

A STUDY ON SBA LITERARY OF ESL TEACHERS IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to understand the current state of school-based assessment literacy of ESL teachers in Sri Lanka. The study implemented a survey-based online questionnaire administered to a sample of 250 ESL teachers representing all the 25 districts selected through stratified random sampling technique to capture their self-perceived literacy and frequency of practice of SBA. Statistical analysis was carried out through descriptive as well as thematic analysis. The research findings point out the strengths and weaknesses in SBA literacy of ESL teachers. Among strengths, competence in performance assessment and practice of communicating assessment results are prominent, while competence in grading and digital assessment practices are highlighted among weaknesses. Overall, ESL teachers view themselves as moderately competent in language assessment, and they exhibit reluctance to do away with traditional assessment methods. The study discusses implications of research findings, and offers suggestions for future research and recommendations for improvement of SBA program as well as ESL teacher preparation programs.

INTRODUCTION

Pupils are usually assessed by school teachers as well as by other external bodies such as the Department of Examinations (DOE) for different purposes. These purposes include certification, selection, promotion, and studies. For example, the main purpose of the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) Examination (GCE AL) conducted by the DOE in Sri Lanka is to select pupils for university entrance. “An assessment carried out in schools by pupils’ own teachers with the prime purpose of improving pupils’ learning is referred to as school-based assessment (SBA).” (Nanayakkara, 2009, p. 51).

SBA has been adopted by a large number of major examination bodies in the world over the last few decades. Sri Lanka adopted SBA nearly 25 years ago, and it has undergone various changes over the years. It is at the threshold of another major change under the proposed educational reforms to be implemented from 2023. (DOE, 2021)

In Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has issued 13 circulars regarding SBA, within the period of 23 years from 1998 to 2021. The first circular issued in January 1998 concerning SBA states that the initiative aimed to bring the then existing public examination results to a more satisfactory level, lower the number of repeaters and dropouts and make the school an institute that provides joyful learning experiences. Unfortunately, the National Education Commission (NEC) report of 2016 complains that the reality is otherwise. The report further states that a majority of teachers are not adequately competent to assess students effectively. In earlier research also the NEC (2014) had found out that even the trained teachers had no assessment or test item writing skills. In addition, Ginige (2021) has revealed that the teachers had not given up on the traditional method of imparting lower-order mental skills. She has further stated that the schools were reluctant to part with the traditional approach, and that the teachers continued

to get their students to name, state, and list things or define, describe and explain things in assessment.

There is no doubt that language proficiency cannot be measured through a written examination alone as it involves mastery of all the four skills - reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Therefore, language assessment is a key competency an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher should possess to execute the learning-teaching process effectively. Although there are a few research studies on SBA in Sri Lanka, it is unfortunate that none of those studies seem to have addressed the assessment literacy of ESL teachers.

Objectives of the study

This study aimed to investigate the current levels of SBA literacy of ESL teachers in Sri Lanka, and the extent to which they were practicing SBA in the language classroom. In addition, special attention was paid under both the questions to gather data on their digital assessment literacy and practices as well. Further, an attempt was made to identify the training needs related to SBA through the data gathered on the first two research questions.

Significance of the study

This study is significant for two main reasons. First, although the SBA history of Sri Lanka is nearly 25 years, research that has dealt with SBA is limited, and there is hardly any research that focuses especially on the assessment literacy of ESL teachers in the country. Therefore, this study will be a valuable addition to the SBA as well as ESL research. Second, under the proposed reforms to be implemented from 2023 onwards, the contribution of SBA for the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) Examination (GCE OL) certificate is going to be 70% of the total marks for each subject (DOE, 2019). It will reduce the contribution of the summative assessment conducted by the DOE by means of a written examination to

30%. This study will be useful to the authorities in reviewing this decision which has already aroused controversy.

Limitations of the study

The major limitation of the research design used for this study was relying on self-reporting by respondents. Despite the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity they could still have given responses that might not reflect the actual situation or practices on the ground. Next, as the sample was drawn from the marking examiners' database of the DOE, the results might not reflect the status of the average ESL teacher. Also, it might be difficult to generalize the findings to the entire population of ESL teachers in Sri Lanka, due to the relatively small sample size of 250 teachers from the 25 districts.

Further, the study was limited to an online questionnaire due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic situation. There was no chance to observe at least a few classes to get a firsthand overview of the classroom practices of the teachers. Also, a test paper on SBA, and evaluation of teacher-produced assessment tasks would have been handy to obtain a clearer picture of the present levels of their knowledge, but it was not possible under the current circumstances.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SBA is an assessment carried out by schools with students being assessed by their own subject teachers. By integrating learning and teaching with assessment, it helps students understand their strengths and weaknesses through quality feedback from teachers (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2021). According to the SBA guidelines issued by the MOE, Sri Lanka in 2017, one of the main focuses of SBA is to assess learning outcomes that cannot be assessed through written examinations. Nanayakkara (2009) also has stated that "SBA provides opportunities to assess aspects that cannot be assessed in public examination settings" (p. 52).

