The Application of the Australian Core Skills Framework to Assessment in the Skills for Education and Employment Program: A Case Study of Teachers’ Perspectives and Practices

by
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Abstract

The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) has been adopted as the national assessment and reporting framework in Australia’s government-funded adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) education sector since mid-2009. Replacing the previous National Reporting System (NRS), the ACSF has become a compulsory framework for pre-training and achievement assessments in adult LLN programs like the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE). Despite its expansion in both applications and scope of implementation, no research findings are available on the application of the ACSF to assessment, especially in the SEE program where rigorous assessment and reporting requirements are in place. The literature review of LLN theoretical models and LLN framework development and application in different educational contexts highlights various issues of concern with LLN constructs, accounting for targeted learner cohorts and accounting for teachers as assessors.

Adopting a case study approach, the present research examined the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program through document analysis of the ACSF, questionnaires and interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols with teachers in a SEE training organisation. The document analysis generated understandings of the realisation of the assessment application in the ACSF. The questionnaire survey and interviews explored the SEE teachers’ perspectives and reflected experience of applying the ACSF to assessment. The audio-recorded think-aloud verbal protocols investigated teachers’ actual application of the ACSF to rating six writing samples by three SEE learners. The data from all the three sources were analysed for insights into the LLN constructs and the extent to which the SEE learners and teachers as assessors were accounted for in the application of the ACSF to assessment.

The research findings revealed both the strengths and shortcomings of the assessment application of the ACSF in the above three areas of concern. The research recommended specific areas for improvement in the ACSF, issues to be addressed in the application process and directions for further studies on the research issue.
Declaration of Originality

This thesis does not contain material which has been accepted for any other degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text.

Signature: ..............................................

Anh Quynh Thi Le
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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my family and friends, who have been patiently asking “Are you there yet?” and supporting me all the way through to my completion.
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACAL</td>
<td>Australian Council of Adult Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCI</td>
<td>Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACEVic</td>
<td>Adult and Community Education Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACFEB</td>
<td>Adult Community and Further Education Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACSF</td>
<td>Australian Core Skills Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTA</td>
<td>Australian Council of TESOL Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMES</td>
<td>Adult Multicultural Education Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTA</td>
<td>Australian National Training Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Qualification Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BES</td>
<td>Block Exit Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEFR</td>
<td>Common European Framework for Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGEA</td>
<td>Certificates in Adult General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLA</td>
<td>Communicative Language Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSWE</td>
<td>Certificates of Spoken and Written English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEECD</td>
<td>Department of Education and Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIIRD</td>
<td>Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIISRTE</td>
<td>Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLN</td>
<td>Language Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLNP</td>
<td>Language Literacy and Numeracy Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCVER</td>
<td>National Centre of Vocational Education Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRS</td>
<td>National Reporting System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYA</td>
<td>Not Yet Achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Pre-Training Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEE</td>
<td>Skills for Education and Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALBEC</td>
<td>Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WELL</td>
<td>Workplace English Language and Literacy</td>
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Research Issue and Rationale

The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) (DEEWR, 2008) has been adopted as the national assessment and reporting framework in Australia’s government-funded adult language literacy and numeracy (LLN) education programs since mid-2009. The framework replaces the National Reporting System (NRS) (Coates, Fitzpatrick, McKenna, & Makin, 1995) and encompasses not only the reporting function like the NRS but also the assessment application. The application of the ACSF has been compulsory in a range of adult LLN government-funded programs including the Skills for Education and Employment Program (SEE), previously known as the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), which provides LLN education to Australian job seekers nation-wide. This research aims to investigate the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. The research was initiated by the researcher’s own experience as an LLN practitioner and necessitated by insights from the review of literature.

Working in the Australian adult LLN education sector for six years, the researcher has used different LLN curricula and frameworks in training program design, training resource and assessment task bank development, teaching, assessment and reporting of adult learners’ LLN performance. These curricula and frameworks include the Certificates in General Education for Adults, CGEA (ACFEB, 1993), the Certificates of Spoken and Written English, CSWE (Hagan et al., 1993), the English as a Second Language, ESL, framework (DEECD, 2009), the NRS (Coates, et al., 1995) and the ACSF (DEEWR, 2008). The researcher has experienced and witnessed various challenges facing LLN practitioners in the application of the NRS and the ACSF to assessment and reporting. It is the need to understand and overcome these challenges that has motivated the researcher to undertake this research on the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. The research issue, specifically related to an Australian adult LLN program, has turned out to be a common issue of interest in the current LLN education landscape as the literature review unfolds.

The adoption of the ACSF in the SEE program resembles the current widespread development and implementation of assessment frameworks in various LLN education
systems in Australia (see Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Breen et al., 1997; Brindley, 1995; Lumley, 2005; Sanguinetti, 1995), the USA, the UK, Canada and Europe (see Alderson et al., 2006; Haque & Cray, 2007; Hudson, 2005; North & Schneider, 1998; Papageorgiou, 2010; C. Scott, 2001; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004). While advantages of LLN frameworks for teaching, assessment and reporting have been well articulated (see Black & Yasukawa, 2010; Broadfoot, Osborn, Sharpe, & Planel, 2001; Coates, et al., 1995; A. Cumming, 2009; J. Cumming & Van Kraayenoord, 1996; Perkins, 2009), problems identified with LLN framework development and implementation have been equally well reported (see Alderson, et al., 2006; Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Bailey & Huang, 2011; Breen, et al., 1997; Brindley, 2000, 2008, 1995; A. Cumming, 2009; Davies, 1995; Davison, 2004; Hudson, 2005; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006; McKay, 1995; Quinn, 1993; Sanguinetti, 1995; Simons, 2009; Widdowson, 2001). Given the complexity and challenges faced by LLN framework developers and users, experts in the field have called for the current crop of LLN frameworks to be subject to continuous improvement with a lot of work to be done to evaluate frameworks’ validity, ensure reliability and facilitate practitioners’ implementation (Brindley, 1998; A. Cumming, 2009; Davison, 2007; McKay, 1995; North & Schneider, 1998; Sanguinetti, 1995).

Despite its current nation-wide adoption as an overarching assessment and reporting framework in diverse Australian adult LLN education contexts, no research findings are available so far on the actual implementation of the ACSF. This research on the assessment application of the ACSF in the SEE program presents a reply to both the needs of LLN practitioners in the SEE program and the call from experts in the field of LLN education.

### 1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows. This chapter continues with some background information on the historical context of the Australian government-funded adult LLN education, the ACSF and the SEE program, and concludes with the research focus and questions. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on theoretical models of language, literacy and numeracy learning, studies of LLN framework development and studies of LLN framework implementation. Chapter 3 discusses the methodologies used to investigate the development and application of LLN frameworks and justifies the choice of an instrumental case study with mixed methods for this study. Chapter 4 describes the
research design and execution. Chapter 5 presents and discusses major findings from the document analysis of the ACSF, Chapter 6 findings from the questionnaire survey and interviews with SEE teachers and Chapter 7 findings from the think-aloud verbal protocols of teachers’ rating SEE learners’ writing performance. To conclude, Chapter 8 summarises major findings from the research and makes some suggestions to the development and implementation of the ACSF and further studies on the research issue.

1.3 Background

1.3.1 Historical Context of Government-Funded Adult LLN Education

The Australian government-funded adult LLN education caters for the LLN needs of two major groups of learners, adult migrants who need to improve English as second language, and native English speakers who need to improve literacy and numeracy skills. Until the end of the 1980s, adult basic LLN education in Australia received little attention from policy makers. Political agendas associated with the sector were primarily linked to cultural assimilation for adult migrants and social justice and welfare for a minority of disadvantaged Australian-born people (Wickert, 2001). Funding to the sector was limited and followed the input-based model, funding based on learner enrolment numbers (Hazell, 1998, in Balatti, Black, & Falk, 2006). The teaching and assessment practices were mainly based on local needs and low-stakes oriented with program objectives, progress, content, materials and activities being identified and negotiated between teachers and learners, and assessment purposes being to inform and facilitate the learning partnership between these two stakeholders (Burns & de Silva Joyce, 2000; Doherty, Magubhai, & Shearer, 1996). Assessments were conducted informally by classroom teachers with no quality assurance procedures in place (Brindley, 1989; McKenna, 1998).

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, changes occurred in the international contexts when the Organisation for Economics Corporation and Development (OECD) recognised the rapid international economic and social transformation and the need for the OECD countries to maintain an economic competitive advantage and social well-being through the provision of substantial adult LLN interventions and initiatives (see Balatti, et al., 2006; McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004a). In Australia, important survey and research findings also identified the lack of sufficient LLN skills among adult Australians and the difficulties they encountered when facing increasing LLN demanding tasks in both their
daily life and workplaces (see Wickert, 2001). Under the influences of the OECD and Australian adult LLN advocates, political agendas of adult LLN in Australia started to shift from seeing adult LLN as the issue of solving illiteracy for individuals to the issue of building human capital for the whole nation (Balatti, et al., 2006; Wickert, 2001).

Following the shift in the political agenda in Australia’s adult LLN education were major changes in the concepts of LLN and the funding models of adult LLN education. The conceptualisation of LLN was no longer limited to the ‘basic’ skills of word recognition and phonics, decoding and comprehending written texts and manipulating numbers. Instead, LLN concepts were expanded to include the ‘whole language’ skills to construct meanings of texts in the social context; the ‘language experience’ skills to relate language to ones’ own experiences; the ‘functional’ skills to perform tasks related to managing one’s domestic, work or public life; the ability to situate, interpret, critique, use and even create maths in context; the ‘multiple literacies’ skills to use words and numbers in integration; and the ‘learning to learn skills’ for life-long learning (Balatti, et al., 2006; J. Cumming & Van Kraayenoord, 1996; McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004a). The funding model in Australia’s LLN education also shifted from pre-1990s ‘input-based’ model to the post-1990s ‘purchasing outputs’ model, which means funding was no longer allocated on learners’ enrolment but based on successful achievement of learning outcomes by participants (Hazell, 1998, in Balatti, et al., 2006).

