

## **Exploring the Practices on Macro Skills Integrated Assessment in Philippine Higher Education Context: Basis in Designing a Language Training Program**

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*Received: 21 October 2021*  
*Reviewed: 21 June 2023-21 September 2023*  
*Accepted: 29 September 2023*  
*Published: 30 September 2023*

### **Abstract**

Despite the great number of studies on separated skills assessment in measuring language performance, integrated assessment has recently been occupying a significant place as educational paradigm shift continues to uphold a more skills-oriented language assessment scheme. This research determined the practices on integrated assessment of macro skills in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to subsequently design a Language Training Program (LTP) and material appropriate to teachers' needs. It followed the design of a Type I developmental research which includes multilevel stages of instructional development such as analysis, design, implementation and evaluation. Nevertheless, this paper only reports the analysis phase of the research due to its longitudinal nature and the multifaceted analysis of the qualitative data. It utilized interview and document analysis as initial research instruments. The participants of the study were language teachers and learners selected via total enumeration and purposive sampling, respectively. As a result, the research accentuates the need to improve the employment of stimulus-related and thematically linked tasks as equally significant features defining the practice of integrated assessment in language classrooms.

**Keywords:** Integrated task; developmental research; text- or content-responsible task; stimulus-related task; thematically linked tasks

### **Introduction**

Macro skills integration in language instruction has been emerging as a pedagogical approach as language educational paradigm continuously campaigns a more skills-oriented assessment scheme. In fact, an approximately even balance of the language strands as a pedagogical principle in language teaching accentuates the need to encompass all the language skills – listening, reading, speaking, writing, and viewing – in the language instruction process (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Thus, the integration of these macro skills at the core of language pedagogy is pervasively indorsed by various researchers (Barrot, 2018; Cleofas & Macapagal, 2015; Nation & Macalister, 2010; Patil, 2008, as cited in Chandio & Jafferi, 2015; Thirakunkovit, 2018).

Nevertheless, most of the studies still ventured on segregated-skill testing. Actually, some researchers reported on the limited scope in assessing the language learners' macro skills since just a part of their proficiency is explored (Elshawa et al., 2017; Patil, 2008, as cited in Chandio & Jafferi, 2015), and just a few utilized an integrated and holistic scheme to take account of the overall proficiency of learners.

This paved the way to the rationale of this study that targeted to close this research gap as it determined the practices on integrated assessment of macro skills in ESL classes to subsequently design a Language Training Program (LTP) and material for language teachers. The results of the analysis phase on the said research topic would actually serve as a critical basis in crafting a needs-based LTP and material that would adequately capacitate language teachers with necessary competencies to employ assessment tasks in the continuum of macro skills integration. Likewise, this study would serve as a vehicle for the dissemination of contemporary pedagogical trends which emerge in the horizon of language education.

## Literature review

### Separate skills assessment

Despite the need to fashion all the macro skills in an integrated manner, a multitude of literature and studies disclose the use of separate skill language instruction and assessment. In fact, the reading approach by Michael West (1941) gave emphasis on reading comprehension only, whereas the audiolingual approach (Fries, 1945) in the United States and the oral-situational approach in Britain (Eckersley, 1955) merely underscored the listening and speaking skills (Murcia et al., 2014).

Most of the contemporary studies focused their research topic on the assessment of only one language skill for a reasonable purpose. For example, several researchers ventured on the assessment of listening skill (Barabadi et al., 2018; Basal et al., 2015; Sulaiman et al., 2017). On the other hand, a number of researchers delved on the evaluation scheme of learners' speaking skill (Butz & Lovseth, 2015; Cameron & Dickfos, 2014; Diaz et al., 2015; Evanini et al., 2017; Phaiboonnugulkij & Prapphal, 2013; Roohr et al., 2018; Tajeddin et al., 2018; Zhao, 2014). Other had investigated the assessment of students' reading skill (Chen & Wang, 2019). The literature also unveils a vast of research that attempt to gauge the writing skill of students (Alshakhi, 2019; Han & Huang, 2017; Lam, 2018; Mellati & Khademi, 2018; Obeid, 2017; Olivier, 2019; Veloo et al., 2018). Lastly, Gabinete (2016) embarked his research journey on the assessment of ESL learners' viewing skill. Indeed, second language performance assessment has concentrated on gauging independent constructs of macro skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing (Frost et al., 2011).

Since each skill is taught and assessed discretely as language arts domain, it resulted to the disconnection between and among the learning competencies for each macro skill (Barrot, 2018), existence of disequilibrium on the assessment of macro skills, and adoption of segregated-skill-oriented (SSI) language courses due to the prominence given to one or two of the skills that consequently marks the preclusion of the other three (Vernier et al., 2008). In fact, researchers reported some frequently and negligently assessed macro skills (Aydogan & Akbarov, 2014; Sarigoz & Fisne, 2018; Yilmazer & Okan, 2017) which may result to mismatch between curricular principles and classroom practices.

