Factors influencing assessment of language in school

Due to the globalization, some people whose first language is not English are the fastest-growing school population, and in Australia's classroom are becoming increasingly diverse. Take Deakin university for example, the students in the classroom come from Italy, America, China, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Australia and so on. Many students are from none English Speaking countries and different cultural background. They share the considerable challenge of having to learn English while responding to the subject-matter demands of school. This article is to explore the cultural understandings which underpin pedagogies used in international education. Moreover, there has been great recent interest in the social and policy context of language testing and assessment. McNamara (1998)comments on the recency of discussion of the ethics of language testing, an area in which social values are a main concern; while the previous relative neglect of these issues in research on language testing has been documented by Kunnan (1996), quoted from Hamp-Lyons article. Finally, because effective use of technology must be supported by significant investment in hardware, software, infrastructure, professional development, and support services, over the last decade, technology is introduced into the nation's school systems, ultimately, the schools will be held accountable for these investments. Assessment refers to the collection and interpretation of information about learners' knowledge, skills, strategies and attitudes. It is a vital and integral part of classroom instruction, and serves several purposes and audiences. Assessment polices exert considerable influence over the education of English language learners because assessment influence the identification, classification, placement, and ongoing monitoring of students. Sometimes the assessment results can help the students to improve their abilities and

the quality of instruction. Assessment practices were not designed with the diversity of current population of English language learners in their mind. As a result, assessment practices have also sometimes prevented students who are learning English from gaining access to a high quality education. Many learners complain that the English language tests are too much, in fact their abilities and skills have not been adequately assessed because traditional testing practices do not capture all that they know and can do. This essay will argue that the culture, policy and social condition, the educational background and technology impact on assessment of language in Australia. In planning assessments to be taken by the general student population, including English language learners, the general principles of good assessment practices apply. This article describes different steps within the planning process, highlighting issues most relevant to the assessment of English language learners.

First of all, the policy and social considerations influence on language assessment. McNamara (1998) mentions that the use of tests as an arm of policy reform in education and vocational training has grown, and it has been incorporated as an aspect of immigration policy. These developments have invited the kind of analysis made relevant by the new frameworks for thinking about tests outlined above. The policy influence on the school and university educational systems and even the workforce. National governments often require language tests or other formal assessment procedures to be used. Test fairness is a particularly important quality when tests are related to migration, residency or citizenship. Moreover, as labor mobility has risen and immigrant and refugee flows become a more

entrenched part of the present global situation, the assessment of language skills has assumed importance in the context of immigration policy, especially in Australia. Besides that the concern of governments for greater industrial efficiency, and the needs of vocational education and training of workforces in rapidly changing environments of production, have motivated a range of policy initiatives which have had implications for assessment. In the past 15 years, language assessment has become increasingly uses as an instrument of policy in the areas of school education, vocational training, and immigration. Khattri and Sweet (1996) demonstrate that the policy context supporting the introduction of performance assessment in school and vocational training contexts at national, state, and district levels, quoted from McNamara' article. Therefore, policy makers should be aware that there are some other kinds of assessment which may also be appropriate. Tests and other methods of assessment have their own particular benefits which relating to characteristics such as impact on the candidate, the interpretability of results, standardization and reliability of the results which means that it is easy to compare candidates across the same or different administrations, and cost and practicability. It is very significant that the requirements of the situation are considered carefully to identify the most appropriate kind of assessment. It should also be noted that a combination of assessment methods is possible. Brindley argues that the function of such frameworks in providing greater accountability for systems in their delivery of language training potentially involves a conflict with the educational needs of learners and the goals of teachers. For example, as notes in the ETS standards for quality and fairness, validity is one of the most important attributes of an assessment. Validity is commonly referred to as the extent