Driven by the profound changes in the political agendas, the LLN conceptualisation and the funding models, various LLN frameworks have been developed and adopted in Australia’s adult LLN education sector for the last two decades to specify the standards or learning outcomes that the teaching, assessment and reporting practices are expected to account for (McKay & Brindley, 2007; McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004a). Two types of LLN frameworks have been adopted in Australia’s adult LLN education. The first is curriculum frameworks designed for teaching and assessment of specific learner cohorts. Examples of these frameworks include the CGEA (ACFEB, 1993) for native English-speaking literacy and numeracy adult learners, the CSWE (Hagan, et al., 1993) for adult migrants and the ESL Framework (DEECD, 2009) for English as a Second Language learners in general. The second type of frameworks is what Brindley (1998) called “scale of scales”, which has been designed mainly for assessment and reporting for accountability purposes, often adopted at a nation-wide scope, across different learner populations and
upon various curricula. An example of this type is the National Reporting Systems, (NRS) (Coates, et al., 1995), which, as pointed out before, has currently been replaced by the ACSF (DEEWR, 2008).

1.3.2 The Australian Core Skills Framework

The ACSF (DEEWR, 2008) replaced the NRS (Coates, et al., 1995) to become the national LLN assessment and reporting framework in Australia’s government-funded adult LLN education in mid-2009. The ACSF, which describes five levels of performance of the five core skills, Learning, Reading, Writing, Oral Communication and Numeracy, aims to provide “a rich, detailed picture of real-life performance in adult learning English language, literacy and numeracy” and “a consistent national approach to the identification of the core skills requirements in diverse personal, community, work and training contexts” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2).

The development of the framework was drawn on four sources of input: advice from key stakeholders and experienced English LLN practitioners; the knowledge and experience of the project team; an analysis of current accredited curriculum documents; and an analysis of theories of adult learning, language, literacy and mathematical development, task and text complexity and human, psychological and social capital (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2). Unlike the NRS, which functioned only as a reporting tool or “a mechanism for reporting the outcomes” in adult language, literacy and numeracy provision (Coates, et al., 1995, p. 1), the functions of the ACSF have been broadened to encompass the assessment application. In particular, the framework is used for: assessing core skills performance; describing core skills in the workplace; mapping curricula to the ACSF; and informing decisions regarding funding and referrals (DEEWR, 2008, p. 3).

The ACSF is expected to make the concepts about the performance and development of core skills more accessible to not only LLN practitioners but also non-practitioners (Perkins, 2009, p. 31) and offer “a means of providing qualitative and quantitative data that would allow us to build a nationally consistent and detailed picture of Australians’ performance in the five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy” (Perkins, 2009, p. 37).

Since its adoption in mid-2009, the scope of implementation of the ASCF has been continuously expanded. The framework has been used as a compulsory assessment and
reporting framework in two major Australian government-funded adult LLN education programs, the SEE and the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (WELL). Currently, the framework has been adopted for LLN assessment in vocational education and training (VET) sector, where industry skills councils have received funding from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to map their training packages to the ACSF and sponsored training for VET trainers in application of the framework (NCVER, 2011). A recent research project has also been conducted to map the ACSF to the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS), a large-scale international adult LLN measurement instrument, for further expansion of the ACSF applications (see Circelli, Curtis, & Perkins, 2011).

Despite its continuing expansion in scope and applications, no research findings have been made available on the implementation of the ACSF in actual LLN training contexts. Meanwhile, viewpoints on the previous NRS (Coates, et al., 1995) as a national reporting framework were contradictory. On the one hand, the outcomes or descriptors stated in the NRS were critiqued as too narrow and not holistic and inclusive enough to capture social aspects of learning or other life skills, and failing to reflect the learning pathways and the complex needs and individual gains of learners (ACAL, 2008; OMI, 2008; VALBEC, 2008). On the other hand, the learning outcomes in the NRS were favored by industry-oriented organisations such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ACCI and the Agri-food Industry Skill Council. In particular, the ACCI (2008) found the focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills in the NRS highly appropriate and helpful to solve the problem of insufficient basic literacy and numeracy among adults in the workforce. The Agri-food Industry Skill Council (Blewitt, 2008) also found the outcomes in the NRS met the language and literacy needs in the vocational context. Given the contradictory feedback on the NRS and its replacement by the ACSF with expanding scope of implementation and additional assessment application, it is necessary for research to generate understandings and insights into the application of the ACSF to assessment in actual training contexts.

1.3.3 The Skills for Education and Employment Program (SEE)

The SEE program represents one major context of the ACSF implementation. The SEE program was renamed from the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP),
which was established in January 2002 from the amalgamation of the Literacy and Numeracy Training Program for native English-speaking adult learners and the Advanced English in the Adult Migrant English Program. Although this research has been conducted mainly during the time LLNP was used as the name of the program, the new name SEE is used in this research report to reflect the change of the program name from July 2013.

The SEE operates under the management and funding from DEEWR. For the period of 2011-2015, the program has received a budget of $143.1 million to provide LLN training to approximately 30,000 clients per year in 370 training locations around Australia. The SEE providers are selected from both public and private sectors through rigorous and competitive tendering processes every three years for SEE provision contracts. The SEE provides LLN training to Australian adults of working ages from 15 to 64 whose language, literacy and numeracy skills are assessed as below levels considered necessary to secure sustainable employment or pursue further education and training. The SEE provides training in three Training Streams:

- Initial Language for learners whose first language is not English;
- Basic Language Literacy and Numeracy for both ESL and native English-speaking adult learners;
- Advanced Language Literacy and Numeracy for both ESL and native-speaking adult learners with the focus on English for professional purposes (DEEWR, 2010, pp. 23-26)

According to the Review Report of the SEE (DEEWR, 2005), 50% of learners entered the Initial English Stream, 41% the Basic Language, Literacy and Numeracy stream, and 9% the Advanced English Stream.

In addition, being a federal funding receiver, the SEE is compliant with rigorous requirements on assessment and reporting of learners’ learning outcomes to DEEWR, the funding body. The program features two types of assessment, Pre-training Assessment (PTA) and Block Exit Assessment (BES) (DEEWR, 2010, p. 39). PTA is conducted individually and face-to-face by SEE teachers or assessors to decide a learner’s LLN levels across the five core skills, learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy for placement in appropriate training streams and classes. BES is conducted by class teachers at different intervals during 800 hour training entitlement to report learners’ progress and achievement of the core skills to DEEWR. SEE learners are expected to demonstrate
satisfactory progress of at least one core skill to continue training entitlement. Unsatisfactory progress from BES may result in the cessation of training to the learners as well as funding for the learners to the providers. Learners’ progress and achievement are also used for evaluation of the SEE and SEE providers by DEEWR (see DEEWR, 2005).

The ACSF is a compulsory framework for both PTA and BES in the SEE program (DEEWR, 2010, p. 39). In particular, the ACSF is used to: document an individual’s competencies in LLN; assist in determining the stream of training appropriate to the client’s needs; and measure increases in LLN competencies (DEEWR, 2010, p. 30). Two major processes of verification and moderation are implemented in the SEE to ensure the quality of assessment and reporting practices with specific emphasis on the compliance to the ACSF.

Verifications are executed by independent verifiers who verify PTA and BES conducted by teachers and assessors in each SEE provider against the ACSF to ensure: learners’ achievement of the claimed ACSF indicators; the accurate application of the ACSF; training providers’ implementation of good practice training and assessment methods; and continuous training, assessment and reporting improvement by training providers (DEEWR, 2010, p. 81). Independent verifiers focus on the PTA and BES reports generated by teachers and assessors, the assessment tasks used, the evidence or work samples performed by learners with teachers’ and assessors’ judgments and notes on the condition, context of the assessment and the LLN features being demonstrated to claim the ACSF levels and features (see DEEWR, 2010, p. 55). The verification results are used as one of the Key Performance Indicators for DEEWR to evaluate the performance of a SEE provider and decide funding allocation.

Moderation workshops are provided separately by both the ACSF designers and SEE providers. Moderation workshops aim at “achieving, improving and maintaining national consistency” of SEE providers by providing them with support to “build and maintain a common set of standards and interpretations of ACSF levels against curricula learning outcomes used throughout the program” (DEEWR, 2010, p. 78). Moderation workshops involve SEE teachers and assessors moderating each other’s assessment tasks and judgment of learners’ performance against the ACSF.
In the SEE program, teachers take total responsibility in designing and conducting teaching, assessment and reporting activities. The SEE teachers and assessors come from different backgrounds including school teachers, English as a Second Language specialists, adult literacy and numeracy teachers, and vocational education practitioners (see McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004). It has been recognised that there is a lack of professional development, trust and security for the teaching staff in the SEE program (ACAL, 2008; ACEVic, 2008; OMI, 2008; VALBEC, 2008). Moderation workshops and verification process focusing on assessment and reporting were found insufficient for professional development (ACAL, 2008; VALBEC, 2008) and providing a micro-management method rather than professional development (VALBEC, 2008). More trust on teachers’ professional judgment and more funding on teacher training rather than verification have been called for.

The operation of the SEE program represents the manifestation of the current changes in Australia’s government-funded adult LLN education with the reinforcement of expected LLN skills through the adoption of the ACSF and the outcome-based funding policy through requirements of assessment and reporting. The program, however, represents the most challenging LLN education context with heterogeneous learner cohorts from a wide age range, various stages of development and diverse cultural, linguistic, educational and employment backgrounds; and rigorous compliance requirements for reporting and assessment placed upon teachers and trainers with limited training in assessment.

1.4 The Research Focus and Questions

As discussed above, the adoption of the ACSF for assessment is quite current and the SEE program presents a challenging context for the ACSF implementation. Insights from the literature review, as shown in more detail in the next chapter, indicate three major challenges with the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program.

Firstly, the attempt to define and operationalise the three major constructs of language, literacy and numeracy performance anticipates the most challenging undertaking in current LLN education. Current changes in the LLN conceptualisation and the increasingly complex LLN theoretical models make it hard for LLN framework designers to decide what to include and what to exclude in LLN constructs, how to realise the
interrelationships among LLN elements, how to scale performance indicators or quantify
LLN performance for measurement (Davies, 1995; Hudson, 2005; Lonsdale & McCurry,
2004; Quinn, 1993; Widdowson, 2001).