### Integrated assessment

Nevertheless, numerous real-world communicative acts depend on the integration of two or more of the macro skills, along with other non-linguistic cognitive abilities (Frost et al., 2011). In the same way, when an individual makes use of a language in an authentic context, skills like listening, reading, speaking and writing are naturally integrated to achieve communicative competence (Biloon, 2018). Consequently, a paradigm shift in the field of language education has paved the way to the utilization of integrated assessment. In fact, task-based language teaching (TBLT) as a current language teaching approach draws back from teaching disjointed skills to using holistic language through tasks accomplishment (Plakans, 2013). Hence, numerous researchers had brought out the significance of integrated mode of testing various language skills (Alhussain, 2009; Nunan, 1989, as cited in Bastias et al., 2011; Powers, 2010).

As the concept of integrated assessment pervasively penetrates in the realm of language assessment, several scholars had brought forth delineations of this type of assessment. Karumpa et al. (2016) explained that this type of assessment “evaluates aspects of linguistics and aspects of language skills through a comprehensive and integrated assessment rather than through a separate assessment (Oller, 1979)...the integration is intended to test the ability of learners to use two or more language skills simultaneously (p. 478)”. Similarly, Plakans (2013) referred to this as the “use of test tasks that combine two or more language skills to simulate authentic language-use situations... and overlap and synthesize combinations of listening, reading, speaking and writing (p.1)”. Likewise, Douglas (2014) described that this kind of assessment involves the “integration of input modalities, such as written and oral, which the test taker then has to summarize or contrast, in either writing or speaking (p.53)”. Hence, integrated assessment regards the skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing not as isolated but rather as conjunctive skills to be performed and practiced in language classrooms to orchestrate a truly communicative and authentic teaching and learning (McDonough & Shaw, 2003, as cited in Gholami & Alinasab, 2017). Indeed, this kind of assessment task could aid language teachers to achieve positive washback as it highlights source-based writing (Gebriel, 2009; Rukthong & Brunfaut, 2020), and approximates the demands of a ‘real world’ communication (Frost et al., 2011).

With all these arguments in mind, integrated assessment is delineated in this study based on the viewpoints of Karumpa et al. (2016), Douglas (2014) and Plakans (2013) which stresses the integration of two or more language skills concurrently, preferably the combination of any of the input modalities and productive skills demonstration.

Essentially, there also have been studies conducted to investigate integrated assessment situated in language pedagogy. In fact, several researchers have made a comparison between independent and integrated task at different angles (Barkaoui et al., 2013; Cumming et al., 2005; Gholami & Alinasab, 2017; Guo et al., 2013; Michel et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2016). Others have explored the validity of integrated tasks (Frost et al., 2011; Gebriel & Plakans, 2014; Ohkubo, 2009) and its score generalizability (Gebriel, 2009) and possible inclusion in a competency test (Weigle, 2004). On the other hand, some delved on the association of integrated tasks with critical thinking (Li & Yang, 2014) and with inferential reading comprehension (Wickramaarachchi, 2014), while others probed on the strategy use concerning integrated writing tasks (Karimullah, 2018; Zhang et al., 2015).

However, most of the researches delved on a specific typology of integrated assessment and were not inclusive of all the typologies of integrated tasks. Consequently, how all typologies of integrated assessment are employed in ESL classes to implement a more holistic scheme of integrated assessment is a research interest that demands a thorough investigation. In fact, Frost et

al. (2011) reported that research studies to date concerning the employment of integrated tasks as a yardstick of second language proficiency are limited in number.

Thus, this study determined the practices on integrated assessment of macro skills in ESL classes as basis in designing a Language Training Program (LTP) and material for language teachers. Specifically, it sought to answer the question: What are the features of integrated assessment of macro skills as practiced in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in terms of language teachers' and learners' perception; integrated task typologies; and its restraining features (task factors, student factors, and teacher factors)?

## **Research method**

### **Research design**

This study trailed the design of a developmental research which is defined as “the systematic study of designing, developing and evaluating instructional programs, processes and products that must meet the criteria of internal consistency and effectiveness (Seels & Richey, 1994, p. 127, as cited in Richey & Klein, 2005, p. 24)”. Specifically, Type I developmental research was adopted in this study as it characteristically involves “situations in which the product development process is analyzed, described, and the final product is evaluated (Richey et al. 2004, p. 1102)”. Since this type of research design is longitudinal and requires multifaceted analysis of qualitative data, this paper only discusses the analysis phase of the study which served as a critical basis in the design, implementation, and evaluation of a Language Training Program (LTP) and material on the language teachers' practice of integrated assessment.

