

Teachers view student assessment as a central teaching function in their classrooms. They devote a large part of their preparation time to creating instruments and observation procedures, marking, recording, and synthesizing results in formal and informal reports in the school system. Every model of the teaching and learning process requires that teachers base their decisions – instructional, grading and reporting – on some knowledge of student progress toward desired learning outcomes (Anderson, 1990; Rogers, 1991; Wilson, 1998). However, very little is known about the classroom assessment practices of teachers who teach English as a second and/or a foreign Language (ESL/EFL) at the tertiary level. Therefore, given (i) the large number of students who find it necessary to study English as a second/foreign language, (ii) the influence of high-stakes external testing on ESL/EFL teaching and learning, (iii) the central role that student assessment plays in the teaching and learning process, and (iv) the need for systemic knowledge about the nature and kind of assessment practices that will yield reliable and valid information about the achievement and progress of ESL/EFL students, the objective of this proposed research is to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the assessment knowledge and practices used by ESL/EFL teachers, who are teaching in English language programs at the tertiary level.

The proposed research will thus investigate a continuum of ESL/EFL contexts represented by Canadian ESL, Hong Kong ESL/EFL and Chinese EFL. A comprehensive survey, diary, and in-depth interviews will be used to address this objective over a three-year period. First, a survey questionnaire will be developed for administration to ESL/EFL teachers teaching English language programs in universities in each of the three contexts. The questionnaire, which will be written in English, will address three issues: 1) teachers' assessment knowledge, 2) the assessment practices they use, and 3) their teaching and education background. Purposive sampling will be used to select 100 ESL/EFL teachers in each jurisdiction: from 10 universities in Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario (Canada), the six major universities in Hong Kong, and from 10 universities in Beijing (China) where English language programs are taught. Second, a diary checklist will be designed based on the survey findings. The checklist will consist of a two dimensional matrix of assessment practices vs. reasons why certain assessment practices are used by ESL/EFL teachers in their daily teaching. Space will be provided so that teachers can record any assessment practice that is not in the matrix. The diary checklist will be used once at the beginning of the course, once in the middle, and again toward the end. The participants for the diary study will be 40 teachers selected from among the participants in the survey who indicated they were willing to participate in the second stage of the research. Third, semi-structured interviews will be conducted. Questions will be centered around four major themes: the reasons why ESL/EFL teachers carry out certain assessment practices; the use of assessment results; the influence of external testing on the assessments used; and ways to improve the assessment knowledge and skill of ESL/EFL teachers. Fifteen teachers, selected from among those who completed the diary and indicated that they were willing be interviewed, will be selected from each context. The duration of each interview will be 45 minutes.

A clearer understanding of teachers' classroom assessment practices will offer insights about the nature of assessment practices in relation to the ESL/EFL classroom teaching and learning at the tertiary level, and will promote sound assessment practices. The findings will provide direction for current teacher education and teacher life-long professional development. In addition, feedback and implications for policy-making will be provided to directors of ESL/EFL training and certification programs in Canada, Hong Kong, and China for future planning and evaluation, as well as to government organizations.