How Teachers' Perceptions Affect the Academic and Language Assessment of Immigrant Children

Figueiredo, S*, Alves Martins, M. Silva, C., Simões, C.  
* sandradfigueiredo@ua.pt

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Introduction

• Recent research evidences inconsistencies in teachers' practice regarding skills assessment of L2 students.

• Scientific evidence supports that less experienced teachers have lower orientation toward multiple task-tests for non-native students. school teachers.
• Research questions: Whether school teachers as having different teaching training and unequal teaching experience with non-native students perceive differently a four-skills scale.
Methodology

Purpose of the study: This study intends to analyse the importance degree between the four skills/tasks: reading, writing, speaking and listening, in the perspective of school teachers.

H1 - identify the most revealing tasks for the establishment of items in proficiency and competency tests;
H2 - assess the knowledge and representations that these teachers have about evaluation tests, according to age (a) length of service (b), and experience with multicultural classes (c).
•The study involved 77 teachers aged between 32 and 62 years (M=47 years, SD=7.4), of whom 11 (14.3%) were male and 60 (77.9%) were female, with an average of 22 years teaching experience (SD=6.7). Teachers teach at nine schools/groupings in the district of Lisbon, Portugal
H1 confirmed: Portuguese teachers differentiate tasks as being more or less relevant throughout the four specific academic areas in the creation of items in proficiency and competence tests of learners of Portuguese as L2. There are differences in assigning importance to items within each academic area (reading, writing, speaking and listening comprehension) but there are also differences in the groups regarding perception of specific items, as the previous results show. It was found that the less valued items lie in the writing area (item associated with the ability to write according to the type of audience) and in speaking (item related to the ability of structuring hypotheses during speech - arguments). These data support previous results (Gebhardt, Chen, Graham et al., 2013) and show that one of the greatest writing difficulties of L2 learners is to produce texts related to the specific contents of the subjects.
This difficulty is related to the teachers’ instruction method, which focuses on grammar and underestimates the sociolinguistic sense, in this case the skill to write according to a specific audience. If the difficulties lie in this aspect of writing (audience awareness), then the explanation is the type of instruction and the teachers who underestimate this item (one of the weakest observed in this study) indicate that they maintain an inadequate teaching method.

According to Gebhardt et al., the way teachers perceive the teaching of language rules generated problems to the correct teaching of needs in the writing skill, like knowing how to write properly for different publics.

It should be noted that in a previous study (Shanahan, 1992), it has been highlighted that writing depends, for its proper development, on a great awareness of the audience for which one is writing. This study stresses a problem related to the perception of teachers that directly affects the teaching done.
This study demonstrates that teachers effectively value this type of skill less (writing skills according to the audience) and for this reason it appears as one of the items with a lower mean. It seems that for this kind of task, Foreign Language teachers value it less than the Portuguese language teachers, and in the same proportion regarding the valuing of grammar rules. FLs teachers are the ones who undervalue these two aspects of writing the most, when they should be the most sensitive to the grammar question and sociolinguistics of the audience. However, these data are in line with a meta-analysis study conducted by Graham and Peri (2007) who identified the priorities of teachers in the writing teaching tasks as being teaching strategies and 'peer assistance' to the detriment of grammar, pre-writing activities and processing aspects in texts written by the students. According to studies conducted in the eighties (Scarcella, 1984), L2 writers have major problems in writing for specific audiences, which is related to "attention engaging" (p. 671) during the writing task. One cause may be related to the subject’s incomplete proficiency in Mother Tongue (Khuwaileh & Shoumali, 2000) and to difference in cognitive processing (and therefore different strategies) in the contexts of Mother Tongue and L2 (Silva, 1993).
AGE

Age is the factor that differs less between groups in univariate analysis of variance, except for the regression analysis test that shows the predictive influence of the age of teachers only to explain their choice of the task referring to the ability to reason within the speaking skill. In fact, there are few studies that examine this correlation (age factor) and usually authors (Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Tsui, 2003) focus on the differentiation of experiences about teaching L2 between teachers at an early stage in their careers and more experienced ones. They conclude that younger teachers are at a stage of learning teaching and concepts processes, before actually implementing the tasks and processes (Kanno & Stuart).
EXPERIENCE WITH MULTICULTURAL GROUPS

It was also found that this variable has predictive value (linear regressive analysis) for the implementation of action measures in non-native students, that is, less experience is associated with lower capacity and initiative to apply measures in PLNM. These results corroborate studies of the past two decades that reveal that inexperience in a L2 teaching context creates serious ambiguities and conceptual errors about how to teach and what materials to use in class with immigrant students (Horwitz, 1988; 2014; Kern, 1995; Mantle-Bromlwy, 1995; Peacock, 2001; Samimy & Lee, 1997). Indeed, studies insist on distinguishing teachers in a pre-service situation and real teachers in a L2 context, and the authors (Bree, Hird, Milton et al., 2001; Peacock, 2001) concluded that younger teachers at the start of their careers have more mistaken beliefs about teaching techniques and the learning priorities of non-native students.
L2 APPLIED MEASURES

The experience of implementing measures in non-native students was an important variable in this study to explain tasks valuation differences, but as a predicting variable. These results contradict previous studies that assert the importance of experience with linguistic diverse classes to build teachers’ favourable attitudes towards the teaching of L2 learners (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Reeves, 2006; García-Nevarez, Stafford, Arias, 2005). Teachers with no experience in this area may develop representation problems on the needs of these students and the need to differentiate groups of learners (immigrants, refugees and bilingual), for which reason research in this topic is important to understand the lack of perception of teachers from any scientific area (Freeman, 1975; Karabenick & Noda; Reeves, 2006).
Implications for policy/Practice

The results presented in this study are an important contribution especially in two aspects: the analysis of teachers’ perception of relevant tasks in L2 is pioneer in Portugal. On the other hand, it presents a corpus of results that corroborate and contrast those of previous international studies, with implications for education and concepts of practices that teachers from various scientific fields reveal about L2 teaching and the type of tasks to consider in tests and in the classroom.
Implications for policy/Practice

The data suggest that teachers may be developing inadequate practices and concepts, especially considering the differences according to scientific field and high school level; that they undervalue the grammar component of all skills to be developed by the students; that they overemphasize listening comprehension and its relationship with reading; that they follow closely a L2 teaching model (originally of American design, Horwitz, 1985) but only basic education teachers (for students aged 4-11 years); and that they have poor notions regarding L2 tasks and evaluation tests, in general.
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Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Portugal
ISPA – Instituto Universitário, Lisboa, Portugal
University of Aveiro, Portugal
ISDOM: Instituto Superior D. Dinis