### **Participants and setting**

The study was conducted at a certain state university in Cagayan Valley, Philippines offering language education courses since language assessment on macro skills is one of the major subjects stipulated in the designed curriculum for the said course.

In the analysis phase of the research, a total enumeration of language teachers as sampling procedure was employed since they are the primary deliverers of assessment schemes in ESL classrooms. Thus, a total of four (4) language teachers who were identified as Bachelor of Secondary Education – English faculty members handling major and English subjects were considered as teacher participants. To enrich and elucidate the data of the study, and cross-validate or corroborate the findings, the selection of respondents was focused on a cross section of the population rather than a homogenous sample. Hence, taking account of the small sample size as a characteristic of qualitative studies, 10 Third Year English major learners, having knowledge of assessment processes and being exposed to how these are applied in the ESL classrooms, were purposively selected to validate and elaborate further the integrated assessment practices reported by their language teachers. The said sample size of the student participants was already adequate in the collection of elucidatory data since saturation of data was observed in the responses of some ESL learners as the range of participants was increased.

### **Research instruments**

Primarily, this study made use of document analysis and semi-structured interview with the language teachers and learners as research methodologies to lay out the features of integrated assessment of macro skills.

With regard to document analysis, this research relied on various documents as instruments particularly six language course syllabi adhering to the latest memorandums on language

programs, including nine samples of language tests with their corresponding Table of Specification (ToS). On the other hand, a semi-structured interview probing the features of integrated assessment of macro skills as practiced in language classrooms is another research instrument of this study. The interview questions were initially crafted through a priori coding to better align these to the main focus and objectives of this research. Thus, seven (7) interview queries composed the initial set of questions which were crafted to gather the needed data for this research.

#### Data gathering procedure

Initially, document analysis of language course syllabi and samples of language tests with their corresponding Table of Specification (ToS) was systematically conducted. Then, an interview with language teachers and ESL learners was done. Considering the precautionary measures in preventing the spread of Covid-19, the interview with the ESL students was carried out through asynchronous communication particularly by means of Messenger, a communication feature of Facebook, as this is the most friendly and economical platform to contact the language learners. They were given a maximum of one week to respond to the interview questions at their most convenient time or day. On the other hand, the language teachers were interviewed personally at an average stint of 30 minutes but at different times since limited face-to-face interaction between employees was warranted. An audio recorder was used to document the interview responses of the language teachers. After which, the interview responses were transcribed, and to ensure the veracity and rigor of the interview transcripts, the participants were furnished a copy of the transcriptions, and their approval on the truthfulness of their written responses was also sought prior to coding, thematization, member data checking, and other schemes of qualitative data analysis.

#### Data management and statistical analysis

The data from document analysis and interview were subjected to cool and warm analysis to identify the significant and relevant statements that would explicate and describe the English teachers' practice of integrated assessment of macro skills. Particularly, it considered samples of language assessment tasks or enhancement activities, test and task instructions, target competencies or objectives of language tests, etc. Moreover, Plakans' (2013) task categories of integrated assessment was used in the analysis of assessment tasks stipulated in the language course syllabi and interview transcripts. In doing such, simple descriptive statistics particularly frequency count and percentage was deliberately used to categorize the lists of integrated tasks. Afterwards, inductive coding on the significant and relevant statements was done to form themes or categories that are essential in the logical arrangement, analysis and discussion of information about the practice of language teachers in implementing integrated assessment of macro skills. Also, data member checking was executed to ensure that the analysis of the documents and interview transcripts as qualitative data were processed, interpreted, and analyzed systematically. Moreover, textual evidence to stipulate and highlight significant responses from the research participants including relevant document excerpts was carried out all throughout the data analysis and discussion to validate assertions and claims, and strengthen the insights and/or viewpoints elucidated in the study.

#### Ethical considerations

Before conducting the study, the technical review-approved proposal was subjected to the rigorous evaluation process by the Ethics Review Committee. Afterwards, necessary

communications were sent to the concerned authorities for the approval of the conduct of the research. Prior to the gathering of research data, the consent of the research participants were sought to ensure their willingness to participate in the study, especially that audio-recording of interview responses was one of the means of collecting the necessary data. Thereafter, they were informed about their rights, including the nature and objectives of the study and were assured of anonymity, data protection and confidentiality of whatever their responses were. In instances where queries were posed by the respondents, the researcher tactfully addressed and answered all these questions to eradicate the ambiguity that might contaminate the research process.

## Results

Features of integrated assessment based on language teachers' and learners' perception: basis for integrated assessment implementation

This theme discusses how integrated assessment is delineated and described by language teachers and learners based on their viewpoints since the way they perceive this kind of assessment may shape their actual practice in language assessment.

