language problem should be the major cause of the absences of ESL students' parents. Most ESL teachers appreciate the value of teamwork and believe that the communication with other teachers could help teachers with the work of both teaching and assessment. At present, ESL teachers' teamwork takes various forms; it could be very tight, like teachers working together on each step of the assessment they used in the classrooms. It could also be just an exchange of experience, techniques and methods. Some teachers have regular and frequent discussion with other peers. Others rarely have a chance to communicate with other colleagues.

Conclusion and Discussion

Four conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, classroom-based reading assessments play a central role in ESL teachers' teaching and assessment of reading. Second, ESL teachers highly value classroom-based reading assessments,

considering them valuable, accurate, and efficient. Compared to statewide mandated standardized testing, ESL teachers prefer classroom-based reading assessments. Third, ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments is largely under the control of districts or school authorities and there are many disagreements on the ways of assessing reading of ESL students between teachers and the districts or schools. Finally, statewide mandated standardized testing has over-shadowed and distorted ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessment in practice.

Classroom-Based Reading Assessment: One of the Most Valuable Assessments for ESL Students

This study has shown that classroom-based reading assessments play a central role in ESL teachers' teaching and assessment of reading, which confirms the major arguments of many researchers and educators for advocating classroom-based assessments.

According to this study, classroom-based reading assessments set up the foundation for teachers to make decisions about individual students and instruction. These assessments indicate individual ESL students' reading level, progress of reading, and problems they had, based on which teachers get ideas about where to place a particular student, what kind of help should be provided to the student, and what kind of books should be chose for the student. Also using the information produced by these assessments, teacher could discuss with parents about their children' learning or help students become aware of their own reading progress. When putting the information about different individuals' reading together, these assessments could also provide a

picture of general performance or problems of a whole class, and based on which teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and lesson plans, making decisions about what to add, what to repeat, and what to teach in the following instruction. In addition to assessing teaching and learning, classroom-based reading assessments also function as an instructional instrument.

These valuable functions of classroom-based reading assessments revealed in this study have been addressed in the arguments of advocates of classroom-based assessment. For instance, Airasian (1991) pointed out that classroom-based assessment “occupies more of a teacher’s time and arguably has a greater impact on instruction and pupil learning than do the formal measurement procedures” (p.15). Short (1993) also presented that classroom-based assessment is helpful because it can measure student progress and achievement, guide and improve instruction, and diagnose student knowledge of a topic. Shepard (1995) added that classroom-based assessment helps teachers to find the weaknesses and strengths of instruction and encourages them to continuously search for better ways to teach. More discussion about these ideas has been presented in detail in Introduction and Chapter II.

The findings of this study also support another argument of advocates that classroom-based assessments especially benefit ESL students. For instance, this study revealed that classroom-based reading assessments allow ESL teachers to address ESL students’ special needs and take into consideration their disadvantages in the assessment procedure. While conducting classroom-based reading assessment, ESL teachers were very sensitive about the assessment environment and the ways that an assessment was

conducted, making sure students feel safe, comfortable, and relaxed in the whole process. During the process, teachers also looked for the ways to provide as much support to their students as they could. In grading, teachers would focus on what students could do rather than what they could not, giving credit to any progress students have made. As discussed in Introduction and Chapter Two, the advantages of classroom-based assessments on ESL education are mentioned and disputed by many researchers and educators, including Darling-Hammond and Goodwin (1993), Resnick and Resnick (1992), Wiggins (1992), and Hamayan (1995). For instance, Chamberlain and Medinos-Landurand (1991) argue that since classroom-based assessments are individually oriented, they run less risk of suffering from the cultural bias to which statewide mandated standardized tests are prone. Hamayan (1995) also states that ESL students can benefit from classroom-based assessments because it “allows for the integration of various dimensions of learning as relating to the development of language proficiency” (p.214).

ESL Teachers Feel Satisfied with the Quality of Classroom-Based Reading Assessment

The findings of this study respond to the critiques about the efficiency, accuracy, and validity of classroom-based assessments from researchers and educators such as Worthen (1993) and Norris, Brown, Hudson, and Yoshioka (1998). They argued that alternative assessment (classroom-based assessment) fails to provide an integrated structure that shows how it designs, pilots, analyzes, and revise the procedures of

assessment so that the reliability and validity of the procedures of the assessment cannot be studied, demonstrated, and improved in public, so it hardly has a bright future. In addition, they assumed that classroom-based assessments are labor intensive and time consuming, putting more pressures on teachers.

However, these claims are rejected by ESL teachers in this study. According to the teachers, classroom-based assessments are valuable, accurate, and efficient. These teachers argued that classroom-based reading assessments are valuable because they are clearly tied to instruction, provide teachers with information about individual students' general performance of reading, and show teachers the specific reading skills or strategies a student had problem with and what kind of help the student needed. Teachers also pointed out classroom-based reading assessments are accurate and of high quality because it is an on-going process, secured by continuously assessing. In addition, many classroom-based reading assessments are mainly designed, assigned, administered, and interpreted by ESL teachers who are currently teaching the ESL students, and know them best, which further raise the quality of assessments. At last, ESL teachers mentioned that most of the classroom-based reading assessments are fast, short, and information-rich, allowing them to know students' current learning in a very short time.