Further, the adoption of the ACSF as a national assessment and reporting framework
across diverse LLN educational contexts poses another challenge. The increasingly
heterogeneous learner cohorts make it hard for LLN frameworks to account for learners’
diverse characteristics, needs  and contexts of LLN use (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006). In
both the school and the adult LLN education sectors, concerns have been raised on how
LLN framework development and implementation can incorporate factors concerning
learners’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds, education or schooling experience, age, stage
of development, time of residence in targeted language countries and specific LLN
performance needs (Bailey & Huang, 2011; FitzSimons, 2002; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006;

Last but not least, the enterprise of making the ACSF accessible to a variety of LLN
framework users and consistently applied nationwide predicts inevitable complexity.
Teachers have been acknowledged to play a vital role in the designing, trialing and
implementing LLN frameworks (Breen, et al., 1997; Davison, 2004; Davison & Leung,
2009; Leung, 2004; McKay, 1995; North & Schneider, 1998; Sanguinetti, 1995). Teachers’
application of LLN frameworks to ratings of learners’ performance, however, has been
found to be affected by various factors including their knowledge of current LLN theories,
assessment experience, background, perception of the importance of criteria, judgment
strategies, and their interaction with actual performance samples and learners, teaching,
assessment, reporting requirements, and the wider social practice and values (Barkaoui,
2010b; Breen, et al., 1997; Claire, 2001; Davison, 2004; Eckes, 2012; Knoch, 2009;
Leung, 2004; Lumley, 2002; Sanguinetti, 1995). To ensure the clarification,
comprehensibleness and applicability of LLN assessment frameworks to teachers, trainers,
assessors and task designers is by no means a simple undertaking (Alderson, et al., 2006;
Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; McKay, 1995; North & Schneider, 1998).

Drawing on the insights from the literature review, this research is set out to answer the
research question: “How does the ACSF realise its assessment application in the SEE
program?” In particular, the research aims to answer the following sub-questions:
- How are the LLN constructs defined and operationalised?
- How does the assessment application of the ACSF account for SEE learners?
- How does the assessment application of the ACSF account for SEE teachers as assessors?

This project will first and foremost benefit the ACSF designers and SEE teachers, assessors and coordinators or program managers, who use the ACSF for assessment. The research will hopefully specify areas of strength and weakness with defining and operationalising the LLN constructs, accounting for SEE learners and accounting for SEE teachers as assessors in the application of the ACSF to assessment. The research may provide suggestions for better application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. In a broader scope, the research will contribute to current general knowledge of LLN assessment frameworks and benefit framework developers and users in other educational contexts in Australia and around the world.
Chapter 2 Language Literacy and Numeracy Framework Development and Application

2.1 Overview

To understand the nature of the research issue, the review of literature first traces the current trend of LLN framework proliferation and its underlying expectations or driving forces. The review continues with recent developments and discussions on LLN constructs or conceptualisation, the skeleton of an assessment framework like the ACSF. The review then examines major studies on LLN framework development and LLN framework application in different education contexts for major issues and challenges experienced by framework developers and teachers as assessors. The chapter ends with specification of the focus of the present research.

2.2 LLN Framework Proliferation and Driving Forces

The development and application of the ACSF to assessment in the adult LLN education sector reflect the current trend in both Australian and international LLN education landscapes. For the last two decades, Australia has experienced the proliferation of LLN frameworks in both the school (see Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; McKay, 1995; McKay & Brindley, 2007) and the adult LLN education sectors (see Brindley, 1995; Burns & de Silva Joyce, 2000; J. Cumming & Van Kraayenoord, 1996; McKay & Brindley, 2007; Sanguinetti, 1995). In the international context, LLN frameworks have been widely developed and implemented in Hong Kong, New Zealand, Europe, the UK, the USA and Canada (see Alderson, et al., 2006; Bailey & Huang, 2011; Brindley, 1998a, 2001b, 2008; Broadfoot, et al., 2001; A. Cumming, 2009; Davison, 2007; Fulcher, 2004; Gopalakrishnan, 2009; Haque & Cray, 2007; Hudson, 2005; Jones & Saville, 2009; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006; Llosa, 2011; McKay & Brindley, 2007; North & Schneider, 1998).

Using such terms as ‘profiles’, ‘levels of attainment’, ‘standards’, ‘learning outcomes’, ‘competencies’, ‘elements’, ‘criteria’, ‘indicators’, ‘band-scales’, ‘benchmarks’, ‘attainment targets’, etc. these frameworks basically specify the expected learning outcomes or skills to be taught, assessed and reported by teachers, assessors, and training
practitioners, and to be monitored by policy makers and funding bodies. The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 for adult migrants in Canada, for example, set out the learning objectives and assessment indicators to guide teachers in their teaching and assessment practices (Haque & Cray, 2007). Similarly, the CSWE for adult migrants in Australia specifies a range of learning outcomes as competency statements in broad and context-free terms to guide the teachers’ syllabus or teaching and assessment design (see Burns & de Silva Joyce, 2000). The ESL Bandscales for school learners in Australia and the ESL Standards for school learners in the USA both contain level descriptors of language skills or learners’ behaviors for teaching, assessment and reporting (see C. Scott & Erduran, 2004).

Three major expectations drive the proliferation of LLN frameworks in different LLN education contexts. In the first place, by specifying standards or learning outcomes, current LLN frameworks are expected to shift the education focus from inculcation of knowledge to development of creative, real world-related problem solving and life-long learning skills, which are needed in the rapidly changing society, economics and technology (Broadfoot, et al., 2001; J. Cumming & Van Kraayenoord, 1996). In literacy and numeracy education, this means a shift from the focus on the basic technical skills of reading, writing and doing the sums to meaningful application of those skills in private, workplace, community, and other social and cultural contexts (Black & Yasukawa, 2010; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004; Marr & Hagston, 2007; Tout, 2007). In language education, this shift of learning outcomes indicates a change of focus from teaching language knowledge or cognitive skills to developing functional and communicative language ability (Brindley, 1998a; A. Cumming, 2009; Leung, 2005; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006).

Further, by defining standards or learning outcomes, LLN frameworks are expected to make the learning objectives and standards explicit for teachers and learners, assist them with identification of an individual’s progress and mastery of a given skill, task or content domain, and provide information for feedback and necessary remediation (Brindley, 1998a; A. Cumming, 2009; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006). LLN frameworks can offer the advantages of linking what is taught to what is assessed and what is assessed to the outcomes that are reported, or the alignment of teaching and curriculum goals, sensitivity to individual needs and transparency of reporting (Brindley, 1998a, 2001b). In other words, by making explicit the results expected for students, LLN frameworks are hoped to
increase clarity, consistency and precision in teaching, assessment and reporting (A. Cumming, 2009, p. 92).

Last but not least, LLN frameworks, normally developed at system-wide or national levels, are expected to serve as managerial instruments, providing a common reference framework for the performance of educational institutions and systems to be closely monitored and evaluated for funding purposes (Brindley, 1998a; Gopalakrishnan, 2009; Grove, 1996; McKay & Brindley, 2007). Explicit and system-wide outcomes provide common platforms for comparisons and thus foster competition among individuals, schools, institutions and businesses, (McKay & Brindley, 2007). They serve the managerial purposes of: “(1) establishing competition among individuals, teachers, schools and states; (2) commodifying the curriculum (making it measurable through standards); and (3) measuring, publishing and then rewarding or punishing achievement” (McKay, 2005, p.224, in Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006, p. 222). The profound impact of the application of LLN frameworks on teachers’ autonomy was noted by Brindley (1994, p. 8) “when assessment takes the form of constant observation and monitoring in relation to standards, it becomes a form of surveillance”.

The last two decades of LLN theoretical model and framework development and implementation, however, have revealed various issues concerning defining and operationalising the constructs of LLN performance with increased clarity, consistency and precision in assessment and reporting at state, national and international levels. The expectations driving LLN framework development and application have posed great challenges to framework developers and users in terms of both theory and practice. The sections below review current theoretical development and discussions on defining and operationalising LLN constructs and current studies on the development and application of various LLN frameworks for insights into the nature of the present research on the assessment application of the ACSF in the SEE program.

### 2.3 Theoretical Challenges of Defining and Operationalising LLN Constructs

As noted by Bachman (1990), the measurement of language ability requires two fundamental steps. The first step involves defining the construct of language abilities or “to distinguish the construct we wish to measure from other similar constructs by defining it
clearly, precisely and unambiguously” (Bachman, 1990, p. 41). The second step requires operationalising the construct of language abilities or “to isolate the construct and make it observable... decide what specific procedures, or operations, we will follow to elicit the kind of performance that will indicate the degree to which the given construct is present in the individual” (Bachman, 1990, p. 43). The ACSF, as shown in Chapter 1, highlights its aim to measure real-life LLN performance, which inevitably involves defining and operationalising three constructs of language, literacy and numeracy for real-life performance in the first place.

Fulcher and Davidson (2007) classify three levels of language conceptualisation, which helps to understand the case of defining and operationalising LLN constructs in the ACSF. According to the authors, the first level is a theoretical model which offers an overarching and high-level abstract theoretical descriptors or descriptions of all what we know about language knowledge and language use. The second level is an assessment framework which selects skills and abilities from a theoretical model relevant to a specific assessment context or domain. The third level is test specifications which consists of generative blueprints or plans for a specific test. Defining and operationalising LLN constructs in the ACSF belong to the second level, which requires the incorporation of current understandings or theories of the attributes or qualities being tested (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Brindley, 1995; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007; McKay, 1995; McNamara, 1996; North & Schneider, 1998). The ACSF developers actually confirm the incorporation of theories of “adult learning, language, literacy and mathematical development” in the development of the ACSF (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2).