### *Interdependency of macro skills*

The concurrent linking of at least two macro skills through an integrated task is the most remarkable feature of integrated macro skills assessment tasks as practiced in ESL classes. The following interview extract primarily reveals how language teachers define integrated assessment with reference to mutual dependence of macro skills:

*One feature I think of integrated assessment is you get to assess the interdependency of the skills on each other. For example, let's say you let them read, and then you let them listen, and then later, you let them speak in response to a question. They will read the question and then they listen to the question and then let them speak or write in response to a question or the other way around. So, you see how they use the skills interdependently...as a whole. (TP4)*

On the other hand, on the premise about resemblance and existence of certain subskills from one macro skill to another, Teacher Participant 4 highlighted that "some subskills that macro skills share like comprehension for both listening and reading, and even in viewing; and grammatical ability/accuracy or linguistic skill for speaking and writing".

### *Utilization of source texts*

As an offshoot of the notion on the interdependency of macro skills, integrated assessment is also notably known for its use of source texts which can be a reading, listening, or viewing text serving as inputs prior to exhibition of any written or spoken outputs. Needless to say, a source text functions as a scaffold or background provider among ESL learners to guide them on how they will produce the necessary language outcomes of any assessment activity. This feature of integrated assessment of macro skills is exposed in the following interview response:

*In writing, we wrote our essay regarding the topic that she gave. In reading and viewing we experienced reading a story or an article and film viewing and then we wrote out own insight or comment about what we've read and viewed. (SP6)*

### *Utilization of integrated writing and speaking tasks as performance-based assessment*

Willis and Nanni (2017) clarified that integrated writing usually combines reading and/or listening with a writing task. It is sometimes denoted as reading-to-write or listening-to-write or

reading-listening-writing, relying upon the components of the task. Relating this to the focus of the study, integrated writing may also take account of viewing as a task component. In the same way, an integrated speaking, therefore, combines reading and/or listening with a speaking task, and may be referred to as reading-to-speak or listening-to-speak or reading-listening-speaking depending on the components of the task in which viewing is again considered as a task component. This phenomenon in the practice of integrated assessment is evident in the following interview extract:

*Most of the time, we focus on writing and speaking. It's because I feel like in reading, you can measure this skill when they already write. It is because listening, reading and viewing are considered inputs, that is why their performance in these skills can already be assessed in their speaking and writing performances. So most of the time, the productive skills are really targeted. (TP1)*

#### *Task authenticity and contextualization*

The present-day attention on the integration of skills in assessment revolves around their authenticity (Plakans, 2013). Hence, integrated assessment is described as employment of authentic and contextualized tasks that bring the actual activities and situations from the real-life scenarios into the language classrooms. As far as employment of authentic and contextualized tasks is concerned, the language teachers also recognize the need to utilize various assessment tools like rubrics especially in setting appropriate criteria as descriptors of complex macro skills demonstration, which consequently unveils their practice on integrated assessment. This assumption is further validated by the following interview extract:

*It is because rubrics are really needed, especially in writing. Like when you ask the students to write an essay, of course, you cannot just give their written outputs scores right away. So, we really need to use rubrics in determining the scores of the students as basis. (TP2)*

Features of integrated assessment based on the integrated task typologies practiced in ESL Classes

The integrated assessment tasks specified in the said data sources were analyzed using the category of integrated tasks by Plakans (2013) which stresses three classifications of such tasks as follows: text- or content-responsible tasks, stimulus-related tasks and thematically linked tasks.

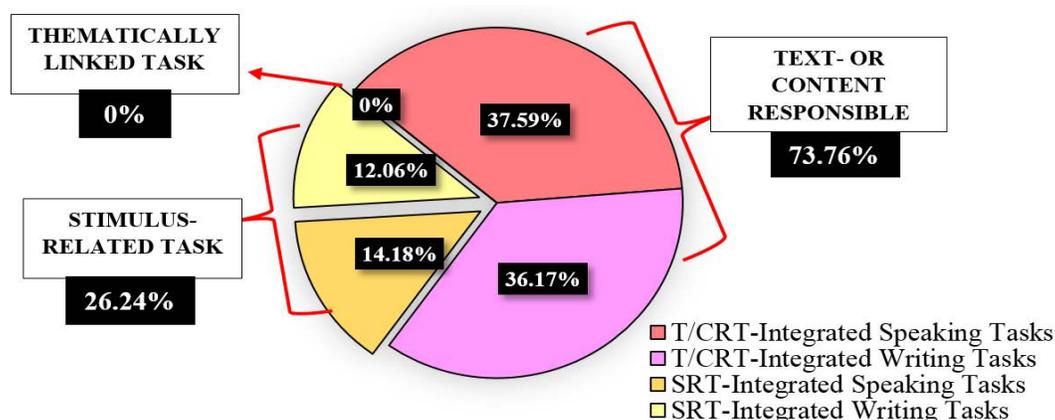


Figure 1. Types of integrated tasks employed by language teachers in their ESL classes

*Text- or content-responsible tasks*

Out of 141 integrated tasks taken from the analyzed documents and interview transcripts, 104 or 73.76% comprised the text- or content-responsible tasks. Basically, Plakans (2013) highlighted that a “text- or content-responsible task (Leki & Carson, 1997; Leki et al., 2008) requires the test taker to write or speak about the content of texts (p.2)”. Looking closely at the chart, it could be perceived that there is almost a similar proportion of integrated speaking and writing tasks under text- or content responsible category of tasks. Out of 104 text under text- or content responsible category of tasks, 53 or 37.59% of the said task is classified as integrated speaking task whereas 51 or 36.17% is considered integrated writing task.