This study also shows that the ESL teachers do consider subjectivity as a very serious issue in classroom-based reading assessments. While talking about the issue of subjectivity and objectivity related to classroom-based reading assessments, some teachers deny that there was subjectivity problem in their classroom-based reading assessment. Some did admit the existence of subjectivity, but did not consider it as

detrimental to the quality of these assessments, and they also argued that sometimes the subjectivity could be an advantage to students. Just a few teachers expressed their worry about subjectivity.

Districts or School Administrators Interfere with ESL Teachers' Use of Classroom-Based Reading Assessment

This study also revealed that districts or school administrators have significant influences on ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessments. Districts and schools often have many guidelines and requirements about classroom-based assessments for all teachers to follow. Some districts and schools even assign a particular reading assessment to ESL teachers, in which everything is pre-regulated, leaving little room for teachers to make their own choices. However, teachers do not always agree with the requirements of the districts or schools. They complained that some policies or assessments assigned by districts or schools do not work well in practice or are not suitable for the specific situation of a particular classroom. Unfortunately, teachers felt powerless to make any change concerning these policies, and they had to follow what the districts or schools told them to do no matter how uncomfortable and resistant they felt inside.

The finding of this study exposes the problem of teachers' lack of power in decision-making process with regard to educational policy in the current educational system, a situation which has been addressed by researchers such as Good and Brophy (2000). In the current educational system, teachers are often left out of in the process of

decision-making related to teaching, learning, and school affairs. They have to follow all kinds of policies and rules that are made by experts, administrators, and principals other than themselves. The powerlessness of teachers on the decision-making of educational policy, in fact, has marginalized teachers' role in education. However, teachers are the ones who work at the front line of education, having the first hand knowledge about what works and what is needed for teaching and learning, and they are also the final conductors of educational policy. Ignoring the input of teachers in the process of decision-making is not only a great waste of resources, but also could ultimately hurt the effective application of any educational policy in practice. In addition, Good and Brophy (2000) also pointed out that if schoolteachers are powerless in most school and district life, there is no way to set up a real democratic educational system. Therefore, teacher should be empowered more in our modern educational system.

Classroom-Based Reading Assessment Lives under the Shadow of Statewide Mandated Standardized Testing

ESL students are exempted from statewide mandated standardized tests if they have been in the U.S and enrolled in ESL/bilingual education programs for only three years or less in many states (Menken, 2000), but the pressure of statewide mandated standardized tests on ESL teachers and students is not less than the regular teachers and students because ESL students still have to face the test sooner or later, and to pass it they must start preparing at the beginning of their learning of English (Ruetten, 1994).

The findings of this study show that ESL teachers' use of classroom-based

reading assessments has been shadowed and distorted by statewide mandated standardized testing; it broke ESL teachers' regular teaching schedule. During a one to two month period, ESL teachers had to only teach and assess the certain subjects that the coming test would test on until after the test. ESL teachers also had to constantly shift the direction of their teaching and assessment to adapt the change of statewide mandated standardized tests, which would sometimes invalidate teachers' past teaching in a way. Preparing students for the statewide mandated standardized test has become the center of teachers' daily teaching and assessment.

In addition, this study shows that ESL teachers have generally negative views about statewide mandated standardized testing. Teachers in this study claimed that the statewide mandated standardized reading test (TAKS) was unrealistic and too hard for ESL students and failed to provide accurate and valuable evaluation of ESL students' reading progress and competency. ESL teachers also complained that the statewide mandated standardized tests could not provide them with information that would benefit daily teaching of reading.

These findings are consistent with other empirical studies including Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001), Urdan and Paris (1994), Johnson, Guice, Baker, Malone, and Michelson (1995), and Haladyna, Nolen, and Haas, (1991). For instance, the study of Johnson, et al. (1995) indicated the pressure from accountability assessment forced teachers to change the ways of their teaching and assessment in classroom. Hoffman, et al. (2001) found that teachers start to prepare students for TAAS more than a month before testing, but they almost always plan their curriculum for the year to emphasize

those areas that will be tested on TAAS. Urdan and Paris (1994) revealed that most teachers have negative beliefs about the merits and validity of statewide mandated standardized tests. Especially, teachers of non-white students view the test more negatively and perceive more negative consequences for students.

Statewide mandated standardized testing mainly contributes to public accountability; classroom-based assessments have more power to evaluate instruction and identify students' personal needs. Both of them play a role in teaching and learning, serving different directions in educational practice. However, at present, statewide mandated standardized testing has gained overwhelming attention in school life, and classroom-based assessments are of no concern. There is an urgent need for schools and districts to re-balance the emphasis on both statewide mandated standardized testing and classroom-based assessments in teaching and learning.

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Research

The Theoretical Contributions

The present study depicts a general picture of ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessment in practice including the process, the functions, the problems, and the influential factors, "providing a foundation for possible recommendations regarding continuation or change" (Fitzgerald, 1995, p. 126). The findings of this study also verify the assumptions that classroom-based assessments guide instruction and identify individual student's learning strengths and weaknesses. The discussion contributes to the

body of research seeking an alternative to standardized testing (Darling-Hammond and Goodwin, 1993; Garcia and Pearson, 1994; Resnick and Resnick, 1992; Short, 1993; Stiggins, 1999; Wiggins, 1992) as well as the growing body of research emphasizing teachers' voices and opinions in educational research and policies (Casimir, Mattox, and Hays, 2000; Commeyras, Osborn, and Bruce, 1994; Dhunpath, 2000; Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseoglou, and Stogiannidou, 2000). At last, this present study provides further insight into the development of classroom-based reading assessments.