to which a test measurement what it claims to measure. For English language learners, as well as for all populations, it is critical to consider the degree to which interpretations of their test results are valid reflections of the skill or proficiency that an assessment is intended measure (Educational Testing Service, 2009). Language assessment is a measure of language ability for the ELLs. According to study guide, " the Rasch model attempt to generalize from test data to estimate candidate ability and item characteristics (difficulty, discrimination and fit to the model). Estimates of candidate ability take task or item difficulty into account and are based on the assumption that the propability of a correct response is a function of the difference between the person's ability and difficulty of the task". For instance, ESL tests are being increasingly used by the Australia government to manage immigration. One test, assess, raises ethical issues in the way it is used to limit numbers and types of immigrants. There are many immigrants from the other countries want to move to Australia, the government should take effective measures to control this situation; the other, step, was used to hasten the determination of residential status for substantial numbers of asylum seekers (McNamara, 1998). " The Australian tradition of using language tests in immigration policy contexts, dating back to the notorious dictation test which was used to implement a blatantly discriminatory immigration policy until the 1960s, is analyzed by Davies (1996)". Cumming (1994) has stressed the responsibility of language assessment practice to promote the welfare of immigration. As a result, where language assessment is being considered, policy makers are urged to first consider issues at a deeper level. 690

Second of all, different language and educational background influences the assessment of English language learners. This point of view describes factors to consider when developing assessments and make useful decisions relate to testing accommodations for English language learners. The factors provide useful context for the guidelines presented in the later parts of the document. As for language factors, many English language learners in Australia are from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds. This is particularly important to keep in mind when considering the use of native language testing accommodations, since it may not be possible to provide assessments in all native languages represented in a large school district to a state. For example, in Deakin University English Language Institute (DUELI), which is a language training school related to Deakin University, many overseas students are from different country, they can communicate with each other in English, through a period of language learning, at the end of the step there is a language assessment provided. That is to detct the progress of students in language learning. Furthermore, different levels of proficiency in English for English language learners will influence their assessment of language. They may have varying levels of oral and written English proficiency. It also conclude the native speakers, some may not have had any formal schooling in their native language. The language learners should not be assumed that they can converse easily in language learning will have the literacy skills necessary to understand the written directions for a standardized test. Some English language learners may be proficient in the English used for interpersonal communications but not in the academic English needed to fully access content-area assessments (Educational Testing Service, 2009). According to some research that shows the level of

language proficiency has an influence on processing speed. Comparing with native speakers, English language learners probably take longer on tasks presented in English. This is important to keep in mind when designing and scoring the assessment, as well as when making decisions about testing accommodations. In addition, as for educational background factors, English language learners vary widely in the level of formal schooling they have had in their native language (Educational Testing Service, 2009). The degree of native language formal schooling affects not only native language, but also for the assessment of English language learners. The other the proficiency of the language learners in literacy in the native language is involving the skills and knowledge. For instance, some students are refugee people, they want to go to the school which the educational system with little or no formal schooling in any language. These students must learn English and content-area knowledge simultaneously, while also being socialized into a school context that may be extremely unfamiliar. The other English language learners may come to the formal schooling and may have received instruction in the content area in their native language. Accord to Educational Testing Service (2009) describes the primary challenge for these students is simply to change their existing content knowledge into English. In addition, these factors come into play when making decisions about appropriate accommodations. Moreover, there are vary degrees of exposure to standardized testing, it should not be assumed that the English language learners have had the same exposure to the standardized testing that is prevalent in Australia. The learners in some countries may have had no exposure to multiple-choice questions, while those from other countries may never have seen a constructed-response question. Even English language

learners from educationally advantaged backgrounds and with high levels of English language proficiency may not be accustomed to standardized, large-scale assessments and may be at a disadvantage in these testing situations.

Thirdly, cultural factors can be potential sources of construct-irrelevant variance that add to the complex of appropriately assessing English language learners. Culture is an important facet of the learners' social environment as cultural beliefs guide and direct behaviour. Each culture has different value systems and these guides the individual. English language learners are from a wide range of cultural background, and cultural difference may place the English language learners at a disadvantage in a standardized testing situation. Lack of familiarity with mainstream Australia culture, they may potentially have an impact on test scores for English language learners. The learners who are unfamiliar with Australia culture may be at disadvantage relative to their peers because they may hold different assumptions about the testing situation or the educational environment in general, have different background knowledge and experience, or unfamiliar with Australia culture may be at a possess different sets of cultural values and beliefs, and therefore respond to questions differently (Accord to Educational Testing Service, 2009). In fact, assessment the true value of language assessment is to check the language learners learning level, and based on the assessment results to help students progress. Culture differences are inevitable factors and impact on language assessment obviously. In addition, assessment can be used for a variety of purpose such as diagnosis of learners' strengths and weaknesses, grading of learners' performance, placement of learners in an appropriate class or