Specifically, the text- or content-responsible integrated speaking tasks employed by language teachers are recitation, powerpoint/peer/oral/multimedia presentation, storytelling, poetry interpretation, and reporting as other integrated speaking tasks under this task category. On the other side, the specific text- or content-responsible integrated writing tasks practiced by language teachers are technical paper writing, reaction/essay/insight writing, poem analysis, literary analysis, report write-up, and research critiquing.

*Stimulus-related tasks*

The integrated task category that secondarily received attention in the practice of integrated assessment in ESL classes is the stimulus-related task. Out of 141 integrated tasks taken from the analyzed documents and interview transcripts, 37 or 26.24% comprised the stimulus-related tasks. Essentially, stimulus-related tasks entail the test takers to listen, read or view a text but does not impose the presence of the text’s content in their language output or performance (Plakans, 2013). Also, in this task category, ESL learners are provided with input texts or visuals like charts or graphs and lists which function as background information or idea generators (Leki & Carson, 1997, as cited in Plakans, 2013) as these are necessary prior to the language performance or language learning outcomes of the language learners for these serve as prompt or cue that leads them on how to carry out language assessment tasks.

Looking closely at the chart, there is also a comparable percentage of integrated speaking and writing tasks under stimulus-related category of tasks. Out of 37 stimulus-related category of tasks, 20 or 14.18% of the said task is classified as integrated speaking task, while 17 or 12.06% is categorized as integrated writing task. Considering the specific stimulus-related integrated speaking tasks practiced by the language teachers, they employ role play, multimedia/oral presentation, interview, debate, and research presentation. Meanwhile, they use technical paper writing, research proposal writing, academic papers or written outputs (resume, application letter, and minutes of the meeting), memorandum writing, image interpretation, and discourse writing (e.g. expository, descriptive, narrative, persuasive) as stimulus-related integrated writing tasks.

*Thematically linked tasks*

Lastly, thematically linked tasks, having 0%, receive less attention in the choice of integrated tasks among language teachers. This kind of integrated task consists of several test sections which are thematically linked (Esmaeili, 2002, as cited in Plakans, 2013). Specifically, Plakans further explicated that the underlying principles supporting the use of this integrated task type is the provision of content among language learners by means of their encounter with a topic in listening and reading tasks that reappears in their performance tasks, on which they can build their performance.

## Features of integrated macro skills assessment restraining its employment in ESL classes

### *Task factors*

**Complexity of Activities.** Integrated macro skills assessment is challenging for the language learners as the task per se is loaded with multi-skill activities that make it difficult to focus assessment on the specific strengths and weaknesses of the students in their skills demonstration. This has been disclosed by the language learners, as manifested in the following interview extract:

*Because it allows simultaneous language skills, it is harder to focus assessment of students' ability from one skill to the other since you need to assessed [sic] two or more skills at a time. Making it harder to assess which area of skills do your students have their strengths or weaknesses in particular activities. (SP3)*

**Novelty of Assessment Task.** Since integrated assessment just recently emerged in the language assessment horizon, unfamiliarity on how integrated tasks are carried out may cause trouble and discomfort on language teachers and learners. This has been revealed by Teacher Participant 4 elucidating this kind of assessment as “something novel, and at introducing it, you expect that there will be those who will not be comfortable with it.”

**Technological Hitches.** Integrated tasks are still affected by technological glitches and online-related hitches that make the execution of integrated macro skills tasks challenging, as validated by the interview response below:

*When they are presenting, we are delayed especially if the projector is not available because it's by schedule. The instructional time is really limited because even in setting up computers, laptops, or projectors, we are already consuming at least 15 to 20 minutes for that preparation. (TP2)*

**Subjective Scoring.** The subjective nature of scoring which is a new mode of performance rating, as opposed to the objectivity of the traditional selected response tools, observably complicates the feature of an integrated assessment. In fact, Teacher Participant 4 explained, “in integrated assessment, scoring is more difficult...the subjective nature of the scoring is the disadvantage...you have to prepare other scoring tools.”