The Implications for Schools and Districts

This study indicates that classroom-based reading assessments play a central role in ESL teachers' teaching and assessment of reading. District and school administrators should pay more attention to this type of assessment, addressing its importance in school life and provide teachers with more supports regarding to the use of classroom-based reading assessments, for instance, providing teachers workshops about assessment skills and strategies or providing teachers with more assessments materials and supplies.

The discussion of this study about relationships among teachers, districts, and schools in dealing with classroom-based reading assessments also holds implications for district and schools' work. First, while making and enforcing any policy related to classroom-based assessments, district and schools should involve teachers in the decision-making process and make an effort to reach an agreement with teachers, avoiding forcing teachers to follow an assessment policy with which they do not feel comfortable with. Second, districts and schools should be careful about interfering in

teachers assessment work too much, and leave more room for teachers to make their own choices in regard to this activity.

This study suggests that teamwork would help teachers' use of classroom-based assessments. Districts and schools should create more opportunities for teachers to interact and communicate with each other, and encourage teachers to discuss, negotiate, and learn the best way to conduct classroom-based assessment in a team or a group. There are several ways that might help increasing teachers' teamwork, such as professional discussion seminars, peer observation, peer coaching, and action research (Good and Brophy, 2000). Finally, districts and schools should pay attention to finding a balance between the statewide mandated standardized testing and classroom-based assessments, in an effort to decrease the overwhelming influence of statewide mandated standardized testing on daily teaching and learning.

Suggestions to Further Research

The present study has suggested that the procedure of classroom-based reading assessments involved teachers, students, districts, school administrators, and parents. To have a comprehensive and profound understanding of classroom-based assessment, the voices of most of these subjects should be heard and addressed. This present study, however, only focused on ESL teachers' perceptions and use of this kind of assessments. No students, parent, or administrator were invited into this study. Further research is thus needed to investigate the contributions and perceptions of the other forces.

Several studies are suggested to further research in ESL classroom-based reading

assessments. One study could focus on ESL students, investigating these students' perceptions about classroom-based reading assessments. The research questions that may be addressed in such a study are:

1. What can ESL students learn from classroom-based reading assessments and how could these assessments help students with self-monitoring?
2. Which specific types of classroom-based reading assessments that ESL students think are making them feel more comfortable with?

A second suggested study could be a comprehensive study involving teachers, parents, students, and districts or schools authorities into the discussion of the use of classroom-based reading assessments.

A third suggested study could investigate the regular English language arts teachers' use and perceptions of classroom-based reading assessments. A comparison of the perceptions and use from both ESL teachers and regular English language arts teachers may reveal how much ESL students would benefit from this kind of assessments and which aspects of classroom-based assessments should be addressed to serve ESL students' needs.

Also, the present study calls for attention to the relationship between statewide mandated standardized testing and classroom-based assessments once again. Further research could focus on the comparison of statewide mandated standardized reading tests and classroom-based reading assessments, eliciting feedbacks from teachers, districts, parents, and students. A study examining this comparison could help schools find an appropriate way to balance the emphasis on statewide mandated standardized testing and

classroom-based assessment in teaching and learning.

In addition, this study has suggested that classroom-based reading assessments play a valuable role in ESL teaching and learning, and most of them are designed, assigned, administered, and interpreted by ESL teachers. Accordingly, further research is necessary to investigate the preparedness of current pre-service ESL teachers about classroom-based assessments.

A Concluding Note

This study has demonstrated ESL teachers' perceptions of and use of classroom-based reading assessment. At present, there are three kinds of classroom-based reading assessments commonly used by ESL teachers in the classrooms: tests, observation, and using writing to assess reading. These classroom-based reading assessments serve ESL teachers in two ways: helping teachers make decision about individual students and helping teachers make decision about instruction. In addition, classroom-based reading assessments are also effective instructional instruments. ESL teachers highly value classroom-based reading assessment, and consider it accurate and valuable that could provide great help to daily teaching of reading. Students, statewide mandated standardized tests, and district administrators are three major forces that influence this assessment process. With this research I hope to further the heated conversation about classroom-based assessments and measurement of ESL students; drawing people's attention to classroom-based assessments and emphasizing the harm of the overpowering influence of statewide mandated standardized testing on teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

- Airasian, P. W. (1991). Perspectives on measurement instruction. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 10(1), 13-16, 26.
- Allen, D.D., & Flippo, R.F. (2002). Alternative assessment in the preparation of literacy educators: Responses from students. *Reading Psychology*, 23(15), 15-26.
- Anfara, V.A., Brown, K.M., & Mangione, T.L. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher*, 31(7), 28-38.
- Angaran, J. (1999). Reflection in an age of assessment: Do frequent tests actually impede meaningful education? One veteran teacher says yes. *Educational Leadership*, 56(6), 71-72.
- Ashton, P. T. (1990). Editorial. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(1), 1.
- Ayers, W. (2001). *To teach: The journey of a teacher*. New York: Teacher College Press.
- Barton, P.E., & Coley, R. J. (1994). *Testing in American's schools*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Bauer, E. B., & Garcia, G. E. (2002). Lessons from a classroom teacher's use of alternative literacy assessment. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 36(4), 462-494.
- Bibou-Nakou, I., Kiosseoglou, G., & Stogiannidou, A. (2000). Elementary teachers perceptions regarding school behavior problems: Implications for school psychological services. *Psychology in the Schools*, 37(2), 123-134.
- Bracey, G. (1989). The \$150 million redundancy. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 70(9), 698-702.