Therefore, SBA has immense value and importance when it comes to subjects that have a practical component. For example, practical work such as laboratory experiments, workshops, research projects, and others that need more time to finish can only be assessed by school-based assessment (Jamal, 2021). Also, the competence of subjects like dancing, music, and language cannot be assessed through a written examination alone. There is no doubt, therefore, that SBA literacy is very important for an ESL teacher.

SBA has many important characteristics which distinguish it from other forms of assessment. According to Nanayakkara (2009) and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (2021), these characteristics can be summarized as follows:

- SBA provides a more balanced and trustworthy assessment system because it allows a wide range of assessment modalities to be used.
- SBA provides opportunities to assess aspects that cannot be assessed in public examination settings, thereby improving the validity of the assessment.
- As judgments related to SBA are based on many assessments of the pupil over an extended period of time, they are more reliable.
- SBA provides a beneficial wash-back effect on the teaching-learning process, including assessment practices.
- SBA empowers teachers as their judgments are recognized by external stakeholders and used for several purposes, including certification and selection.
- SBA has a professional development function and contributes to improving the assessment and teaching skills of teachers.
- SBA contributes to improving the learning, teaching, and evaluation processes in the classroom.
- SBA promotes the involvement of multiple assessors in the assessment process, such as other teachers, pupils' groups (peer assessment), and individual pupils themselves (self-assessment).

- SBA allows ample opportunities for teachers to provide meaningful and timely feedback to pupils.

History of SBA in Sri Lanka

Although Sri Lanka officially initiated SBA in 1998, it has nearly 40 years of experience on the subject. The continuous assessment introduced with the educational reforms in 1981 can be viewed as the first attempt at introducing SBA to general education in the country. Although it was abandoned in 1989 due to the excessive paperwork placed on the part of the teacher, inadequacy of resources, and strong opposition imposed by the student unions in universities and some sectors of the community, it stands as a milestone in the general education history of Sri Lanka (Nanayakkara, 2009).

In 1994, National Institute of Education (NIE) initiated a classroom-based assessment program for Grades 6 – 9. It was piloted in North Western Province and later extended to 100 schools. The program was revised and renamed as SBA and introduced into the general education system in 1998 through the Circular No. 98/04 of the MOE. In 2001, the DOE did further revision and implemented the revised SBA program in GCE OL classes. In 2003, the DOE extended the implementation of the SBA program to GCE AL classes (NIE, 2015).

The DOE commenced including SBA grades in the GCE OL and GCE AL certificates in 2002 and 2005 respectively (Niroshanie, 2011). Although the SBA grades were included in a separate column in the certificate, it gave SBA national-level recognition for the first time. Yet, the grades received for the written examination conducted by the DOE continues to be superior to the SBA grades in the society. For example, no job advertisement so far has mentioned that the SBA grades would be taken into consideration as a qualification. It means that the SBA has failed to establish its due position in the general education system during the course of nearly 25 years. Sedere, (2016) blames the DOE for this failure, stating that “rather than improving

SBA to gain validity and reliability, the Department of Examinations discarded its value and further centralized examinations” (p. 11).

The latest circular on SBA issued by the MOE in 2017, highlights the need for implementing the SBA program in a novel manner aiming at empowering the learning-teaching process effectively by considering the current trends and innovations in education. All teachers need to keep pace with the current trends and innovations in education to perform their duties to the satisfaction of the stakeholders concerned. How the ESL teachers have responded to the above call of the MOE could be revealed through the current study.

Teaching English as a second language

In Sri Lankan schools, formal teaching of ESL starts in Grade 3 and continues up to Grade 13. Since the early 1950s, teaching ESL in Sri Lankan schools irrespective of the socio-economic or geographical background has been a major concern of successive governments of Sri Lanka (Sanmuganathan, 2017). Yet, the statistics of the DOE indicate that nearly 40% of the school candidates fail English at public examinations. For example, 37.64% of the school candidates had failed the English at GCE OL examination in the year 2019. It means that 114,851 students out of 305,162 who sat this examination had failed to score a minimum of 40 marks. The percentage of candidates who had obtained an ‘A’ pass at this examination in the same year was 10.58%. The mean and the standard deviation for the same subject were 41.30 and 19.98 respectively.

The educational qualifications of ESL teachers in Sri Lanka vary from GCE OL qualification to a Master’s degree or above. At present, prospective ESL teachers are given two-year academic and professional training at the National Colleges of Education (NCOE) (Nanayakkara, Neumann & Pohlenz, 2015). Teachers are also recruited as untrained teachers and later trained at Teachers’ Training Colleges. In addition, graduates can join the profession directly and later complete the Post-Graduate Diploma in

Education (PGDE) at a recognized university. All of the above subgroups of ESL teachers have been included in this study.

MOE and the NIE have a mechanism to offer in-service training to all teachers, and there are also School-Based Professional Teacher Development (SBPTD) programs aimed at keeping the teachers updated on the current trends in the learning-teaching process. However, the NEC report of 2016 records that those recruited without pre-service teacher education, i.e., general degree or diploma holders, fall short in their performance due to their inability to identify the potentials and weaknesses of the students.