**Time Constraint.** The involvement of several macro skills in the attainment of the language outcomes demands a reasonable time allotment for the execution of integrated tasks and attainment of assessment objectives. This assumption is corroborated by the following response:

*Imagine 50 students, so if the activity is done individually, it is very time-consuming. If they are given three minutes each, how many of them would complete the task in 30 minutes? Only 10. Sometimes I have to use the following day if they have vacant time so we could finish the task. (TP1)*

### *Student factors*

**Feeling of Inhibition or Shyness and Fear.** This feeling affects the level of engagement of ESL learners in the execution of integrated tasks, as exposed in the following interview extract:

*In oral presentation and recitation, there are times in which language skills cannot be fully met especially the use of other language especially your mother tongue is strictly prohibited. We cannot deny the fact that sometimes we can't express ourselves in using the international language, as it is just our second language. And it all leaves us in frustration and the biggest worry to be criticized. (SP9)*

Inadequate Macro Skills Fluency. ESL learners' lack of command of the language is a manifestation of an inadequacy in terms of macro skills fluency. Once learners do not satisfactorily exhibit macro skills fluency, their level of task absorption and understanding is much affected. This is validated by the following interview response:

*It's very easy to tell a story in front of the students because we have good command of the language, whereas with them, they know the story, but for them to retell the story in their own words, without a copy, without memorizing it, they grope for words. Sometimes it takes too long for them to think of a word that would fit whatever they will say. (TP1)*

Reactive Response. The reactive response of ESL learners which they manifest through complaints or by being whiny adversely affects their level of participation in an integrated task because of the weight and impact this kind of assessment puts on them. This is supported by the following interview extract:

*Sometimes, the students are the problem. They have many complaints. "Ma'am, we have many requirements in other subjects, we have so much to do – still have lots of readings. The way they make excuses also like "Ma'am, we are not able to practice". Sometimes, you postpone the activity to accommodate their demands. (TP1)*

### *Teacher factors*

Taxing Teacher Preparation. Crafting an integrated task, which is complex in itself, requires enough expertise and time among language teachers. Likewise, the burden lies on the effort they need to exert in checking, scoring and judging the performances of their ESL learners. In fact, Teacher Participant 4 commented, "It's something that requires a lot of effort, a lot of preparation on your part to come up with a task that will really combine the assessment of all these skills."

Reluctance and Inflexibility. Language teachers' hesitancy on practicing integrated assessment may be due to lack of resources and inadequacy of time, inflexibility, novelty and conservative preference, as validated in the following interview extract:

*One assessment tool that other teachers use is portfolio, but I never liked it. I think I go for reaction paper, but it is also difficult to check after because the student outputs may pile up. I do not like it because I feel like how do you assess in portfolio? It is difficult to check. (TP1)*

Adherence to Institutional Practice. The institutional practice of requiring language teachers to submit traditional paper-and-pencil language tests limits the language learners' exposure to integrated macro skills assessment. Actually, Teacher Participant 4 remarked, "Since the test required by our instructional processes are still traditional, for the major examinations, of course, we still resort to our traditional assessment forms."

Extent of Understanding. The wavering perceptions and expectations on the employment of integrated tasks in the ESL classes by language teachers and learners certainly affects its implementation in ESL classes. This is wrapped up on the following interview extract:

*I think we need more training on integrated assessment. I do not know if my understanding of integrated assessment is correct, so I think training on integrated assessment is needed. Let's say SOI for instruction, I think they should also consider the inclusion of integrated assessment particularly in language courses that develop the macro skills. (TP4)*

To remedy the above-cited restraining factors, crafting of a Language Training Program (LTP) and material is suggested to capacitate the language teachers' skills and expertise and augment their current extent of understanding with regard to integrated macro skills assessment. Consequently, this guarantees a high level of success in terms of integrated tasks implementation in ESL classes.

## Discussion

The features of integrated assessment of macro skills in terms of language teachers' and learners' perception explain that linkage of several communication skills may be attributed to the mutually dependent relationship existing between or among the macro skills, the resemblance and existence of certain subskills from one macro skill to another, and the wholeness of a language performance which make the linking of skills possible in the language assessment process. In fact, several researchers put forward certain language abilities that link macro skills together and function as a common denominator of certain language skills (for reading and writing, see Thompson et al., 2013, as cited in Li & Yang, 2014; Gebhard et al., 2013, as cited in Li & Yang, 2014; Hyland, 2003, & Hudson, 2007, as cited in Wickramarachchi, 2014; and for speaking and reading, see Plakans, 2013). Furthermore, the use of story, article, film, news and other reading texts as exemplars of source texts signifies that both language teachers and learners recognize the necessity of providing a background through various texts as a scaffold in carrying out an integrated assessment, particularly text- or content-responsible tasks. Hence, numerous researchers accentuated the need to utilize a source text since it promotes a fairer yardstick in the assessment of language learners' macro skills performance as it offers a common information to the test takers from where their arguments are generated and reduces the impact of their schematic differences (Plakans, 2007 & Weir, 1993, as cited in Soleimani & Mahdavi-pour, 2014; Read, 1990 & Lewkowicz, 1997, as cited in Barkaoui et al., 2013; Weigle, 2004, as cited in Rukthong and Brunfaut, 2020).