- Brindley, G. (1989). *Assessing achievement in the learner-centered curriculum*. Sydney, Australia: Macquarie University. National Center for English Language Teaching and Research.
- Brookhart, B. A., & Freeman, D. J. (1992). Characteristics of entering teacher candidates. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(1), 37-60.
- Brown, J., & Hudson, T. (1998). The alternatives in language assessment. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(4), 653-675.
- Carrell, P.L. (1984). Schema theory and ESL reading: Classroom implications and applications. *The Modern Language Journal*, 68(4), 332-343.
- Carrell, P.L. (1988). Introduction: Interactive approaches to second language reading. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine, & D.E. Eskey (Eds.), *Interactive approach to second language reading* (pp. 1-9). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Casimir, M., Mattox, N., & Hays, J. (2000). Teaching through the prism of difference: A dialogue among four bilingual, African-ancestry teachers. *Theory into Practice*, 39(4), 248-57.
- Chamberlain, P., & Medinos-Landurand, P. (1991). Practical considerations for the assessment of LEP students with special needs. In E.V. Hamayan, & J.S. Damico (Eds.), *Limiting bias in the assessment of bilingual students* (pp. 111-156). Austin, TX: ProEd.
- Charmaz, K. (1988). The grounded theory method: An explication and interpretation. In R.M. Emerson (Ed.), *Contemporary field research: A collection of reading* (pp. 109-126). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

- Clark, C. M., & Peterson, P. L. (1986). Teachers' thought processes. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp. 255-296). New York: Macmillan.
- Clark, C. M. (1988). Asking the right questions about teacher preparation: Contributions of research on teaching thinking. *Educational Researcher*, 17(2), 5-12.
- Commeyras, M., Osborn, J., and Bruce, B. (1994). What do classroom teachers think about the 1992 NAEP in reading? *Reading Research and Instruction*, 34(1), 5-18.
- Crawford, L. (1993). *Language and literacy learning in multicultural classrooms*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Goodwin, L. (1993). Progress toward professionalism in teaching. In G. Kawelti (Ed.), *Challenges and achievements of American education* (pp. 19-52). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Davey, B. (1983). Think aloud--modeling the cognitive processes or reading comprehension. *Journal of Reading*, 27(1), 44-47.
- Denzin, N.K. (1978). *Sociological methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Dhunpath, R. (2000). Life history methodology: "Narradigm" regained. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)*, 13(5), 1-9.
- Diaz-Rico, L. T., & Weed, K.Z. (2002). *The crosscultural, language, and academic development handbook*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

- DiCerbo, P.A. (2000). *Common practices for uncommon learners: Addressing linguistic and cultural diversity*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education*, 6, 1-6.
- Duff, G., & Anderson, L. (1984). Teachers' theoretical orientations and the real classroom. *Reading Psychology*, 5(1-2), 97-104.
- Ellis, E.S. (1989). A model for assessing cognitive reading strategies. *Academic Therapy*, 24(4), 407-424.
- Ferguson, R. F. (2003). Teachers' perceptions and expectations and the black-white tests score gap. *Urban Education*, 38(4), 460-507.
- Fitzgerald, J. (1995). English-as-second-language reading instruction in the United States: A research review. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 27(2), 115-152.
- Ford, M. I. (1994). Teachers' beliefs about mathematical problem solving in the elementary school. *School Science and Mathematics*, 94(6), 314-22.
- Francis, N. (1999). Applications of cloze procedure to reading assessment in special circumstances of literacy development. *Reading Horizons*, 40(1), 23-46.
- Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., & Philips, N. (1994). The relation between teachers' beliefs about the importance of good student work habits, teacher planning, and student achievement. *Elementary School Journal*, 94(3), 331-345.
- Garcia, G.E., & Pearson, P.D. (1994). Assessment and diversity. *Review of Research in Education*, 20, 337-392
- Genesee, F., & Hamayan, E.V. (1991). Classroom-based assessment. In E.V. Hamayan,

- & J.S. Damico (Eds.), *Limiting bias in the assessment of bilingual students* (pp. 212-239). Austin, TX: Pro-ED.
- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Good, T., & Brophy, J. (2000). *Looking in classrooms* (8th Ed.). New York: Longman.
- Goodman, K.S. (1967). Reading: A psycholinguistic guessing game. *Journal of the Reading Specialist*, 6(1), 126-135.
- Gredler, M. (1999). *Classroom assessment and learning*. New York: Longman.
- Grossman, P.L., Reynolds, J. A., Ringstaff, C., & Sykes, G. (1985). *From English major to English teacher: New approaches to an old problem* (Knowledge Growth in a Profession Series). Stanford, CA: Stanford University School of Education.
- Guba, E.G. (1990). *The paradigm dialog*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Haladyna, T.M., Nolen, S.B., & Haas, N. (1991). Raising standardized achievement test scores and the origins of test score pollution. *Educational Researcher*, 20(5), 2-7.
- Hamayan, E. V. (1995). Approaches to alternative assessment. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 15, 212-226.
- Heibert, E.H., & Davinroy, K. (1993). *Dilemmas and issues in implementing classroom-based assessments for literacy: A case study of the effects of alternative assessment in instruction, student learning and accountability practice*. Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado at Boulder, National Center for Research of Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing.
- Heilman, A.W., Blair, T.R., & Rupley, W.H. (1994). *Principles and practices of*