In order to investigate the application of the ACSF for assessment of LLN performance in the SEE program, it is necessary to review current theoretical models of language, literacy and numeracy performance that frameworks like the ACSF are expected to realise. The sections below review the three most influential theoretical models of language, literacy and numeracy and relevant discussions on such models. The review helps to identify the nature and essence of LLN constructs likely expected in frameworks like the ACSF. The review also helps to identify issues concerning the vital task undertaken by the ACSF to define and operationalise three broad constructs of language, literacy and numeracy for assessment in the Australian adult education.
3.4.1 The Theoretical Model of Communicative Language Ability

Bachman (1990) presents an influential conceptual model of Communicative Language Ability (CLA) in second language education. The model features strong focus on not only knowledge of language but also language in use or language for real-life communication. The model consists of three major components, Language Competence or knowledge of language, Strategic Competence or capability to implement language components in contexts, and Psycho-physiological Mechanisms or the neurological and psychological processes of language execution. Each component is further divided into numerous layers of sub-components. Language Competence, for example, entails sets of multiple sub-components as shown in Figure 2-1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language competence</th>
<th>Organizational competence</th>
<th>Pragmatic competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical competence</td>
<td>Textual competence</td>
<td>Illocutionary competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>Ideational functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphology</td>
<td>Rhetorical organization</td>
<td>Manipulative functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td></td>
<td>Heuristic functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonology/graphology</td>
<td></td>
<td>Imaginative functions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2-1: The components of language competence (Bachman, 1990)**

Bachman’s (1990) CLA model has been one of the most influential models in second language assessment for the last two decades (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006). Bachman (1990) claims to be providing a model of second language competence as an explicit statement of the construct being assessed in second language testing or assessment. The model, however, has been subject to skepticism (Davies, 1995; Hudson, 2005; Quinn, 1993; Teasdale & Leung, 2000; Widdowson, 2001). According to Davies (1995), the attempt like Bachman (1990) to specify all possible components of communicative language ability is “a vain hope” or “a never-ending search” for a “grammar of discourse” or “grammar of communication in human interaction”. Cautions have also been raised on
the dilemma of breaking down language ability or competence into multiple units and layers for precision and clarity and the possibility to cover the defined units and to realize their interrelationship in assessment (Davies, 1995; Widdowson, 2001).

According to some language educators, detailed specifications in current extended LLN models produce counter effects in operation. The greater the differentiation of the model the less operational it is likely to be or the more difficult it is to create contexts which “systematically and measurably brings all the components into play” (Widdowson, 2001, p. 17). In other words, “the more precisely we specify what we want, the more likely we are to get it, but the less likely it is to mean anything” (William, 2001, in Davison, 2004, p. 309). Quinn (1993) cautions that while other aspects of human behaviour, skills and knowledge are conventionalised and thus can be defined in descriptors, human language is creative in nature and cannot be characterised without serious and reductionist distortion (Quinn, 1993, p. 72).

3.4.2 The Theoretical Model of Multiliteracies

Similar attempts have been made in defining constructs of literacy for the last two decades and questions have been raised on both conceptualisation and assessment of literacy (see Balatti, et al., 2006; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). Literacy has been reconceptualised under different theoretical models such as ‘basic’, ‘genetic’ ‘critical’ ‘ideological’, ‘autonomous’, ‘multiple’, ‘social’, ‘pluralistic’, ‘human capital’ literacy (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). Fundamental concerns to literacy educators revolve around what to include and what to exclude in the construct of literacy, what characteristics of different literacies are, how the characteristics are connected and which literacy model should be used in different education contexts and to different learner cohorts (Balatti, et al., 2006; I. Brown, Lockyer, & Caputi, 2010; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004).

The New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996) posits an exemplar model of ‘multiliteracies’ to replace the one-dimensional or ‘mere literacy’ which focuses on stable rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence. The ‘multiliteracies’ model emphasises the negotiation of multiple linguistic and cultural differences in learners’ various work, civic and private life contexts. The model encompasses six major categories of design elements including Linguistic design, Visual design, Audio design, Spatial design, Gestural design and Multimodal design to create six equivalent modes of
meaning. Each design element further entails multiple sub-elements as shown in Figure 2-2.

**Figure 2-2: Multiliteracies (Cazden, et al., 1996)**

The extended theoretical models of literacy have, however, raised various issues of concern for assessment. Cautions have been made on the risk of reducing literacy to a set of separate skills or competencies for measurement (Street, 1999, in Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). Rapid technological transformation evokes skepticism about the possibility to establish sets of standards for assessment of multiliteracies (Bond, 2000; Cazden, et al., 1996). Outcomes concerning self-image, like self-esteem, self-confidence are found ‘too hard’ to be measured as they are not easily quantified as other kinds of outcomes (Balatti, et al., 2006), yet they appear to be factors that influence literacy performance. In addition, existing assessment methods appear to lack correspondence to
‘new’ multidimensional literacy models (Bond, 2000; I. Brown, et al., 2010; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). Current classroom assessment and standardised testing practices are found inadequate in measuring multiliteracies with different design elements and modes of meaning (I. Brown, et al., 2010). A current large-scale assessment tool, the International Adult Literacy Survey, is also critiqued as not being able to account for the multiple skills that constitute literacy and different real-life interests, experiences and literacies of different population cohorts (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004).

3.4.3 The Theoretical Model of Numeracy Behavior

In adult numeracy education, though not as well-established as language and literacy education, attempts have also been made to conceptualise numeracy performance. Gal, et al. (2003) provides a complex conceptual framework for measurement of numeracy in the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Survey. The conceptual framework encompasses a wide range of real-life contexts of numeracy performance, task types, types of mathematical information, ways of presenting mathematical information and the activation of various types of mathematical knowledge, skills and processes as shown in Figure 2-3.

Similar to language and literacy, the broadened concept of numeracy also poses great challenges to assessment (Tout, 2007). Firstly, it is found difficult to assess the full scopes of the numerate behaviours as defined in the conceptual framework. Secondly, aspects like beliefs and attitudes, problem-solving strategies, interpretive responses and reasoning processes are hard to assess directly. In addition, it is hard to replicate real-life situations for numeracy performance in assessment, especially in pen and paper tests like the ALL Survey.

It is challenging to set up standards for numeracy assessment (Baynham & Johnston, 2007; Tout, 2007). The development of large-scale assessment tools like Australia’s Survey of Aspects of Literacy, including quantity literacy or numeracy, required the consideration of various characteristics of the survey takers like language background, age profiles, educational status, educational and work opportunities, etc. (J. Cumming, 2001). Similarly, the development of numeracy constructs in work-place training also confronts the complication of accounting for workers’ real-life performance in defining
and setting up levels for numeracy skills and performance (FitzSimons, 2002; Marr & Hagston, 2007).

Figure 2-3: Numeracy behaviour and its five facets (Gal, et al., 2003, p. 17)

3.4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the review of the three influential theoretical models of language, literacy and numeracy and relevant scholar discussions illuminates the challenges facing
assessment frameworks like the ACSF in defining and operationalising LLN constructs. Recent developments in LLN conceptualisation have resulted in increasingly complex LLN theoretical models, which extend to encompass not only traditional LLN knowledge, skills and forms but also real-life performance contexts and various LLN performance-based components. It is a challenging endeavour for assessment framework developers to incorporate current LLN theoretical understandings in defining the LLN constructs, to decide what to include and exclude in LLN definitions, to realise the interrelationships of multiple aspects of real-life LLN performance, to quantify LLN performance for measurement and to account for various factors concerning LLN education contexts and targeted LLN learner populations.

For the last two decades, various attempts have been made by framework developers in different education contexts to tackle the challenge of defining and operationalising LLN constructs for assessment. “Any analysis of the existing proficiency rating scales and assessment frameworks would reveal different emphases and approaches in respect to the different aspects of language development and language skills” (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006, pp. 220-221). More than ever before has the vital role of clear and sound LLN constructs been highlighted in LLN assessment. Teasdale and Leung (2000) note that:

“in mass education systems with relatively few resources allocated for standardization, clarity about construct, as well as theoretically sound linkage between construct and domain specification, is important...Care in specifying the domain (i.e., what is to be assessed), as well as clarity of and consistency in assessment criteria, are important components in large-scale teacher assessment. Failure to address fundamental issues of this kind may well emphasize the tendency towards divergence of interpretation of criteria when teacher-raters attempt to operationalise scales in the lived experience of doing assessment” (Teasdale & Leung, 2000, p. 171).

Ensuring theoretically clear and sound LLN constructs, however, constitutes only the very first challenge in realising the assessment function of LLN frameworks. To further understand various issues facing LLN framework developers, the next section reviews two comprehensive projects on the development the Common European Framework for Reference, CEFR (North & Schneider, 1998) and Australia’s national school ESL Bandscales (McKay, 1995). Both frameworks are similar to the ACSF regarding their
function as an overarching assessment framework, the former at the international scope of European countries and the later at the national scope of Australian schools. The review focuses on how the two frameworks were developed and what factors were taken into consideration in the development processes to realise their assessment functions. The review shows that in addition to the theoretical challenges of incorporating current complex LLN models, accounting for the targeted learner cohorts and accounting for teachers as assessors emerge as two other major challenges for framework developers.

2.4 LLN Framework Development: Mediating Theories, Teachers and Learners

This section explores how two over-arching frameworks like the ACSF were developed for insights into the realisation of their assessment function in the development process. The two frameworks being reviewed are the Common European Framework for Reference, CEFR (North & Schneider, 1998) for second languages at schools in Europe and the national ESL Bandscales (McKay, 1995) for primary and secondary schools in Australia. Both projects featured a complex process of constructing the scales for second language assessment and the incorporation of not only different theoretical models but also teachers’ perspectives and experience and specific characteristics of the targeted learner cohorts.

In particular, to construct the scales for measurement, the two projects comprised three major stages as follows:

- Analysing and applying different theoretical models to construct indicators or descriptors of second language performance;
- Consulting teachers alongside with linguistic and assessment experts to select and edit theory-based indicators or descriptors; and
- Trialing descriptors through teachers’ actual rating of learners’ performance to evaluate, calibrate and set cut-off points for descriptors and construct scales for measurement

The ESL Bandscales project (McKay, 1995) started with the employment and incorporation of different theoretical models and research findings, which included Bachman’s (1990) CLA model, theories on school learners’ second language development and language ability in academic contexts, genre theory and research findings on the relationships between school learners’ age, experience and school contexts and Australian
learners’ ESL development (McKay, 1995, pp. 40-53). The incorporation of these theories and research findings was found vital to ensure the suitability and adequacy of the ESL Bandscales to the Australian school education context.