SBA in ESL classroom

MOE, Sri Lanka in their latest circular on SBA issued in 2017 has recommended 31 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Modalities (LTA Modalities) to be used in the classroom. In their 2008 circular, the MOE had recommended only 24 LTA Modalities which were referred to as Evaluation/Assessment Modalities then. Those techniques that motivate student learning, contribute to the development of competencies, and enable establishing whether the competencies have been developed are referred to as LTA Modalities. The teachers are expected to select the most suitable modalities according to the subject and the level of the students. The list of LTA Modalities recommended by MOE are as follows:

- Assignments
- Projects
- Field Visits
- Debates
- Impromptu Speeches
- Speech Tests
- Practical Activities
- Exhibitions/Presentations
- Creative Activities
- Innovations
- Role Plays
- Listening Tests
- Observations
- Explorations
- Self-Creation Manuals
- Surveys
- Concept Maps
- Team Activities
- Oral Tests
- Double-Entry Journals

- Concept Cartoons
- Simulations
- Wall Newspapers
- Portfolios
- Quiz Programs
- Discussion Panels
- Problem-Based Learning
- Math Trail
- Case Studies
- Stories
- Reading Tests

Out of these 31 LTA Modalities debates, impromptu speeches, speech tests, presentations, roleplays, listening tests, oral tests, and stories can be identified as directly related to assessment and improvement of listening and speaking skills in language learning. Most of the other LTA Modalities are related to reading and writing skills. For example, wall newspapers, double-entry journals, and assignments can be used to assess writing skills while reading tests and case studies can be used to assess reading skills. Some of the recommended LTA Modalities are not relevant for language learning. Therefore, assessment literacy is very important for a teacher to be able to select the most appropriate modality according to the level of students and skill in focus.

Language assessment literacy

Al-Bahlani (2019) examines that teacher assessment literacy is essential for the success of the teaching process, the quality of student learning and student motivation. However, studies have consistently shown inadequate levels of assessment literacy for both pre-service and in-service teachers in both language teaching and general education. (Xu & Brown 2017)

Brookhart (2011) has proposed several skills that language teachers should possess in order to be competent in formative assessment. Al-Bahlani (2019) has summarized Brookhart's proposals as follows in her research report on Assessment Literacy of EFL Teachers in Oman:

- Teachers should understand learning in the content area they teach.
- Teachers should be able to articulate clear learning intentions that are congruent with both the content and depth of thinking implied by standards and curriculum goals, in such a way that they are attainable and assessable.
- Teachers should have a repertoire of strategies for communicating to students, what achievement of a learning intention looks like.
- Teachers should understand the purposes and uses of the range of available assessment options and be skilled in using them.
- Teachers should have the skills to analyze classroom questions, test items, and performance assessment tasks to ascertain the specific knowledge and thinking skills required for students to do them.
- Teachers should have the skills to provide effective, useful feedback on student work.
- Teachers should be able to construct scoring schemes that quantify student performance on classroom assessments into useful information for decisions about students, classrooms, schools, and districts. These decisions should lead to improved student learning, growth, or development.
- Teachers should be able to administer external assessments and interpret their results for decisions about students, classrooms, schools, and districts.
- Teachers should be able to articulate their interpretations of assessment results and their reasoning about the educational decisions based on assessment results to the educational populations they serve (student and his/her family, class, school, community).
- Teachers should be able to help students use assessment information to make sound educational decisions.
- Teachers should understand and carry out their legal and ethical responsibilities in assessment as they conduct their work.

There are many studies around the world related to assessment literacy of both pre-service and in-service teachers in the literature. The majority of the studies have generally used questionnaires to measure teachers' assessment literacy levels (Öztürk and Aydin, 2018). Teacher Assessment Literacy Questionnaire (TALQ), Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory (CALI), and Assessment Literacy Inventory (ALI) can be listed as some of the popular instruments. The TALQ was developed by Plake and Impara (1992) and it was later revised by Mertler and Campbell (2005) into the ALI. Both instruments consist of 35 items that have been used to measure pre-service and in-service teachers' assessment literacy in many studies, which mostly found that literacy levels of teachers were unsatisfactory (Al-Bahlani, 2019).

In the above study, Al-Bahlani had used quantitative instruments such as survey-based questionnaires and assessment knowledge tests, as well as qualitative instruments such as test evaluation tasks, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and assessment of teacher-produced tests to study the assessment literacy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. In contrast, Zulaiha, Mulyono, and Ambarsari (2020) had used only a survey-based questionnaire and semi-structured interviews in their study titled *An Investigation into EFL Teachers' Assessment Literacy: Indonesian Teachers' Perceptions and Classroom Practice*. In a similar study conducted in Turkey, Öztürk, and Aydin (2018) had developed an instrument called the Language Assessment Knowledge Scale consisting of 112 items that covered all the four skills -- reading, writing, listening, and writing.

After going through various studies conducted on assessment literacy of language teachers, it was decided that Al-Bahlani's survey-based questionnaire would be ideal for the requirements of the current study that focuses on the assessment literacy and practices of ESL teachers in Sri Lanka.