- teaching reading*. Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Company.
- Hill, C., & Parry, K. (1994) (Eds.) *From testing to assessment: English as in international language*. New York: Longman.
- Hoffman, J.V. Assaf, L.C., & Paris, S.G. (2001). High-stakes testing in reading: Today in Texas, tomorrow? *The Reading Teacher*, 54(5), 482-492.
- Hollon, R. E., Anderson, C. W., & Roth, K. L. (1991). Science teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning. In J. Brophy (Ed.), *Advances in research on teaching* (pp. 145-185). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Huerta-Macias, A. (1993). *Current terms in adult EFL literacy*. Washington, DC: National Clearing House on Literacy Education.
- Huerta-Macias, A. (1995). Alternative assessment: Responses to commonly asked questions. *TESOL Journal*, 5(1), 8-11.
- Hurley, S. R., & Tinajero, J.V. (2001). *Literacy assessment of second language learners*. Boston, MA: Allen and Bacon.
- Jegede, O., & Taplin, M. (2000). Trainee teachers' perception of their knowledge about expert teaching. *Educational Research*, 42(3), 287-308.
- Johnson, K.E (1992). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices during literacy instruction for non-native speakers of English. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 24(1), 83-108.
- Johnson, K.E. (1996). Portfolio assessment in second language teacher education. *TESOL Journal*, 6(2), 11-14.
- Johnson, P., Guice, S., Baker, K., Malone, J. and Michelson, N. (1995). Assessment of

- teaching and learning in “literature-based” classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(4), 359-371.
- Kagan, D. M. (1992). Implications of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist*, 27(1), 65-90.
- Kampfer, S. H., Horvath, L.L., Kleinert, H. L., & Kearns, J. F. (2001). Teachers’ perceptions of one state’s alternate assessment: Implications for practice and preparation. *Exceptional Children*, 67(3), 361-374.
- Ko, A. C., & Lee, J. C. (2003). Teachers’ perceptions of teaching environmental issues within the science curriculum: A Hong Kong perspective. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 12(3), 187-204.
- LeCompte, M.D., & Presissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1981). *Do evaluators wear grass skirts? “Going native” and ethnocentrism as problems in utilization*. Paper presented at the joint annual meeting of the Evaluation Network and the Evaluation Research Society, Austin, TX, October 1981.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. (1995). Developing analysis. In J. Lofland, & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Analyzing social setting* (pp. 183-203). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Mangano, N., & Allen, J. (1986). Teachers’ beliefs about language arts and their effects on students beliefs and instruction. In J. Niles, & R. Lalik (Eds.) *Solving problem*

- in literacy: Learners, teachers, and researcher* (pp. 136-142). Rochester, NY: National Reading Conference.
- Menken, K. (2000). *What are the critical issues in wide-scale assessment of English language learners?* Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Merriam, S.B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S.B. (1991). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (1995). What can you tell from an N of 1?: Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 4, 51-60.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moje, E.B., Brozo, W.G., & Haas, J. (1994). Portfolios in a high school classroom: Challenges to change. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 33(4), 275-292.
- Mokhtari, K., & Reichard, C.A. (2002). Assessing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(2), 249-259.
- Morine-Dersheimer, G. (1983). *Tapping teacher thinking through triangulation of data sets*. Austin, TX: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, University of Texas at Austin.
- Norris, J., Brown, J., Hudson, T., & Yoshioka, J. (1998). *Designing second language performance assessments*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

- Nuttall, C. (1982). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. London: Heinemann Educational Books
- Olson, D.R. (1990). Forum response. *TOESL Talk*, 20(1), 18-22.
- O'Neil, J. (1992). Putting performance assessment to the test. *Educational Leadership*, 49(8), 14-19.
- Paratore, J.R., & Indrisano, R. (1987). Intervention assessment of reading comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 40(8), 778-783.
- Parry, K. (1994). The test and the text: readers in a Nigerian secondary school. In C. Hill, & K. Parry (Eds.) *From testing to assessment: English as in international language* (pp. 82-113). New York: Longman.
- Peacock, M. (2001). Pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning: A longitudinal study. *System*, 29(2), 177-195.
- Peters, C.W. (1991). You can't have authentic assessment without authentic content. *Reading Teacher*, 44(8), 590-591.
- Prawat, R.S., & Anderson, A. L. H. (1988) Eight teachers' control orientations and their students' problem-solving ability. *Elementary School Journal*, 89(1), 99-111.
- Putnam, J., & Duffy, G. (1984). *A descriptive study of the pre-active and interactive decision making of an expert classroom teacher*. Research series No. 148. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, Institute for Research in Teaching.
- Resnick, D.P. (1982). History of educational testing. In A. K. Wigdor, & W.R. Garner (Eds.), *Ability tests: Uses, consequences, and controversies, Part II* (pp. 173-194). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