The development of the ESL Bandscales involved the participation of experienced and expert writers in consultation with experienced school teachers, who provided feedback to the theoretically-based scales with reference to their experience and observations of their own learners’ performance. The consultation process, though highlighting the vital role of teachers’ participation, identified limitations regarding teachers’ lack of theoretical understandings, inadequate observation skills and inability to articulate descriptors. The project team resorted to close and ongoing contacts between experts and teachers to overcome the limitations. Another part of the consultation process involved a classroom-based survey to further ascertain the content and face validity of the ESL Bandscales, which resulted in positive feedback with 90% of teachers rating the ESL Bandscales as “sufficiently representative” or “highly representative” of school ESL learner development (McKay, 1995, p. 57).

The final stage of the ESL Bandscales development involved the trial of the scales in teachers’ actual ratings of learners’ performance, which was conducted in a small scope using 4 teachers’ rating 22 secondary students on each of the four skills. The trial helped to confirm the effective operation of the scale on Australian school learners. The researcher called for further trials to validate the categories in the constructs and their interrelationships and identify disproportionate indicators in ratings (McKay, 1995, p. 56).

In the same manner, the development of the CEFR (North & Schneider, 1998) also started with the exploitation of different theoretical models to develop the initial pool of descriptors. Approximately 1,000 descriptors were developed based on different theoretical models of communicative language competence and second language performance including Bachman’s 1990, Canale and Swain’s 1980, 1981; Van Ek’s 1986, Skehan’s 1995, and McNamara’s 1995 models of communicative language ability or competence (North & Schneider, 1998, p. 226).

The second stage of the CEFR development involved a qualitative validation process in which second language teachers in different schools in Europe were employed in the process of supplementing, selecting, modifying and editing the content and language of the
initial bank of theory-based descriptors. The validation process helped to determine and eliminate descriptors which were found not to be workable by teachers and add in new ones that teachers submitted. The validation process resulted in 400 suitable descriptors for the CEFR (North & Schneider, 1998, p. 228).

In the final stage of the CEFR development, North and Schneider (1998) used a hundred teachers in rating their students of different languages against initially theory-based and teacher-consulted indicators and employed empirical analysis of their ratings to calibrate and set cut-off points for scales of indicators. North and Schneider’s (1998) large-scale trial of the pool of initial indicators helped to identify overlapping descriptors of the constructs of different languages skills, reveal and eliminate misfitting categories of indicators, develop new categories, set cut-off points for scaling indicators and establish coherence within levels and consistency of the whole scale.

In short, the review of McKay’s (1995) and North and Schneider’s (1998) accounts on the development and validation of the ESL Bandscales and the CEFR further illuminates the complexity of defining and operationalising the LLN constructs in framework development. To ensure the validity of the frameworks, the framework developers had to incorporate not only different theoretical models of second language learning and theories and research findings relevant to the targeted learner cohorts but also the practical experiences and knowledge of teachers and feedback from trials on actual learners’ performance. In other words, the two projects featured the mediation of three major factors: theories, teachers as primary framework users and the targeted learner populations in their development and validation processes. Especially, the last two factors were further emphasised in the conclusion notes by the researchers in both projects.

Both McKay (1995) and North and Schneider (1998) called for further evaluation of the two frameworks in application to different groups of learners and subsequent professional development or training to teachers, raters and test designers in framework implementation. McKay (1995) considered teachers’ agreement with the scales or face validity to be vital and emphasised the need to account for specific learner cohorts like low-literacy and Aboriginal learners children in the subsequent implementation of the ESL Bandscales. In the same vein, North and Schneider (1998, p. 243) concluded “however good descriptors are and however objectively they are scaled, they are still subject to interpretation by raters in relation to groups of learners”.

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As shown in Chapter 1, the ACSF has just been adopted as an assessment framework in Australia’s government-funded adult education sector since mid-2009. No research findings are available on evaluation of the assessment application of the framework or the trial of the framework on assessment of targeted learner cohorts. The framework does mention consultation with LLN practitioners in the development process but in contrast to the cases of the ESL Bandscales and the CEFR, no information is available on how the consultation was conducted and how it contributed to the realisation of the assessment function of the framework. The insights generated from the two projects on the development and validation of the CEFR the ESL Bandscales suggest the need for research on application of the ACSF for assessment in actual training contexts by actual teachers and with actual learner cohorts like the SEE program. The two projects also suggest three important features of an assessment framework, which include the theoretical constructs of the LLN performance, the account for the targeted learners and the account for teachers as assessors.

In order to further inform this research on the application of the ACSF for assessment in the SEE program, the section below reviews studies on the application of different LLN frameworks and scales in different educational contexts. In particular, the review seeks insights into three major areas identified above as vital for assessment frameworks like the ESL Bandscales (McKay, 1995) and the CEFR (North & Schneider, 1998): the LLN constructs, accounting for targeted learners and accounting for teachers as assessors.

2.5 Issues and Challenges of LLN Assessment Framework Application

This section reviews studies on the application of LLN frameworks in different education contexts of Australian schools (Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004), Australian adult LLN education sectors (Brindley, 1995; Sanguinetti, 1995; Smith, 2000), Europe (Alderson, et al., 2006; Papageorgiou, 2010), the UK (C. Scott & Erduran, 2004), the US (Bailey & Huang, 2011; Llosa, 2011) and Canada (Haque & Cray, 2007). The review reveals several issues with the application of LLN frameworks and signifies four main areas of concern: the LLN constructs, terminology usage, the extent to which the frameworks account for the targeted learners’ needs, levels and progress; and the constraints and roles of teachers as assessors.
2.5.1 Constructs and Terminology Usage

Given the complexity involved in defining and operationalising LLN constructs in development of LLN theoretical models and frameworks, it is not surprising that issues with LLN constructs have also emerged as major areas of concern in studies on LLN framework application. Issues with terminology usage were also paramount. Employing different research methodologies, studies on application of LLN assessment frameworks have identified specific prominent issues in these two areas.

From the position of test developers, Alderson and Figueras et al. (2006) used content analysis with expert judgments to investigate the usability of the CEFR as an instrument for reading and listening test construction. The research project involved six language testing experts reviewing the CEFR in details to inspect the extent to which the CEFR “serves as a basis for test specifications and whether it needs to be complemented and modified to eliminate ambiguities” (Alderson, et al., 2006, p. 6). The project team provided the most comprehensive account on issues with constructs and terminology in an assessment framework, which echoed in various other studies. Four areas of concern emerged from the CEFR review project:

- **Inconsistency:** similar descriptions are found at different levels, features like vocabulary are present at lower level but absent at higher level; operation verbs like ‘recognise’ and ‘infer’ appear or disappear at different levels without logic; skills like ‘use dictionary’ is not mentioned at low levels to reflect learners’ needs; speed in listening is mentioned at some levels but not others; text types are included at some levels but excluded at others (Alderson, et al., 2006, pp. 9-10);

- **Terminology:** confusion with the use of synonymic verbs to describe comprehension, e.g. ‘understand’ and ‘recognise’; “identify and “recognise”; ‘find’ and ‘locate’, etc. are used alternatively in descriptions with no clarity of whether they indicate the same or different meanings and skills (Alderson, et al., 2006, pp. 10-11);

- **Lack of definitions:** confusion with terms like ‘simple’, ‘less simple’; ‘very simple’, ‘the most common’, ‘everyday’, ‘familiar’, ‘concrete’, ‘complex’, ‘short’, ‘long’, highly colloquial’. These terms have different meanings for audiences of different language backgrounds, thus need to be clarified, defined and exemplified (Alderson, et al., 2006, p. 12); and
• Gaps: absence of specification of micro-skills or subskills of comprehension like ‘skim’, ‘distinguish relevant from irrelevant details’ or ‘discriminate between facts and opinions’; introduction of concepts like ‘communicative language competence’, ‘text-to-text activities’, ‘sociocultural knowledge’ without incorporating them in scales; dimension of ‘purpose’ or reason for reading is not addressed systematically; lack of information on test methods, texts, tasks for each level (Alderson, et al., 2006, pp. 12-13).

Another study by Papageorgiou (2010) on the CEFR, particularly on the process of setting cut scores for the framework by examination experts, also revealed issues with the constructs and wordings of the CFER descriptors. The group discussion by experts in the study identified some descriptors with an unrealistic goal, others of a lower level being more difficult than the ones of a higher level, the lack of descriptors for particular aspects of performance and levels, and the usage of confusing synonymic verbs and noun phrases in descriptors at different levels.

Using reflective journals and interviews with LLN practitioners, Sanguinetti’s (1995) study on the implementation of the CGEA, one of the first LLN frameworks for Australian adult literacy and numeracy learners, also highlighted concerns by practitioners about the LLN constructs. In particular, the LLN practitioners in the study found that:

• the elements were broad but artificial and hard to assess in natural way; some criteria bore a tenuous relationship to the element and the sum-up of the criteria did not make the whole competence (Sanguinetti, 1995, pp. 19-20);

• the constructs of four domains with accompanying elements, each with its own set of criteria were rigid, did not reflect real-life flow, made it hard to find texts neatly fitting the domain and limited the skills and text types needed by learners in work and social situations (Sanguinetti, 1995, pp. 22-23); and

• essential elements were omitted, e.g. lack of descriptions for grammar, spelling, punctuation, purpose and audience (Sanguinetti, 1995, pp. 25-26); not sufficient measurement and number work in the construct of numeracy, excessive coverage of graphs, equations but insufficient coverage of basic calculation estimation, validation needed for vocational training (Sanguinetti, 1995, p. 33).
Also using discussions and conversations with teachers, Arkoudis and O’Loughlin’s (2004) study on the application of the ESL Companion assessment framework by teachers in schools in Australia revealed that the teachers found descriptors in the framework lacked level discrimination and were too general, broad and vague to be used for assessment of individual students’ texts.