Studies on SBA in Sri Lanka

As mentioned earlier, the studies on SBA are quite rare in Sri Lanka, but the handful of literature that is available provides a comprehensive understanding of the nature of SBA in the country. A recent study on the existing status of the SBA system in upper school chemistry that involved 350 students and 170 teachers from all nine provinces has revealed that teachers need more guidance and proper training (Perera, Bandara & Ekanayake, 2020). Their findings tally with the results of a study on SBA in Sri Lanka conducted by Selvaruby, O'Sullivan, and Watts way back in 2008. In their research article named *School-Based Assessment in Sri Lanka: Ensuring Valid Processes for Assessment for Learning Physics*, Selvaruby et al. observe that as a result of insufficient training, teachers were unable to plan and conduct assessments as expected. NEC (2016) and Ginige (2019) have similar stories to report regarding the status of SBA in the country.

In addition, NIE (2015) also has revealed similar issues concerning SBA after research conducted in four provinces representing 36 schools. The most popular assessment methods used by teachers had been writing-inclined evaluation techniques such as Written Tests, Assignments, and Open Book Tests. More than 50% of the teachers had resorted to quizzes, creative activities, listening tests, speech, and wallpapers. As per the teacher responses, discussion panels, projects, explorations, exhibitions, debates, concepts maps, seminars, double-entry journals, and surveys that inspire students' creativity had been rarely used. In the classrooms, evaluation had been mostly implemented monthly and at the end of a unit, although SBA is supposed to be a formative form of assessment.

It is noteworthy that none of the above-mentioned studies have directly addressed the SBA literacy of ESL teachers. For example, Perera, Bandara, and Ekanayake (2020) had focused on Chemistry subject while Selvaruby, O'Sullivan and Watts (2008) had focused on Physics.

The foregoing studies have employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods to inquire into the operational situation of SBA.

Questionnaires and interviews have been mainly utilized to collect data on perceptions of the teachers, students, and other stakeholders. The recommendations of the above-mentioned studies appear almost similar. Although there are success stories from around the world, almost all the studies conducted in Sri Lanka highlight the need for further training for teachers to be able to execute the SBA to deliver the expected outcomes. It means that the SBA literacy of teachers in Sri Lanka is not up to the expected levels. However, it would be interesting to find out whether it was correct to generalize the aforementioned research results to ESL teachers in the country.

METHODOLOGY

This study was solely based on a survey-based online questionnaire administered to a sample of 250 ESL teachers. The questionnaire consisted of 70 items under three sections. Section One consisted of 14 items designed to collect the background information related to the teachers, their schools, and the SBA program they are involved in. Section Two consisted of 27 items aimed at collecting information on teacher-perceived assessment skills, while Section Three consisted of 29 items designed to collect information on teacher assessment practices.

There were several reasons to select a survey-based online questionnaire for this study. Since the research questions were aimed at finding out how teachers perceived their SBA literacy and how they practiced their SBA literacy, it was believed that a survey-based questionnaire would be the best method to elicit this kind of data. Another reason to select a survey-based online questionnaire for this study was that the schools were closed until further notice from the Director General of Health due to the Covid-19 pandemic prevailing in the country. However, it must be stated that the teacher perspectives on SBA could have also been studied through qualitative methods using structured or semi-structured interviews and class observations too. For example, Malakolunthu and Hoon (2010) have

conducted such a study on *Teacher Perspectives of School-based Assessment in a Secondary School in Kuala Lumpur* using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

It is widely accepted that surveys allow researchers to generalize from a sample to a larger population (Al-Bahlani, 2019). In this study, the sample is the ESL teachers who are registered at the DOE as GCE OL marking examiners, and the larger population is the ESL teachers in Sri Lanka and beyond.

It should be mentioned that the DOE has a screening/grading system to select marking examiners based on their teaching experience, professional and educational qualifications, results of their students, previous marking experience, and recommendations of the Chief Examiners, etc. There is a huge competition to get selected for marking, and it is widely accepted that only the best gets selected. Therefore, the teachers who get selected for marking have a considerable demand for private tuition in the society. The DOE keeps the selected marking examiners updated on the best marking practices through training programs. In addition, the statistical reports which include item analysis data prepared by the DOE after each examination help teachers improve their assessment literacy.

The questionnaire was piloted with a group of 200 ESL teachers from one of the districts in the North Central Province. The In-service Advisor for English in the said district volunteered to share the link of the online questionnaire in her WhatsApp group of ESL teachers and invited them to submit their responses. Fifty-two responses had been submitted within the given one week's time period.

The 250 selected participants of the actual study included 10 ESL teachers from each district. There were 190 female teachers and 60 male teachers in the sample. The percentage of the female participants selected was 76% while the male participants' percentage was, 24%. Their ages, teaching experience, or type of school were not taken into consideration when sampling. For the researchers' convenience, the teachers who had a Dialog

phone number were given priority. Participants of the pilot study may have been included in the actual study too as there was no way of identifying them.

The online questionnaire was open for two weeks for responses, and a reminder was sent after a week. It did not collect any email addresses so that the participants would feel free and comfortable to express their views. Further, the participants were not forced or encouraged in any way to respond. The researcher could have sent the invitation through the official mail and SMS facility or given some presents to force or encourage the participants.

Statistical analysis was carried out with the quantitative data through descriptive statistics, and thematic analysis was used mostly with the qualitative data. Descriptive statistics (frequency) were carried out to analyze the quantitative data relevant to both the research questions while the responses to open-ended questions in Section One were manually coded and categorized into themes or groups in a non-hierarchical manner to examine the data.