- Resnick, L.B., & Resnick, D.P. (1992). Assessing the thinking curriculum: New tools for educational reform. In B. R. Gifford, & M.C. O' Connor (Eds.), *Changing assessment: Alternative views of aptitude, achievement, and instruction* (pp. 37-75). Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Rhodes, L., & Shanklin, N.L. (1990). Miscue analysis in the classroom (assessment). *Reading Teacher*, 44(3), 252-254.
- Richardson, V., Anders, P., Tidwell, D., & Lloyd, C. (1991). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in reading comprehension instruction. *American Educational Research Journal*, 28(3), 559-586.
- Robbin, S., Moss, P., Clark, C.T., Goering, S., Herter, R., Templin, M., & Wascha, K. (1995). Negotiating authority in portfolio classrooms: Teachers' use of assessment theory to critique practice. *Action in Teacher Education*, XVII (1), 40-51.
- Rothman, R. (1990). Ford study urges new test system to "open gates of opportunity." *Education Week*, IX (36), 1, 12.
- Ruetten, M. (1994). Evaluating ESL students' performance on proficiency exams. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 3(2), 85-96.
- Rumelhart, D.E. (1977). Toward an interactive model of reading. In S. Dornic (Ed.), *Attention and performance* (pp. 573-603), Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rupley, W.H., & Logan, J. W. (1984). *Elementary teachers' beliefs about reading and knowledge of reading content: Relationship to decision about reading outcomes*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No ED285162.
- Sahin, C., Bullock, K., & Stables, A. (2002). Teachers' beliefs and practices in relation

- to their beliefs about questioning at key stage 2. *Educational Studies*, 28(4), 371-384.
- Scarcella, R. (1990). *Teaching language minority students in the multicultural classroom*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Shepard, L. A. (1995). Using assessment to improve learning. *Educational Leadership*, 52(5), 38-43.
- Shepaz, L. (1991). Will national tests improve student learning? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 73(3), 232-238.
- Short, D. (1993). Assessing integrated language and content instruction, *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(4), 627-656.
- Skelton, C. (2003). Male primary teachers and perceptions of masculinity. *Educational Review*, 55(2), 195-209.
- Smolen, L., Newman, C., Wathen, T., & Lee, D. (1995). Developing student self-assessment strategies. *TESOL Journal*, 5(1), 22-27.
- Smith, M. L., Edelsky, C., Draper, K., Rottenberg, C., & Cherland, M. (1989) *The role of testing in elementary schools*. Los Angeles, CA: Center for Research on Educational Standards and Student Tests, Graduate School of Education, UCLA.
- Stiggins, R.J. (1999). Assessment, student confidence, and school success. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(3), 191-198.
- Texas Education Agency (TEA). (2004). 2002-2003 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report, Source retrieved from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/>
- Tierney, R.J. (1998). Literacy assessment reform: Shifting beliefs, principled

- possibilities, and emerging practices. *Reading Teacher*, 51(5), 374-390.
- Urdan, T. C., & Paris, S.G. (1994). Teachers' perceptions of standardized achievement tests. *Educational Policy*, 8(2), 137-56.
- Valencia, S., & Pearson, P. D. (1987). Reading assessment: Time for a change. *Reading Teacher*, 40 (8), 726-732.
- Vecchio, A.D., Gustke, C., & Wilde, J. (2000). Alternative assessment for Latino students. In J.V. Tinajero, & R. A. Devillar (Eds.), *The power of two languages* (pp. 365-382). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Wiggins, G.P. (1992). *Assessing student performance*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Wilson, S. M., & Wineburg, S.S. (1988). Peering at history through different lenses: The role of disciplinary perspectives in teaching history. *Teachers College Record*, 89(4), 525-539.
- Wing, L. (1989). The influence of preschool teachers' beliefs on young children's conceptions of reading and writing. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 4(1), 61-74.
- Winograd, P., Bridge, C., & Paris, S.G. (1991). Improving the assessment of literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 45(2), 108-116.
- Wixson, K.K., Valencia, S.W., & Lipson, M.Y. (1994). Issues in literacy assessment: facing the realities of internal and extent assessment. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 26(3), 315-337.
- Wolf, K.P. (1993). From informal to informed assessment: Recognizing the role of the classroom teacher. *Journal of Reading*, 36(7), 518-523.