Moreover, the utilization of integrated writing and speaking tasks as performance-based assessment implies the preference of language teachers to switch to a more extended response type of assessment, from which integrated speaking or writing is ascribed, that entails the construction of longer discourse stretches (Douglas, 2014), and the production of not just chunks of spoken and/or written discourses, but a more elaborative and extensive language output or performance based on input processing. Essentially, the inclusion of integrated tasks of speaking and writing has been regarded as a recent development in second language performance test design to approximate the demands of a 'real world' communication (Frost et al., 2011).

In addition, Nasab (2015) explained that authentic assessment, from which integrated assessment is ascribed, is highly contextualized (Bailey, 1998) which creates a link between language instruction and the real-world experience of language learners through meaningful tasks (Birenbaum & Dochy, 1996; Simonson et al, 2000). This just proves its adherence to task-based language teaching (TBLT) as a current language teaching approach, which draws back from teaching separated skills to the usage of holistic language through tasks accomplishment (Plakans, 2013).

On the other side, the subtheme regarding integrated task typologies shows the dominance of text-or content-responsible tasks in ESL classes. This result also suggests that majority of the integrated tasks employed by the language teachers required the learners to comprehend a certain input, either oral or written, then they were asked to speak or write about the input's content. Actually, Leki and Carson (1997), as cited in Weigle (2004), noted that writing in content courses

is virtually always “text-responsible,” which implies that learners are responsible in communicating the information from source texts correctly. Likewise, Plakans (2013) elucidated that text- or content-responsible tasks are more anticipated in the assessment for academic purposes and even in content-based instruction in which language serves as a medium for learning as exemplified in language immersion programs or sheltered instruction. These results may be attributed to the context of the study, being a higher education institution, which offers a more advanced academic literacy to its clientele, and where English language is predominantly used as medium of instruction. In fact, the academic writing literature has offered evidence that most university classes entail learners to perform diverse types of writing tasks like reports, research papers and essay exams (Gebriel, 2009) since discourse synthesis as a typical exercise in university writing (Gebriel, 2009; Hale et al., 1996; Horowitz, 1986; Moore & Morton, 1999; Plakans, 2008, 2009) is the actual practices in academic contexts (Gebriel & Plakans, 2014).

As a result, since text- or content-responsible tasks are immensely employed by the language teachers, stimulus-related tasks have received less attention and have been used occasionally in ESL classes. Nevertheless, this result indicates that language teachers still recognize the need to give language learners a leeway to demonstrate their communication skills matched with their creativity in demonstrating their language performance since their language outputs or performances are not only confined in the content of the source text but go beyond input comprehension. Besides, the analogous proportion of integrated speaking and writing tasks in both text- or content-responsible and stimulus-related category of integrated assessment imply the high regards of language teachers on the importance of both language outputs and performances of language learners. Thus, the acknowledgement given to the importance of productive skills of language learners in the execution of text- or content-responsible tasks is also carried over in the employment of integrated speaking and writing tasks under stimulus-related task type.

However, despite the promising offer of thematically linked tasks, language teachers tend to overlook its importance as an effective and efficient assessment task. This may be attributed to the complexity embedded in the nature of this category of integrated task which apparently affects its employment in ESL classes as Plakans (2013) elucidated that this can either be stimulus-related or content-responsible, which somehow makes it a more intricate task typology. Likewise, language teachers’ unclear concepts on thematically linked tasks and on how they employ this in their ESL classes may also be a factor on why this is least in their choice of integrated assessment types. In fact, Scarino (2013) had mentioned that teachers usually bring their implicit presumptions, understandings, beliefs, and worldviews about assessment in their professional learning as well as in their assessment practice.

With regard to the factors that restrain the implementation of integrated assessment, task factor elucidates integrated assessment as a task loaded with multi-skill activities which leads to difficulty in focusing assessment on the specific strengths and weaknesses of the students in their skills demonstration. In fact, if a language learner gains a low score in an integrated speaking task, it is difficult to recognize if the low score is attributed to poor speaking ability, poor comprehension, or both (Barkaoui et al., 2013; See also Douglas, 2014). Moreover, the higher language learning standards are established, the more difficult target skills are required. In fact, as far as assessment criteria and complex learning outcomes are concerned, integrated tasks entail “complex cognitive, literate, and language abilities for comprehension as well as to produce written compositions that display appropriate and meaningful uses of and orientations to source evidence, both conceptually (in terms of apprehending, synthesizing, and presenting source ideas)

and textually (in terms of stylistic conventions for presenting, citing, and acknowledging sources) (Cumming et al., 2005, p. 34).”