RESULTS

The results of the study include the details of the sample of ESL teachers who responded to the survey-based online questionnaire, how the ESL teachers in Sri Lanka perceive their SBA literacy, and how they practice their SBA literacy in their day-to-day teaching. Fifty-eight responses had been received within the given two weeks' period out of which two responses were blank. Therefore, only 56 responses were available for analysis, and the actual response rate is calculated as 22%. The sample included 60 males and 190 females. The percentage of males in the sample was 24% while the percentage of females was 76%. Responses were also received at almost the same rates, i.e., Male 25%, Female 75%. Table 4.2.1 illustrates the above-mentioned rates in detail.

Table 4.2.1: Gender-wise Response Rate

	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Selected	60	24%	190	76%
Responded	14	25%	42	75%

As shown in the above table 14 out of 60 males invited had responded to the questionnaire, while 42 out of 190 invited females had responded. The response rates were almost the same for both males and females. The rates were 23.33% and 22.10% for males and females respectively. It was quite interesting to note that the response rate of the pilot questionnaire and the actual one was almost the same. It may be an indication of the IT literacy of ESL teachers and also of the IT facilities available to them. It can also be a reflection of their attitude towards online surveys.

Out of these participants, 74.54% had more than 10 years of teaching experience and 25.46% had less than 10 years of experience in the field. In detail, 41.8% had more than 20 years of experience, while 32.7% had 11 to 20 years, and 21.8% had 6 to 10 years of experience. Only 3.6% of the participants had less than 5 years of experience.

Figure 4.2.1 shows the rates of their highest educational qualifications. According to it, the majority of the teachers have GCE AL as their highest educational qualification. It is noteworthy that 44.6% have a degree or above as their highest educational qualification.

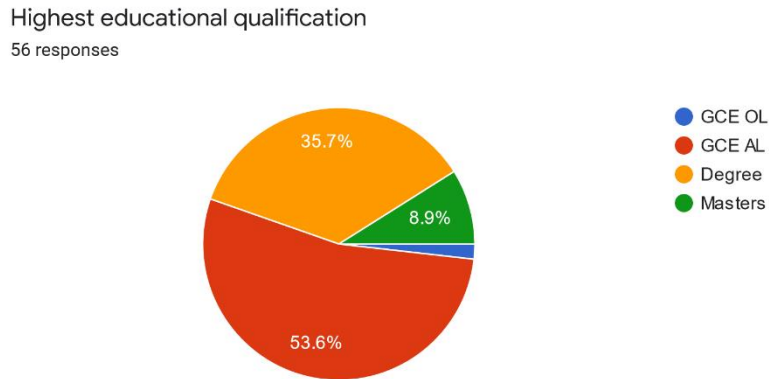


Figure 4.2.1: Educational Qualifications of Participants

According to the above chart, 20.7% of the participants had B.Ed. or M.Ed. as their highest professional qualification while all the others (79.3%) had teacher training as their highest professional qualification. There were no untrained teachers among the participants because the DOE does not select untrained teachers for marking.

When it comes to IT literacy, 73.22% of the participants had taken some kind of IT training. Most of them had ICDL or IPICT licenses. 26.78% had mentioned that they did not have any kind of IT training.

The following table (Table 4.2.2) shows the types of schools the participants come from. According to the table, the majority of the participants represent 1AB schools. These are the schools that have the facilities to teach all four streams – science, commerce, arts, and technology. Also, these are the schools that are recognized as reputed schools in the country. The student population of these schools exceeds 2000. These schools usually have more facilities than an average school. How the ESL teachers of these schools perceive and practice their SBA literacy would indicate the actual situation of the SBA literacy of ESL teachers in the country.

Table 4.2.2: Types of Schools

School Type	Participation
1AB	60%
1C	27.3%
2	10.9%
3	1.8%

The highest number of responses were received from Jaffna District. Eight out of ten invitees had submitted their responses to the online questionnaire. There were no submissions from Polonnaruwa, Hambantota, and Badulla. There were up to four responses from all the other districts. The response rate of Jaffna District is commendable.

The majority of the participants (56.4%) represent schools controlled by the Provincial Councils, while 41.8% represent the National Schools controlled by the MOE. The balance of 1.8% represent semi-government schools.

It was surprising to note that 80% of the participants have said that they did not have any pre-service training on SBA, and 70.4% say that they have not taken any professional development on SBA. They may have meant that they haven't taken any training other than the in-service training programs organized by the respective authorities.

The majority of the participants had said that they updated their SBA knowledge through quality circles, in-service training, colleagues, and circulars. They used school-based professional teacher development programs, books, or magazines too. The least popular source was the internet.

It is noteworthy that only 49% of the participants have had some kind of in-service training on SBA within the last five years. It means that more

than half of them have not had a chance to improve their knowledge of SBA during the said period. It bears witness to the nature of dedication of the authorities concerned towards improving SBA in the education system.

Only 34 participants out of 56 had submitted their proposals to improve the SBA program. 17 of them (50%) had mentioned that more training is needed to improve the SBA program. 10.2% of the participants had expressed the need to give SBA due recognition by adding a certain percentage of marks from SBA to the national level examinations. Nearly 40% did not have any ideas to propose.