- Wood, T., Cobb, P., & Yackel, E. (1990). The contextual nature of teaching: Mathematics and reading instruction in one second-grade classroom. *Elementary School Journal*, 90(5), 497-513.
- Worthen, B. (1993). Critical issues that will determine the future of alternative assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74(6), 444-448, 450-454.
- Wrigley, H.S. (1992). *Learner assessment in adult EFL literacy*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education.
- Wrigley, H.S. (1993). *Sparks of excellence: Program realities and promising practices in adult EFL*. Washington, DC: Southport Institute for Policy Analysis.
- Yochum, N., & Miller, S. D. (1990). Classroom reading assessment: Using students' perceptions (research into practice). *Reading Psychology*, 11(2), 159-165.
- Zimmerman, S., & Deckert-Pelton, M. (2003). Evaluating the evaluators: Teachers perceptions of the principal's role in professional evaluation. *NASSP Bulletin*, 87(636), 28-37.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What types of informal assessment methods do you use to assess student's reading competence in your classroom? Would you explain to me how you use them? Which of these do you use most often? Is the one you use most often your favorite? If yes, why? If not favorite, why do you use it most often?
2. How often do you use these different methods?
3. What kinds of difficulties or problems do you encounter when assessing reading in your classroom?
 - a. Do you have enough material or information to conduct the assessment?
 - b. Do your students' reading abilities have a large range? How does this range in ability affect your assessments?
 - c. Do you want to get expertise help?
 - d. Do the classroom-based assessment tasks take too much your time or create more burdens on your daily work?
4. What kinds of information do these assessments give you? What kinds of information do they leave out? What is the quality of information you believe these assessments give you?
5. What is your idea about classroom-based reading assessments' objectivity? And what do you do to enhance those assessments' objectivity?
6. How valuable do you believe these assessments to be? What function do you see these assessments serving?
7. How does students' personal background information influence your interpretation of the outcomes of assessment? How do you collect this information?
8. How do you use the outcomes of assessment? What kinds of influence do they have on your instruction for reading?
9. How does your school administrator or district requirements influence your assessment design in classroom?
10. What kinds of influence do statewide mandated tests have on your classroom-based reading assessment?
11. What influences do parent have on your classroom-based reading assessments?
12. Do you discuss assessment methods with other ESL teachers? How do these discussions affect your own assessment design? Could you please give me some examples?

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Question	Interview Question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of classroom-based reading assessment are used in ESL classrooms? 	IQ 1, IQ 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are ESL teachers' perceptions regarding the function and effectiveness of classroom-based reading assessments? 	IQ 4, IQ 5, IQ 6, IQ 8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What and how do the external factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessment? 	IQ 9, IQ 10, IQ 11, IQ 12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What and how do the internal factors influence ESL teachers' use of classroom-based reading assessment? 	IQ 3, IQ 7

APPENDIX C**INTERVIEW SUMMARY FORM**

Contact date: _____

School Code _____

Today's date: _____

Teacher Code _____

Interview time: _____

Site: _____

A. Participant background information:

1. Name _____
2. Gender _____
3. Degrees _____
4. Years of teaching _____

B. Researcher's reflection:

1. Main issues/themes I observed/heard in this interview
2. Summarizing information from questions
3. Which questions did not get adequate answers for?
4. Salient points from this interview

C. Concerns:

APPENDIX D

AUDIT TRAIL

Elementary School Teachers

- 1) AB
 - a) OD
 - i) O1----Classroom Observation at 9:15am-10:00am on April 22, 2004.
 - b) ID-----Interview at 8:15am-8: 50am on April 23, 2004; place, the teacher's classroom
 - c) DD-----Worksheets
- 2) CI
 - a) OD
 - i) O1---Classroom Observation at 9:00am-10: 50am on April 20, 2004.
 - ii) O2--- Classroom Observation at 9:00am- 10:00am on May 3, 2004.
 - b) ID-----Interview at 11:00am-11: 30am, 12:15am-12: 45am on April 20, 200; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD-----Worksheets
- 3) CM
 - a) OD
 - i) O1---Classroom Observation at 9:05am-10:00am on September 27, 2004.
 - ii) O2---Classroom Observation at 9:00am-10:00am on September 29, 2004
 - b) ID-----Interview at 3:00pm-3: 30pm on May 17, 2004; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD-----Worksheets
- 4) JI
 - a) OD
 - i) O1----Observation at 9:44am-10: 30am on April 21, 2004.
 - ii) O2----Observation at 9:00am-10:00am on September 23, 2004
 - b) ID-----Interview at 2:10pm-3: 20pm on March 4, 2003; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD-----Worksheets
- 5) KS
 - a) OD
 - i) O1---Observation at 8:55am-9: 30am on April 22, 2004
 - b) ID-----Interview at 9:30am-10: 20am on April 23, 2004; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD---None
- 6) MC
 - a) OD

- i) O1----Classroom Observation at 8: 30am-9: 30am on April 29, 2004
 - ii) O2-----Classroom Observation at 9: 00am-9: 40am on September 28, 2004
 - b) ID-----Interview at 1:30pm-2: 20pm on April 29, 2004; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD-----Worksheets
- 7) RL
- a) OD
 - i) O1---Classroom Observation at 8:45am-9: 40am on September 20, 2004.
 - ii) O2----Classroom Observation at 8:40am-9: 40am on September 22, 2004.
 - b) ID-----Interview at 2:10pm-2: 50pm on May 17, 2004
 - c) DD-----Worksheet

Middle School Teachers

- 1) AN
 - a) OD
 - i) O1---Classroom Observation at 8: 30am-10: 01am on May 12, 2004
 - ii) O2---Classroom Observation at 1: 00pm-2: 00pm on May 14, 2004
 - b) ID---Interview at 2:10pm-3: 30pm on May 12, 2004
 - c) DD---Worksheets
- 2) AT
 - a) OD
 - i) O1---Classroom Observation at 1: 08pm-1: 45pm on April 1, 2004.
 - ii) O2---Classroom Observation at 12: 25am-1: 50pm on April 8, 2004.
 - b) ID----Interview at 2:10pm-3: 30pm on April 8, 2004; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD---Worksheets
- 3) BG
 - a) OD
 - i) O1---Classroom Observation at 9: 11am-9: 55am on May 13, 2004.
 - ii) O2---Classroom Observation at 1:30 pm-2:00pm on October 4, 2004.
 - b) ID-----Interview at 10: 10am-11: 00am on May 13, 2004; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD----Evaluation reports
- 4) MH
 - a) OD
 - i) O1---Classroom Observation at 9: 48am-10: 24am on April 7, 2004.
 - ii) O2---Classroom Observation at 10: 33am-11: 24am on April 13, 2004.
 - iii) O3---Classroom Observation at 9: 38am-10: 25am on April 14, 2004.