teaching programme, and evaluation of learners for further studies. August, D., & Pease-Alvarez, L. (1996) maintains that assessment presented builds on the school-wide and classroom cultures, policies, and practices that characterize effective schools for English language learners. Elements of these include a core curriculum aligned with rigorous content standards, student assessment that is culturally responsive, teacher knowledge of strategies that support students' cultural backgrounds, and a challenging and responsive learning environment. Every element of the model is first presented in a research-based discussion and then followed by attributes of effective practices based on examples from school sites. All cultures promote specific norms of behavior that can influence the assessment and intervention process with members of ethnically diverse groups, cultural issues related to the assessment process and culturally sensitive recommendations.

Last but not least, technological aspects impact on assessment of language in schools. Each technology is likely to play a different role in students' learning. Rather than trying to describe the impact of all technologies as if they were the same, researchers need to think about what kind of technologies are being used in the classroom and for what purposes, applied linguists might consider technology in language assessment by discussing ways in which streamlines the testing process. Two general distinctions can be made. Students can learn " from" computers-where technology used essentially as tutors and serves to increase students basic skills and knowledge; and can learn " with" computers-where technology is used a tool that can be applied to a variety of goals in the learning process and can

serve as a resource to help develop higher order thinking, creativity and research skills (Reeves, 1998; Ringstaff & Kelley, 2002). In fact, much progress can be identified with respect to this worthwhile goal, as many language tests today are delivered on microcomputers and over the internet. An equally important strand of language assessment concerns its effects on language learning, language teaching, and knowledge within the field of applied linguistics. The story of technology in language assessment needs to encompass both the efficiency of technical accomplishments, which is evident in part through the success of testing programs in constructing technology-based tests, as well as the effects of these test. Technology can encompass a board range of devices used in the testing process, from recording equipment, statistical programs, and data bases, to programs capable of language recognition (Burstein, Frase, Ginther, and Grant, 1996). Many different types of technology can be used to support and improve learning, involving the language assessment. Everything from video content and digital moviemaking to laptop computing and handheld technologies have been used in classrooms, and new uses of technology such as podcasting are constantly emerging(Marshall, 2002). For example, writing assessment is a suitable point which can support this belief that the students can become better writers when they use the computer for writing. By creating more frequent opportunities for students to learn, Student's writing in digital form makes it possible to analyze writing quality in

more detail, grade the writing by automated means, and provide immediate feedback to both the student and the teacher about how well the student performed (Miller, 2009), quoted from Bejar (2010). A digital writing

environment also can provide students with tools or scaffolds (Deane, Quinlan, & Kostin, in press) that can facilitate writing. The feasibility of detailed writing analysis also makes it possible to study the development of writing skills and to chart their development on a meaningful scale (Attali & Powers, 2008). Many years ago, access to technology was limited and writing school was one of the nation's highest education priorities. Public schools have also made consistent progress in expanding Internet access in instructional rooms. Technology is introduced into our nation's school systems. Along with expanded access has come a growing pervasiveness of technology in society. For the new generation of young people, technology, particularly the Internet, has assumed a substantial stake in their social and educational lives.

To sum up, English as a world language, in the past few decades a significant change about the language, researchers have found that these changes not only from English language itself, but also from other factors. This chapter has attempted to outline the issues that need to be considered and, by implication, the issues for which policy makers should take responsibility. The questions of what type of assessment is necessary for the intended purpose, and what it can be expected to measure should be considered first. For the successful use of a language test for migration and citizenship purposes, those who define the policy must work with the test providers on several aspects after the decision to use a test has been made. During these changes will impact on language -related changes in language teaching and assessment. Assessment is the practice of collecting evidence of student learning. In the past, the English test or assessment still to the native English

speakers of the language for criteria, which language closed to the native English speakers is a good standard of evaluation results, and vice versa is not up to the standard learning objectives. Language testing and evaluation is changed now, set the highest standards and evaluate the assessment of the highest standards from the distance and differences, and then view the object of study and progress through the content analysis. Language assessment also based on the different factors is change, and position of the language assessment is more important in the world, therefore, linguists, educators, and testing evaluators should pay more attention on the advantages and limitations of the language assessment, and to grasp these changes then take effective measures.