In addition, task factor also explains that students’ unfamiliarity with the types of assessment would make them struggle in comprehending how to carry out the task which subsequently affect their scores regardless of their language ability (Plakans, 2013). Also, the employment of integrated tasks is affected by technological hitches and its subjective nature of scoring since it was reported to be “difficult to construct, take, mark, interpret, and report results on (Barkaoui et al., 2013, p. 305; Gebril & Plakans, 2014).” Furthermore, this kind of assessment is also viewed as time-consuming (Gipps, 1994, & Linn et al., 1991, as cited in Brindley, 2001; Nasab, 2015) since developing and administering performance assessments is a technical and practical problem on outcomes-based approaches to which integrated assessment is associated (Breen et al., 1997, & Wolf, 1995, as cited in Brindley, 2001).

On the other hand, student factors explain how the ESL learners’ feeling of inhibition and shyness is somehow attributed to their inadequate vocabulary and inadequate macro skills fluency which plays a crucial role in speaking or writing out whatever is in their minds. Moreover, with regard to the ESL learners’ reactive response, the goals and target language outcomes of an integrated assessment daunt them and pose threat to their full involvement in the tasks, especially so that productive skills, having viewed as the most difficult macro skills to demonstrate, are the end points of an integrated task.

Lastly, the teacher factors unveil issues on teacher’s preparation and inflexibility. Actually, Douglas (2014) explained that in task-based assessment in which integrated assessment is also associated with, designing complex tasks, evaluating ESL learners’ performance on these tasks, and coming up with valid results interpretations demand careful planning. Furthermore, Douglas also added that the nature of the required language ability to execute the task and the development of a rating scale for the measurement of each component of language abilities are also a challenge, so is the development of high-quality yet complex integrated prompts (Plakans, 2013). Apart from issues on scoring associated with integrated assessment, among other factors that constrain language teachers in the utilization and exploration of more examples of integrated tasks are the lack of resources and inadequacy of time, inflexibility, and novelty and conservative preference. In addition, the language teachers’ adherence to institutional practice also compels them to occasionally resort to the traditional mode of assessment, and every so often deviate from a more communicative and performance-based assessment. In effect, these institutional and policy requirements form a culture of certainty and compliance which could not be simply challenged by teachers as these contribute to shaping the preconceptions necessary in the development of their assessment literacy (Scarino, 2013).

By and large, the overall results of the analysis phase of the study revealed that language teachers need more orientation and training on thematically linked and stimulus-related as these features of integrated macro skills assessment received less attention in ESL classes. Thus, professional development (i.e. Language Training Program and material) as it equips the language teachers’ with enough competence still remains the key towards a successful implementation of macro skills assessment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Conclusion**

The practice of integrated assessment of macro skills in ESL classes accentuates the significant place and role of language teachers in a 21<sup>st</sup> century mode of language assessment and unveils their content and pedagogical knowledge affiliation with this emerging or contemporary

trend. Considering their perception on this kind of assessment, the way they describe and explain the features of integrated macro skills assessment is, therefore, essential to its successful implementation as it shapes the means and serves as basis on how this assessment type is actually practiced in language classrooms. Furthermore, the employment of integrated assessment tasks in the language classrooms is evident to some extent, especially on text- or content-responsible tasks which dominated the integrated tasks implemented in language classrooms. Nevertheless, there exists a need to improve the employment of stimulus-related tasks and use thematically linked tasks as equally significant features, albeit being neglected, as these still define the practice of integrated assessment in ESL classes. It then implies that a more holistic employment of integrated task typologies ensures an increase in variation and a sense of balance in the employment of integrated macro skills assessment as each task typology is unique in its own way of transforming language learners to be more proficient and competent users of the English language.

On giving directions for future research, since the study is concentrated on integrated assessment tasks employment, and just partly mentioned some scoring guides in the use of integrated tasks, other researchers may conduct a study focused on how integrated tasks are scored or rated validly and reliably. This is to amplify the other equally important facet of assessment – issues on scoring. Moreover, this research explicated some drawbacks of integrated assessment encountered by both language teachers and learners. With this in mind, further research on the restraining factors in the employment of integrated assessment in ESL classes is strongly recommended to guarantee a seamless implementation of this kind of assessment, so all of its features will be completely embraced in the language assessment process.

Lastly, given the comprehensive accounts of this research as basis, crafting a research tool like a survey questionnaire is likewise recommended. This is to institute a large-scale study on integrated macro skills assessment and to increase the generalizability of research results on this research topic, especially the research was carried out with a few research participants as it is the sample size required in a qualitative research design.

#### Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

#### Funding acknowledgements

No funding was received for this paper.

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