- b) ID-----Interview at 1: 30pm-2: 30pm on February 29, 2003 and March 5, 2003; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD-----Book reports and worksheets
- 5) PF
- a) OD---None
 - b) ID-----Interview at 3: 45pm-4: 20pm on March 3, 2003; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD-----None
- 6) RA
- a) OD
 - i) O1---Classroom Observation at 12: 55am-2: 15pm on March 11, 2004.
 - ii) O2---Classroom Observation at 8: 04am-9: 40am on April 1, 2004.
 - b) ID-----Interview at 2: 20pm-2: 50pm on March 11, 2004; place, the teacher's classroom.
 - c) DD-----None

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

(English as a Second Language Teachers' Perceptions and Use of Classroom-Based Reading Assessment)

I have been asked to participate in a research study regarding classroom-based reading assessment in ESL class. I was selected to be a possible participant because I am a certified ESL teacher who has over one year teaching experience. A total of 20 teachers have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to explore ESL teachers' perceptions and use of classroom-based reading assessments.

If I agree to be in this study, I will engage in two audio-taped 30-40 minute interviews at an appropriate (public or private site) common area with Yueming Jia regarding my perceptions and practice of classroom-based reading assessment. I will also permit Yueming Jia to visit my classroom two times to observe my teaching and assessing activities. In addition, I will allow Ms. Jia to collect some materials that I used for assessing reading comprehension in classroom. I understand there is no compensation for participating in this study

I understand that this study is confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely in locked cabinet, room 347 of Harrington tower in Texas A&M University and only Yueming Jia or her academic advisors will have access to the records. In addition, audiotapes used in the investigation will be erased in one year after completion of this study.

I understand that participation is entirely voluntary. My decision whether or not to participate will not affect my current or future relations with Texas A&M University and my school. If I decide to participate, I am free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable. I can withdraw at any time by informing Yueming Jia (979-260-7765) without any adverse consequences. I can contact Yueming Jia or her academic advisors, Dr. Lynn M. Burlbaw and Dr. Zohreh Eslamirasekh, at Teaching, Learning, and Culture/College of Education, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX77843 (Phone 979-846-6195) with any question about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board- Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Research Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at (979) 845-8585 (mwbuckley@tamu.edu).

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent document for my records. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX F

A SAMPLE OF MH'S BOOK REPORT

Name_____Date_____#_____

Non Fiction Book Report – Basic

1 What is the subject (theme) of this book?

2. Write three important facts you learned.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. Which is your favorite part of this book.

Why is this your favorite part?

4. How is this subject connected to your life?

5. The author wrote this passage to...

to describe something to me (an imagination story -Fiction)

to inform me about something (real facts – Non Fiction)

to persuade me to do or buy something (TV commercial or
newspaper ad)

to explain how to do something (game instructions - recipes)

6. Draw a picture of something new you learned.

Label the different parts.

APPENDIX G

A SAMPLE OF MODEL LESSONS

Unit 2– Paired Texts

English Language Arts, Grade 6

Lesson 2.9 – TAKS Moment/Test Review/Proofreading/Editing (90 minutes)

Student Practice

1. Student Practice embedded in Concept Development. (test review)
2. Student Practice embedded in Concept Development (TAKS preparation)
3. Student Practice embedded in Concept Development. (editing/proofreading)

Assessment

1. Assessed on unit test in Lesson 2.10.
2. Assess informally by looking for:
 - ✓ *Students choosing strategies or skills appropriate to question.*
 - ✓ *Students giving a reason why they chose a particular answer.*
3. Look for:
 - ✓ *Students trading papers with each group member.*
 - ✓ *Students recognizing listed descriptors.*
 - ✓ *Students using editing/proofreading marks to make corrections.*

Closure

- Review requirements of Mini-Poster project. Tell students to bring poster to next class meeting.
- Have students practice presenting their vocabulary mini-poster. Circulate and monitor, providing guidance and feedback.
- Post and explain the following for homework:
 - ✓ Rewrite final draft of comparison/contrast composition and bring to next class meeting.
 - ✓ Bring Vocabulary Mini-Poster to next class meeting.

Resources

- A11 Clocking
- B37 TAKS Practice Test
- B38 Proofreading/Editing Marks
- B41 Unit Test Review
- B44 Proofreading/Editing Self Checklist
- TR1 Skills Menu
- TR7 A TAKS Moment
- *The Language of Literature*

VITA

Name: Yueming Jia

Address:

Teaching, Learning, and Culture, Mail Stop 4232

College of Education and Human Development

Texas A&M University

College Station, TX77842

Education:

Texas A&M University, 2004 (Ph.D.)

Jilin University, 2000 (M.A.)

Jilin University, 1997 (B.A.)