Employing different methods, Brindley’s (2000a) analysis of teachers’ final ratings and Smith’s (2000) analysis of both teachers’ final ratings and their rating processes through think-aloud verbal protocols also uncovered issues with the constructs and terminology usage in the CSWE. The two studies identified that some criteria in the CSWE were too hard or too easy for the levels, causing inconsistency in ratings. Some criteria of different competences at the same level differed in their degrees of difficulty. Their studies also revealed that the CSWE contained terminology that evoked different meanings to practitioners and multiple-part criteria that caused variation in teacher assessors’ focus in the rating process. Similarly, Llosa’s (2011) analysis of teachers think-aloud verbal protocols in their assessment process using the US school state-wide English Language Development standards also revealed that the teachers found the language and the multiple parts in standard descriptions ambiguous and difficult to interpret. The teachers also chose to avoid the ambiguous descriptions or assign their own meaning, which subsequently resulted in inconsistency in the final scores.

In summary, applying different methods, from document analysis, interviews with LLN practitioners to analysis of ratings and rating processes, studies on application of LLN frameworks in different contexts identified the following major issues with the LLN constructs:

- insufficient and inconsistent coverage of LLN domains and performance aspects within and across levels (Alderson, et al., 2006; Papageorgiou, 2010; Sanguinetti, 1995);

- tenuous hierarchical interrelationship among components of the LLN constructs (Alderson, et al., 2006; Sanguinetti, 1995);

- inefficient level discrimination of descriptors (Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Brindley, 2000a; Papageorgiou, 2010; Smith, 2000); and
• ambiguous language and terminology due to the use of normative terminology, synonymic expressions and multiple-part descriptors (Alderson, et al., 2006; Llosa, 2011; Papageorgiou, 2010; Smith, 2000).

Given the prominent issues with the domain coverage and terminology usage of LLN constructs in LLN assessment frameworks, LLN framework researchers and users have acted on and called for close monitoring of criteria, modification and removal of ambiguous or unfit criteria or performance descriptors, and reworking on the constructs for better application of assessment frameworks (Alderson, et al., 2006; Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Brindley, 2000a; Llosa, 2011; Papageorgiou, 2010; Sanguinetti, 1995; Smith, 2000).

The ACSF also attempts to define and operationalise the LLN constructs in the same manner as the CEFR, the CGEA and the CSWE, with the division of the five core skills, Learning, Reading, Writing, Oral Communication and Numeracy, each defined and operationalised through four components: “indicators – statements that provide an overview of performance at each level of each core skill”; “Support, context, text and task complexity statements describing factors that may influence a person’s performance at each level”; “performance Features providing detailed descriptors of what a person operating at a level is able to do”; and “Sample Activities providing specific examples of what a person may be able to do at this level in each of the 6 Aspects of Communication”.

(DEEWR, 2008, p. 3)

Insights from the review of studies of different LLN assessment framework application necessitate an investigation of the major components that constitute and the terminology that is used to define and operationalise the LLN constructs in the ACSF for understanding and evaluation of the framework’ assessment application.

2.5.2 Accounting for Targeted Learners

The focus on authenticity or communicative language competency requires the identification of the features of the target language use with reference to the learners’ characteristics or the target population (Bachman & Savignon, 1986, in Brindley, 1994; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006). The current context of global English education features a heterogeneous learner population and variety in the norms of written and spoken English,
which make it harder to specify the construct of communicative language competency (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006, p. 215). Unsurprisingly, concerns with accounting for targeted learner cohorts have emerged in various studies on LLN framework application. Those studies have identified specific areas of concern with classifying learners’ levels of competence, reflecting their progress and reflecting their LLN needs in the development and application of LLN assessment frameworks.

In Australia’s adult literacy and numeracy education sector, Sanguinetti’s (1995) study on the implementation of the CGEA revealed practitioners’ concern about the framework’s failure to capture performance of entry level students and being unrealistically high and impossible for students at levels 3 and 4 (Sanguinetti, 1995, p. 11). The practitioners also found the CGEA lacking flexibility to reflect the differences in oral communication performance by native-English-speaking and non-English speaking learners (Sanguinetti, 1995, pp. 30-31).

Similar concerns were raised on the application of the NRS (Coates, et al., 1995) in the Australian adult LLN education sector. LLN practitioners critiqued the defined outcomes in the NRS as not reflecting the learning pathways, individual gains and complex needs of adult LLN learners, and too narrow and not holistic and inclusive enough to capture social aspects of learning skills or other life skills (ACAL, 2008; OMI, 2008; VALBEC, 2008). In the same vein, Ross’ (2000) and Burrows’ (2001) studies on the application of the CSWE in the adult migrant English program also suggested the need for incorporation of factors concerning learners’ ages, learning pace, education or schooling experience, time of residence in Australia for better measurement of their performance and reflection of their progress.

In the school LLN education sector, Breen, et al.’s (1997) multiple-case study on teachers’ interpretation and application of different national and state ESL assessment frameworks highlighted issues with the frameworks’ accounting for young learners. On the positive side, the teachers were found to be satisfied with the frameworks’ clear indicators and reflection of ESL learners’ performance and inclusion of the listening domain in assessment of ESL learners’ literacy. However, the teachers still found it necessary for the school ESL frameworks to account for the progress of pre-primary, ESL and Aboriginal learners and further accommodate factors concerning children’s ages and stages of development and the contribution of oracy to beginning literacy development.
Papageorgiou’s (2010) study on the application of the CEFR for assessment of young learners also raised concern about the unsuitability of the CEFR to school learners and the adult-oriented tendency at high levels of performance. Arkoudis and O’Loughlin’s (2004) study on the application of the ESL Companion assessment framework also found the framework’s descriptors too broad to capture the progress by school learners.

In the same vein, two other studies by Scott and Erduran (2004) and Bailey and Huang (2011) investigated how school ESL assessment frameworks accounted for their targeted school learners and also teachers’ assessment practices. Scott and Erduran (2004) analysed two frameworks, the Australian school ESL Bandscales and the USA school ESL Standards, examining information on their developments, purposes and goals, scales and clusters, descriptors, assessment activities and assessment guidelines. The research findings revealed specific strengths of the two frameworks in their careful consideration of the targeted educational contexts and learner population, provision of detailed description and vivid pictures of learners’ language performance and progression and accounting for the differences between English as an additional language learners and mother-tongue English learners and their ways of progress.

Bailey and Huang (2011) examined the conceptualisation and construction of the two sets of English Language Development/Proficiency standards at the USA schools for their accounting for learners’ academic English needs. Their examination also focused on the two scales’ coverage of modalities or domains (speaking, listening, reading and writing), levels of attainment or proficiency, and grade-span and age-level consideration, and judging them against features of school academic construct. The researchers found that neither sets of standards offered descriptions of linguistic and discourse features specific enough for incorporation of Academic English, the learners’ authentic use of English at school. The researcher suggested systematic review of the content of the standards to examine their reflection of the English language knowledge and skills needed for school success, warrant the presence of the academic English construct and generate information about features of academic English across all domains, grades and content areas.

In summary, studies on LLN framework implementation signified the need for and highlighted specific challenges with accounting for targeted learners. In particular, the areas of concern include:
• capturing performance by learners at different levels (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Ross, 2000; Sanguinetti, 1995; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004);

• reflecting progress or learning pathways by learners from different backgrounds (ACAL, 2008; Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; OMI, 2008; Ross, 2000; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004; VALBEC, 2008); and

• reflecting learners’ LLN needs (ACAL, 2008; Bailey & Huang, 2011; OMI, 2008; Papageorgiou, 2010; Sanguinetti, 1995; VALBEC, 2008).

As shown in the background chapter and noted by Ollerhead (2010), learners in the SEE program, where the ACSF is a compulsory assessment framework, represent the most heterogeneous learner cohorts with a wide age range and various linguistic, education and employment backgrounds. Insights into how the ACSF accounts for the SEE learners, particularly their LLN performance, their progress or learning pathways and their LLN needs, are necessary.

2.5.3 Accounting for Teachers as Assessors

Teachers’ role as assessors has also been subject to various studies on LLN framework and scale application in school and adult LLN education. On the one hand, scholarly discussions and research findings keep raising concerns about teachers’ diverse approaches to applying LLN frameworks or scales (Davison, 2004; Sanguinetti, 1995; Smith, 2000), their confusion and struggle with interpretation of the LLN constructs in application (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Brindley, 2000a; Claire, 2001; Haque & Cray, 2007; Knoch, 2009; Llosa, 2011; Lumley, 2005), and their different levels of severity and weighing of evidence (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Brindley, 2001a). On the other hand, increasing acknowledgment has been made to the contribution of teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, experience and professional knowledge and judgment in the implementation of assessment frameworks and scales (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Davison, 2004; Lumley, 2005; Sanguinetti, 1995). Various suggestions and approaches have been made to account for the constraints and contributions of teachers as assessors in LLN framework application.
One of the major constraints of teachers working as assessors is their diverse approaches to applying LLN frameworks and scales in their rating processes. Sanguinetti’s (1995) study of LLN practitioners’ application of the CGEA uncovered that teachers’ approaches to applying assessment criteria ranged from one extreme of “creative interpretation”, or “holding onto the ‘spirit’ of the criteria”, to the other extreme of “tickers of boxes”, or using criteria as “the letter of the law”. Similarly, Davison’s (2004) study of teacher assessment practices in Australian and Hong Kong secondary schools revealed that classroom teachers’ assessment approaches ran the whole continuum from technically ticking criterion-bound boxes, to interpreting criteria, accommodating criteria, personalising criteria and ignoring criteria. On the one end of the continuum, teachers were found strictly following stated criteria and wanting accuracy of their judgment to be checked (Davison, 2004). On the other end, they decided to modify the criteria or simply ignore those that they believed irrelevant (Davison, 2004; Sanguinetti, 1995).