Under the general comments, the majority of the participants had expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the SBA program. Their negative feelings had been expressed through the words such as unsuccessful, useless, time-wasting, etc. These comments would be useful in understanding their perceptions on assessment literacy and practices.

Teacher perceived school-based assessment literacy

Table 4.3.1 presents teacher self-perceived competence in school-based assessment. The analysis indicated that 43% of the teachers perceived themselves as competent or very competent in constructing and administering the assessment, while the majority (57%) thought they were somewhat, a little or not competent at all. It means that they are not competent at choosing appropriate methods for language assessment, writing clear instructions, using assessment for developing treatment plans for low-achieving students, and writing questions to assess higher cognitive levels.

Table 4.3.1: Descriptive Analysis of Teacher-Perceived SBA Competence
(N=56)

Assessment Competency	Not competent <i>f (%)</i>	A little competent <i>f (%)</i>	Somewhat competent <i>f (%)</i>	Competent <i>f (%)</i>	Very Competent <i>f (%)</i>
1. Constructing and Administering Assessment	8	17	32	33	10
2. Performance Assessment	7	15	31	37	10
3. Grading	10	13	35	35	7
4. Communicating Assessment Results	8	17	29	39	7
5. Assessment Ethics	17	13	20	38	12
6. Digital Language Assessment Skills	14	23	33	19	11

Competence in performance assessment also tended to lean towards incompetent levels as 53% perceived themselves as somewhat, a little, or not competent at all. Only 47% thought of themselves as competent or very competent in assessing the performance of students. Performance assessment involves assessing students' participation in class, assessing students' learning through oral questions or observation, developing performance assessment methods based on clearly defined objectives, communicating performance assessment criteria to students in advance, and assigning authentic activities.

A teacher should be able to determine grades according to students' average performance, identify different factors to be considered when

grading and identify different factors that should not be used when grading. The analysis of the responses received indicated that the majority of the teachers perceived themselves as incompetent at it too, as 58% thought that they were somewhat, a little or not competent at all in this aspect.

In terms of communicating assessment results also the participants tend to lean more towards the incompetent side as 54% perceived themselves somewhat, a little or not competent at using portfolios to assess students' progress, providing written or oral feedback to students, or communicating assessment results to students and parents.

When it comes to assessment ethics, 50% perceived themselves as competent while the balance 50% perceived themselves as incompetent at it too. Ethics include informing students of the objectives before applying the assessment, keeping the assessment results of each student confidential, avoiding the use of assessment as a way to punish students for their behavior, preventing students from cheating on tests, and avoiding teaching to the test when preparing students for tests.

Digital language assessment competence is the worst of all according to the analysis. Exactly 70% of the participants perceived themselves as incompetent at it. It indicates that the majority of teachers cannot use computer software to design language skills tests, give computerized course tasks, assess students' language skills using online tools, or use computerized assessment data to plan future teaching.

Overall summary of the data collected under the research question one given in Table 4.3.2 shows that the teachers perceived themselves as moderately competent in performance assessment ($M = 3.93$), communicating assessment results (3.18), and recognizing assessment ethics (3.15). They have reported lower levels of competence in constructing and administering assessment ($M = 2.54$), digital language assessment skills (2.31), and grading ($M = 1.90$). It is noteworthy that although they are qualified marking examiners, the participants perceived themselves as having

the lowest competence in grading SBA with a mean of 1.90 and standard deviation of 1.51.

Table 4.3.2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation for Participants' SBA Competence

Competence	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Level of Competence
1. Constructing and Administering Assessment	2.54	1.74	Low
2. Performance Assessment	3.93	3.04	Medium
3. Grading	1.90	1.51	Low
4. Communicating Assessment Results	3.18	2.60	Medium
5. Assessment Ethics	3.15	2.38	Medium
6. Digital Language Assessment Skills	2.31	1.13	Low

Teacher perceived assessment practices

Table 4.4.1 presents teacher self-perceived school-based assessment practices. The analysis indicated that the majority of the teachers do not use the traditional methods such as true/false questions, multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, matching questions, and short-essay questions. 63% of the participants have mentioned that they never, rarely, or sometimes use the above-mentioned methods of assessment. Nearly half of the participants (47%) had mentioned that they used the traditional methods sometimes, while 37% percent had mentioned that they use them the most of the time or always.

However, the analysis also reveals that they do not use the learning, teaching, and assessment modalities either. For example, 72% of them had indicated that they never, rarely, or sometimes use the LTA Modalities. The

items included the modalities such as role-play, listening tests, presentations, impromptu speeches, debates to get an overview of how much attention was given to listening and speaking skills in language assessment by the ESL teachers. The majority of them used the above modalities only sometimes (50%), and only 28% had indicated that they use these modalities most of the time or always.