In another study by Smith (2000) of raters’ application of the CSWE to learners’ written performance, raters were also found using three different reading strategies and judgment approaches which caused substantial impacts on their rating consistency. These approaches included ‘read-through-once-then-scan’, ‘performance-criteria-focused’ and ‘first-impression-dominates’ approaches. The study revealed that the teacher using “first-impression-dominates” did not adhere to the assessment criteria but their internalised or personalised views of standards. The teachers using this strategy passed the greatest number of texts, compared to the teachers using the other two approaches.

Another major constraint identified with teachers as assessors is their interpretation of the assessment criteria or descriptors and levels of performance defined in LLN frameworks and scales. Teachers as assessors and raters were found struggling with making sense and reaching shared understandings of descriptors and how they could be applied to learners’ performance. In higher education, Knock (2009) reported that raters found descriptors too vague and resorted to disregarding descriptors and assigning a global score or rating by impression. Lumley (2002) also found that though raters had similar understandings of the rating category contents in general terms, they applied the contents of the scale differently with different emphases on various components of the scale’s descriptors.
In the Australian Adult Migrant English Program, studies by Brindley (2000a), Smith (2000) and Claire (2001) highlighted issues with teachers’ subjectivity in interpreting the CSWE assessment criteria. In particular, the teachers were found struggling with interpretation of terminology and coverage of multiple-part descriptors and differing in their levels of severity, which contributed to their rating inconsistency. In the same vein, Haque and Cray (2007) also reported teacher’s difficulties with interpretation of wordings and contents of performance features in the application of the Canadian Language Benchmarks in the ESL settlement program in Canada.

In school English language education, Arkoudis and O’Loughlin’s (2004) study on the application of the ESL Companion assessment framework revealed that school teachers lacked confidence for accurate interpretation of level discrimination. They differed in their weighing of performance features, levels of severity and perspectives on what to be expected at each level. Similarly, Llosa’s (2011) study of the application of the US school state-wide English Language Development standards also showed that teachers struggled with multiple-part descriptors and terminology. They chose to avoid or assigned their own meanings to descriptors they found ambiguous, which resulted in inconsistency in their final scores.

*Teachers’ Contributions to LLN Framework Application*

Although concerns about teachers’ strategies and interpretation of LLN frameworks and scales have widely reported in current studies of LLN framework application, the vital roles of teachers’ beliefs, experience and professional knowledge have been increasingly acknowledged. Lumley’s (2002, 2005) study on raters’ rating processes showed that the rating scale did not always describe well the learners’ written performance and raters actually resorted to their professional judgment in their ratings. The raters in the study used the rating scale as a tool for justification of their rating decisions rather than as valid descriptors of the learners’ texts. Similar findings were made by Sanguinetti (1995), Arkoudis and O’Loughlin (2004) and Davison (2004), who found teachers’ professional knowledge contributed and supplemented the validation and implementation of LLN frameworks.

Sanguinetti (1995) argued that performance criteria should be treated as guidance for teachers’ judgment and indicators of learners’ performance rather than conditions of it.
Teachers should take an assessment framework as suggested indicators of competence and incorporate them with their professional judgment and weighing a range of evidence in the application processes. Similarly, Davison (2007) suggested higher priority to be given to professional judgment and discussions rather than performance descriptors in a prescribed LLN framework. According to the scholar, teachers should be provided with high quality assessment criteria as a basis for negotiating assessment, articulating, criticising and interpreting constructs in relation to actual examples of students and texts. In Arkoudis and O’Loughlin’s (2004) study, teachers actually reworked the ESL Companion assessment framework based on their knowledge and experience of the learners for improvement in accounting for learners’ progress and discriminating their levels of performance.

Breen et al. (1997) proposed that LLN frameworks should be considered as initial specifications of LLN performance to be subject to classroom trials and ongoing improvement. The researchers underscored the teachers’ three stages of LLN framework implementation and their vital contributions. The first stage featured teachers’ acceptance of an assessment framework based on their perception of the frameworks’ suitability and appropriateness to the contexts. Initial acceptance was then followed by selective adaptation of the framework to their assessment contexts. The final stage involved the teachers’ integration of the assessment frameworks in their assessment practices, imposing their own meaning and justification, acquiring full ownership of the externally devised assessment frameworks and often refining it beyond its original design.

Accounting for Constraints and Contribution of Teachers as Assessors

In order to account for the constraints and contributions of teachers as assessors in the application of LLN frameworks to assessment, suggestions have been made to both the content of LLN frameworks and the process of application and implementation. Knoch (2009) suggested the development of detailed and empirically developed descriptors as they ensured more consistent ratings and teachers’ preference compared to broad and intuitionally-based descriptors. In the meantime, Brindley (2000a) and Smith (2000) stressed the need to identify and exclude normative terminology and disproportionate descriptors or criteria to minimise teachers’ confusion and enhance rating consistency. Brindley (1998) strongly advocated trials of LLN frameworks or scales on actual targeted learner cohorts for appropriate calibration of descriptors and setting performance level cuttings.
In addition to improvement to performance descriptors and level discrimination, the inclusion of support and guidance for administration of assessment and judgment of learners’ performance was also strongly advocated. In particular, it is essential for LLN framework application to provide detailed and clear assessment guidance, explanation and illustration of terminology and accompanying assessment tools or tasks and examples of assessment activities and scenarios (Brindley, 2000a, 2001a; Davison, 2007; Sanguinetti, 1995; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004; Smith, 2000; Teasdale & Leung, 2000). The availability of guidance and support could facilitate teachers’ application of LLN frameworks to assessment (C. Scott & Erduran, 2004), while the lack of them could lead to teachers’ resistance (Brindley, 1998a).

Apart from improvement of LLN frameworks, professional development for teachers on assessment is also called for in studies and discussions on the application of LLN assessment frameworks (Brindley, 1998a, 2001a, 2001; Davison, 2007; Llosa, 2011; Lumley, 2005; McKay & Brindley, 2007; Rea-Dickins, 2008). In particular, Brindley (2001) recommended training on understanding theoretical constructs and assessment procedures to be one of the core units in a teacher professional development program. Lumley (2005) suggested the provision of specific training and assessment guidance for rating of learners’ performance that did not fit the scale’s descriptors. Llosa (2011) called for further research to examine the levels of expertise and/or experience required for teachers to become competent users of LLN assessment frameworks.

Last but not least, the availability of professional community and discussions is found vital to LLN framework application (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Brindley, 2000a; Claire, 2001; Davison, 2004; Sanguinetti, 1995). Brindley (2000a) suggested teachers’ detailed moderation of learners’ performance samples, multiple ratings and corporation between teachers and assessment experts to enhance teachers’ interpretation and application of the CSWE. Similarly, Clare (2001) advocated the use of external assessors alongside with teachers to reduce subjectivity and improve the assessment practices. Davison (2004), however, argued for more trust given to professional judgment and advocated teachers’ interaction and dialogues around assessment issues to articulate and critique their implicit constructs and interpretations and develop ownership and common understandings of assessment processes.
Davison (2004) proposed a comprehensive matrix which captured the complex interrelationships between assessment frameworks and teachers as assessors and accounted for both their constraints and their contributions. The matrix specified teachers’ five different approaches to application of assessment frameworks and five different types of assessment support and training needed as follows:

- “assessor as technician”, following and ticking the criteria checklist, thus in need for “better assessment criteria”;
- “assessor as the interpreter of the law”, adjusting professional judgment to criteria, thus in need for “better assessor training”;
- “assessor as the principled yet pragmatic professional”, accommodating criteria to professional judgment, thus in need for “more time for moderation and professional dialogue”;
- “assessor as the arbiter of community value”, applying personalised and impression in rating process, thus suggested the need for “better” assessors to uphold the standards;
- “assessor as God”, assigning ratings based on intuition and beyond analysis, thus suggested the need for changes in the system for accountability.

(Davison, 2004, p. 325)

In summary, the review of the literature revealed both the constraints and the contributions of teachers as assessors in the application of LLN frameworks to assessment. In order to account for both the constraints and contribution of teachers as assessors, certain suggestions have been made to improvement of both the LLN frameworks and the application process. On the one hand, it is necessary for LLN frameworks to improve clarity of terminology, descriptors and level discrimination and include guidance and support to administration and judgment of learners’ performance. On the other hand, assessment training for teachers is found to be vital. So is the availability of professional community and discussions. Depending on the nature of the interactions between teachers and the LLN frameworks in application, different strategies to account for teachers’ constraints and contributions are called for.
As presented in the background chapter, teachers in the SEE program take total responsibility for assessment and reporting of SEE learners’ LLN performance against the ACSF. The SEE teachers, however, come from diverse backgrounds (Ollerhead, 2010) and receive limited professional training, mainly through moderation sections (ACAL, 2008; ACEVic, 2008; OMI, 2008; VALBEC, 2008). No information is available on the constraints and contributions of the SEE teachers in the application of the ACSF to assessment and how these constraints and contributions can be accounted for. This research hopefully can address these shortcomings.

2.6 The Focus of the Present Research

The review of literature highlights the proliferation of LLN frameworks in various education contexts for the last three decades and reveals three major issues of concern with the application of LLN frameworks to assessment. Current changes to LLN conceptualisation and the development of increasingly complex and extensive LLN theoretical models have made it ever more challenging for LLN framework developers to define and operationalise LLN constructs with clarity and consistency. In addition, the increasingly heterogeneous learner cohorts pose another inevitable challenge for LLN framework developers and users to account for learners’ LLN performance, progress and needs. Further, teachers’ taking the role of assessors in application of LLN framework to assessment requires the accommodation of both their constraints and contributions. The insights from the literature review both necessitate and provide guidance to the present research on the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program.