Table 4.4.1: Descriptive Analysis of Teacher-Perceived SBA Practices (N=56)

Assessment Practice	Never <i>f (%)</i>	Rarely <i>f (%)</i>	Sometime <i>s f (%)</i>	Most of the time <i>f (%)</i>	Always <i>f (%)</i>
1. Using Traditional Assessment methods	7	9	47	34	3
2. Using Learning, Teaching & Assessment Modalities	5	17	50	26	2
3. Communicating Assessment Results to Students	5	6	28	38	23
4. Assessment Standards and Criteria	8	9	44	29	10
5. Non-Achievement-Based Grading	16	11	39	25	9
6. Digital Language Assessment Practices	27	20	42	10	1

Nearly 61% of the participants had indicated that they communicated assessment results to students most of the time or always. About 6% had mentioned that they did it rarely while 5% of the participants had mentioned that they never communicated assessment results to their students. This 5% never provided feedback to students regarding the progress they make or about the areas they need to pay more attention to.

Similarly, 61% of the participants had indicated a lower rate of practice concerning assessment standards and criteria. They never, rarely, or sometimes provided students with suggestions to enable them to monitor their progress in learning or allowed the students to self-assess their work. Also, these teachers paid less attention to training students to assess tasks done by their peers. In addition, the students are not allowed to choose the assessment task they would like to perform.

Non-achievement-based grading practices of the participant teachers also lean more towards a lower rate of practice as 66% of them indicated they never, rarely, or sometimes practiced non-achievement-based grading. Simply put, these teachers have mentioned that they did not consider students' good conduct in class or their task organization when assigning their overall grades. Also, they say they did not consider students' performance to each other, their participation in class, or their absenteeism when assigning their overall grades.

Digital language assessment practices of the participants were detected to be at the lowest level of all practices. Here, only 11% of the participants had expressed that they used digital assessments most of the time or always. 89% of the participants had mentioned that they used digital tools at lower rates. This tallies with the teacher perceived digital language assessment literacy rates that they had expressed under the first research question, but it contradicts with their self-expressed IT qualifications.

Overall summary of the data collected under the research question two given in Table 4.4.2 shows that the teachers practiced communicating assessment results to students most frequently ($M = 3.66$), ($SD = 2.82$),

followed by using traditional assessment methods ($M = 3.15$), ($SD = 3.05$), and using learning, teaching and assessment modalities ($M = 3.03$), ($SD = 2.84$) respectively. However, teachers have indicated only a medium level of practice of all the three practices above. They claimed less frequent practice of non-achievement-based grading ($M = 2.97$), ($SD = 2.07$), and assessment standards and criteria ($M = 2.59$), ($SD = 2.03$), with digital language assessment practices being the least practiced ($M = 0.85$), ($SD = 0.73$).

Table 4.4.2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation for Participants' SBA Practices

Practice	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Practice
1. Using traditional Assessment Methods	3.15	3.05	Medium
2. Using Learning, Teaching & Assessment Modalities	3.03	2.84	Medium
3. Communicating Assessment Results to Students	3.66	2.82	Medium
4. Assessment Standards and Criteria	2.59	2.03	Low
5. Non-Achievement-Based Grading	2.97	2.07	Low
6. Digital Language Assessment Practices	0.85	0.73	Low

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was centered around examining the current levels of SBA literacy of ESL teachers, and the extent to which they practiced SBA literacy in the language classroom by conducting a comprehensive analysis of their perceptions on different aspects of SBA. It was hoped that the study

would be a valuable addition to the SBA as well as ESL research and that the findings would be an eye-opener towards future professional development programs.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data in this study offered a rich evaluation of SBA literacy levels and practices of ESL teachers in Sri Lanka. This perceptions survey provided information on teachers' self-perceived assessment competence, frequency of practice, and digital assessment perceptions and frequency of practice.

The teachers tend to perceive themselves as moderately competent in school-based assessment ($M = 2.83$), ($SD = 2.0$). On a Likert scale of 5 (Very competent) to 1 (Not competent), teachers reported slightly lower competence in constructing and administering language assessment tasks ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.74$) compared to their general assessment competence. They also had reported as having lower level of competence in digital language assessment ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.13$) and grading ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.51$) too. Medium level competence was reported in performance assessment ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 3.04$), communicating assessment results ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 2.60$), and in recognizing assessment ethics ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 2.38$) by these teachers.

In terms of teacher perceived frequency of assessment practices, the teachers reported practicing assessment communication ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 2.82$) more frequently followed by using traditional assessment methods ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 3.05$), and using learning, teaching, and assessment modalities ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 2.84$) respectively. They claimed less frequent use of non-achievement-based grading ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 2.07$), assessment standards and criteria ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 2.03$), with the digital language assessment being the least practiced ($M = 0.85$, $SD = 0.73$).

As illustrated in the above paragraph, the findings of this study evidenced that the teachers tended to generally perceive themselves as moderately competent in performing SBA. However, teachers showed variations in assessment competence concerning various aspects of SBA. For example, they perceived themselves as moderately competent in performance

assessment, communicating assessment results, and recognizing assessment ethics. Meanwhile, they perceived themselves as least competent in constructing and administering assessment, digital language assessment, and in grading SBA.

It is quite disturbing to note that the participants perceived themselves least competent in grading as the sample was selected from the marking examiners' database of the DOE. They are entrusted with the marking of national-level school examinations that are highly competitive.

The second least competent area according to their perception is the digital language assessment. This result contradicts what they had mentioned about their IT literacy in Section One of the questionnaire, as 73.22% of the participants had mentioned that they had taken some kind of IT training such as ICDL, IPICT, etc. However, if we consider the response rate to the online questionnaire which was less than 25%, we cannot be surprised at this finding.

The next least competent area, according to the analysis, is constructing and administering assessments. Yet, the truth is that 74.54% of the participants had more than 10 years of teaching experience. Only 3.6% had less than five years of experience in teaching. In addition, they are all trained or graduate teachers as the DOE does not employ untrained teachers for marking. Still, they have perceived themselves as low competent in constructing and administering assessment.

It is evident from the above findings that the ESL teachers mainly need training on constructing and administering assessment, digital language assessment, and in grading SBA. In fact, 50% of the participants had expressed that they need further training on SBA.

In line with the literature, the findings of the present study are similar to the findings of a study conducted by Al-Bahlani in 2019 regarding the assessment literacy of EFL teachers in Oman. Those teachers also had perceived themselves as moderately competent in assessment. However, there were certain aspects of assessment where the Omani teachers had

perceived themselves as competent, but the present study revealed a medium or low level of competence only in all the aspects.

The findings also tally with the findings of several studies on SBA in Sri Lanka. For example, Selvaruby, O'Sullivan, and Watts (2008), NIE (2015), NEC (2016), and Perera, Bandara, and Ekanayake (2020), had the same story to report after their studies on SBA. What Selvaruby et al. revealed in 2008 regarding teachers has not changed over the years. They had said that the teachers were unable to plan and conduct an assessment as expected. The NCE (2016) reported the same as, "even a teacher who is designated as a trained teacher has no proven skills of test item writing or assessment" (p.66).

The findings on teacher-perceived SBA practices revealed that the teachers practiced communicating assessment results to students, using traditional assessment methods, and using LTA Modalities at moderate levels, while they practiced assessment standards and criteria, non-achievement-based grading, and digital language assessment at lower levels. The least practiced area which is digital language assessment goes in line with what they had perceived about their digital competence under the first research question. They perceived a low level of competence in that aspect and here it is reflected in their practices. This, quite unofficially reveals what they have been doing as online teaching over the last several months due to the pandemic situation, has not been successful.

The findings also reveal that the teachers less frequently practiced non-achievement-based factors in grading. The overall aim of SBA is not quite achieved as a result. SBA expects teachers to assess aspects that cannot be assessed through paper-pencil tests. For example, students' participation in class cannot be assessed by a summative examination.

Assessment standards and criteria demand enabling students to monitor their progress in learning, self-assess their work, or assess the tasks done by peers. The study revealed that the teachers practiced that rarely.

Although there are more than 30 prescribed LTA modalities that can be used to assess students' learning, the study reveals that the teachers depend more on traditional assessment methods than LTA modalities. This situation never seems to improve as evidence from previous studies on SBA reveals the same conditions. For example, NIE (2015) reports that the most popular assessment methods used by teachers had been writing-inclined evaluation techniques such as Written Tests, Assignments, and Open Book Tests. The NIE report further reveals that discussion panels, projects, explorations, exhibitions, debates, concepts maps, seminars, double-entry journals, and surveys that inspire students' creativity have been rarely used. In addition, Ginige (2021) also has revealed that the teachers continue to get their students to name, state, and list things or define, describe and explain things in assessment.

One positive note to share at the end is that the findings indicate that teachers understand the importance of communicating assessment results to their students. The highest frequency they have recorded for SBA practices is done for this aspect. It involves providing oral or written feedback and acknowledging students of their high achievement in front of their peers. It also involves informing students of assessment objectives, and considering student privacy when communicating assessment results, which are considered as principal steps in boosting learners' understanding of where they are going, and what they need to achieve what is expected from them.

The findings of the study, which supported the findings of several studies that were conducted in Sri Lanka and abroad, indicated that the teacher assessment literacy is limited and that it still has its deficits despite increased pre-service and in-service teacher training in assessment.

Professional training on SBA should be intensive and extended to cover all the teachers in the field as demanded by 50% of the teachers who participated in this study. Teachers also have a responsibility to improve their assessment knowledge and skills through self-study as we cannot expect the authorities concerned to take measures overnight to improve. The

education authorities have been trying their best to get the SBA program absorbed into the system ever since it was introduced. The number of circulars the MOE has issued, the host of guidelines circulated by the DOE, and the massive number of workshops and seminars conducted by the NIE would bear witness to it. Yet, it is in the hands of the teachers to implement it properly to enable the future generation to achieve their potential.

ESL teachers have a special responsibility to understand the importance of the subject they teach. Communication is one of the four Cs in the 21st Century Skills demanded of the future generation. Steps should be taken to integrate technology into the classroom and equip teachers with IT literacy. Also, it is time the teachers grabbed the IT skills required to face the challenges of the new era.

Research is necessary to further investigate why SBA has not been able to establish its due place in the education system in Sri Lanka. Future research may need to investigate the objectives, tasks, contents, and outcomes of assessment courses provided by teacher preparation institutions and professional development programs.

Research in education should be encouraged as only a few researches are found on SBA program in the country. Those that were found, were also mainly focused on science subjects. The low response rate received for the current study may also have indicated the poor research culture prevailing in the field. Teachers are not quite aware of the benefits they can personally gain in participating in education research, and the impact their honest participation can make in the education field.

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