Drawing on insights from the literature review, this research focuses on three major areas of the assessment application of the ACSF, which include:

- the LLN constructs, particularly, the division of LLN domains, the inclusion and exclusion of LLN aspects, the hierarchical interrelationships among LLN components, and level discrimination of LLN descriptors, and the language or terminology usage;

- accounting for targeted learners, particularly, their LLN performance, needs and progress; and

- accounting for teachers as assessors, both their constraints and contributions
The next chapter reviews in detail the methodology and methods used in studies of LLN framework and scale application and justifies the research approach and methods to be employed in this research on the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program.
Chapter 3 Adoption of Case Study Approach With Mixed Methods

3.1 Overview
This research applied a case study approach with mixed methods to investigate the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. This chapter first recaptures the research issue and purpose and then justifies the research approach and data collection and analysis methods to be adopted. In justifying the adoption of the case study approach, the chapter summarises distinctive features of case study research and reviews its utilisation in studies of LLN framework application. The chapter also summarises distinguishing features of quantitative and qualitative methods, discusses their contributions and limitations in studies of LLN framework application and concludes on the mixed methods employed in this study. Details of the design and execution of this research project will be presented in the next chapter.

3.2 The Research Issue and Purpose
As noted by Patton (2002), purpose is the controlling force in research, which drives decisions on research design or methods for data collection, data analysis and reporting. This research investigated the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program, a contemporary phenomenon in current LLN education landscape with anticipated issues of concern regarding the defined LLN constructs, the targeted learner cohorts and the teachers as assessors. The research was initiated by the interest of the researcher as a teacher and assessor in the SEE program and further guided by insights from literature review of LLN theoretical models and LLN framework development and application. The primary aim of the research is to inform SEE professional community including the SEE teachers, coordinators, managers, the ACSF designers and Australian adult LLN policy makers of issues with the ACSF in application to assessment for further improvement of the ACSF and assessment practices. The secondary aim of the research is to contribute to current general knowledge of assessment frameworks and benefit LLN assessment framework developers and users in other educational contexts in Australia and around the world. A case study approach with mixed methods can best serve the research interest and purpose.
3.3 Case Study Approach

Several authors have attempted to define a case study approach and its key features. According to Creswell (1998), “a case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context”. According to the author, the ‘bounded system’ can be defined by time, place or a specific program, an event, an activity or individuals. The ‘multiple sources of information’ include documents, audio-visual materials, observations and interviews. The ‘context of the case’ represents the physical, social, historical or economic setting of the case.

Similarly, Merriam (2009) highlights three features of a qualitative case study: particularistic – focusing on a particular situation, event, or program, suitable for practical problems; descriptive – thick description of the entity being investigated with as many variables as possible and portrait of their interactions; and heuristic – illuminating understanding of the phenomenon under study, bringing about new discoveries or confirming existing knowledge of variables and relationships. According to Merriam (2009), the unique strength of case study research is its ability to incorporate any and all methods of gathering data and deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, observation, participatory observation, informal manipulation, allowing the research to capture complex actions, perception, and interpretation.

Yin (2009, p. 18) also specifies five essential features of case study which include investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, requiring the consideration of contextual conditions for understanding of the phenomenon, involving situations in which there are many variables of interest with little control over by the researcher, relying on multiple sources of evidence, and benefiting from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

In the same vein, Simons (2009) defines case study as “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution or system
to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community in action.” (Simons, 2009, p. 21).

The above definitions all spell out certain distinctive features of a case study, which include:

- in-depth investigation or exploration of a contemporary phenomenon or practical problem, e.g. an object, a situation, an event, policy, a program or a system;
- in its real life context with various variables involved;
- from multiple perspectives;
- incorporating different data gathering methods for a variety of evidence, e.g. documents, audio-visual materials, artifacts, interviews, observation;
- capturing complex action, perception and interpretation and different variables in interaction or interrelationship;
- being guided by and generating new understanding of existing theoretical propositions; and
- informing professional practices and community in action.

Stake (2000) classifies case study into three different types, *intrinsic*, *instrumental* and *collective*, corresponding to three different research purposes as follows:

- An *intrinsic* case study features the primary interest in understanding the case itself. An intrinsic case study explores a case in detail to generate in-depth understanding of the case. The primary goal of an intrinsic case study is to understand the case as a holistic entity as well as its inner workings. The secondary goal is to understand a more general process based on analysis of the case.

- An *instrumental* case study investigates a case to explore and understand something more general and universalistic than the case itself. The primary interest is not to make conclusions about the case but to use a unique or typical case as an instrument to develop and/or test a theory and to generalise and extend findings in research literatures.

- A *collective* case study investigates several cases to form a collective understanding of the research issue or question. The goal of a collective case study is also primarily instrumental when more than one case is selected, studied and compared
for testing of a theory and generalisation of research findings. A collective case study has the advantage of the breadth of analysis but the disadvantage of lacking in-depth analysis that an instrumental case has.

According to Simons (2009) and Yin (2009), depending on the research’s focus, purpose and questions, case study researchers choose the unit of analysis or a case that enables the researcher to explore the research issue. Different research purposes result in different case designs for the same phenomenon. The review of the literature reveals different applications of case study in research on LLN framework application and their valuable contributions to understanding of the phenomenon.

Some studies took LLN frameworks as the cases and employed content analysis to analyse the frameworks for insights into their applicability to test designing (Alderson, et al., 2006), suitability to targeted learners and teachers as assessors (C. Scott & Erduran, 2004) or accommodation of LLN needs by targeted learners (Bailey & Huang, 2011). Some took specific education centres or systems as the cases and used interviews, group discussions, journals, observation and think-aloud verbal protocols to study how specific professional communities tackled the challenge of applying a framework to assessment of their learners (Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Davison, 2004). Others took particular processes of applying specific LLN frameworks as the cases and utilised interviews, discussions, journals and think-aloud verbal protocols to explore LLN practitioners’ perceptions and interpretations of LLN frameworks and ratings of learners’ performance (Knoch, 2009; Papageorgiou, 2010; Sanguinetti, 1995). As can be seen in previous chapter, those studies contributed invaluable understanding of issues with LLN constructs, targeted learners and teachers as assessors.

In order to investigate the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program, this study employed instrumental case study approach. In particular, this research studied the assessment application of the ACSF in the specific context of a SEE training organisation with the participation of SEE teachers. The research provided detailed descriptions of the ACSF and the application context and in-depth exploration of the teachers’ perspectives and practices in applying the ACSF to assessment of their learners. The research drew on insights from the literature review for areas of focus in both data collection and data analysis. The research findings were expected to benefit the community of practice as well as contribute to and extend current understandings of LLN framework application. The
following section reviews and justifies the employment of mixed methods for data collection and analysis in the present case study.

3.4 Adoption of Mixed Methods for Data Collection and Data Analysis

A case study researcher has the vital flexibility in selection or combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and data analysis methods to best answer the research questions (Simons, 2009; Yin, 2009). A review of the literature reveals the application of both quantitative and qualitative methods in studies of the application of LLN frameworks or scales. While quantitative methods have made significant contributions to understanding of LLN framework application, their distinctive features hinder in-depth exploration of LLN framework application in action and in natural contexts. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, possess vital characteristics which compensate the above shortcoming of quantitative methods. Discussions on the application of the two types of methods in LLN framework application studies are presented below.

3.4.1 Contributions and Limitations of Quantitative Methods

Johnson and Christensen (2008) provide a comprehensive account of features of quantitative research. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), pure quantitative research is confirmative and deductive by nature, aiming to test specific hypotheses and theory. Quantitative research views human behavior as predictable which can be studied under controlled conditions for isolation of the causal effects of single variables. Quantitative data is in numerical form and collected using structured and validated data-collecting instruments. Data is analysed for statistical relationships. Findings are generalisable, presented in statistical reports and represent objective outsider viewpoints.

Quantitative methods have been applied in studies of assessment framework application either as the only methods or in combination with subordinate qualitative methods. These studies tend to isolate certain variables involved in the application of a framework or scale and investigate the cause and effect relationship among the selected variables in a controlled condition. Examples of studies with quantitative approach include the ones on the effects of tasks’ characteristics and conditions on learners’ performance (Brindley, 2000a; Brindley & Slatyer, 2002), the effects of rating scales on raters and ratings (Barkaoui, 2010b; Knoch, 2009), and the influence of various factors on rater reliability.
Quantitative studies use statistical analysis of numerical data obtained at the end of the rating process to establish or test casual relationships among variables. The numerical data normally include performance scores and frequency of codes developed from raters’ rankings, comments, application of scale features, judgment strategies, etc. Statistical analysis is conducted using descriptive statistics – frequencies, means, modes and standard deviation, and statistic tests – correlation and coefficient (see Barkaoui, 2010a; Brindley, 2001a), or multi-facet Rasch analysis – the method that allows the display of variables concerning raters’ severity, scales’ performance features and learners’ scores in a common interval scale for statistical analysis and comparisons (see Baker, 2012; Brindley, 2000a; Eckes, 2012; J. S. Johnson & Lim, 2009; Kim, 2009; Knoch, 2011; Weigle, 1998).

Undeniably, quantitative methods have made valuable contributions to understanding of different factors involved in the assessment processes and the effects of individual variables on rating consistency and rater reliability. Their distinctive features, however, account for certain limitations. As noted by Barkaoui (2010), the assessment process involves various factors – the rater, the assessment task, the performance sample, the rating scales and the specific socio-cultural context of assessment, which interact with each other and can hardly be isolated and controlled for investigation and captured and analysed statistically. It is unsurprising for quantitative researchers to end up with prediction of the possible effects of a range of variables rather than the initial controlled variables.

Brindley’s (2000a) and Brindley and Slatyer’s (2002) studies on the effects of tasks’ characteristics and conditions on learners’ performance indicated that in addition to the features of the tasks themselves, factors concerning performance criteria, rating process and teachers as raters also constituted significant effects. Similarly, Weigle’s (1998) and Knoch’s (2011) studies on the effect of rater training on rater behavior and reliability observed little or no changes as a result of training and feedback. In stead, the researchers suspected the influence of other factors including raters’ backgrounds, knowledge bases and interaction with rating scales and with learners’ performance (Knoch, 2011), or raters’ process of reading of assessment criteria, using criteria in judgment and matching criteria
used to test designers’ intended criteria (Weigle, 1998). Studies on the effect of language background on rater severity and consistency by Johnson and Lim (2009) and Kim (2009) also found little effect of teachers’ language background, native and non-native English speaking raters, on rater consistency. Kim (2009) suggested that the involvement of native speaking teachers did not ensure the validity of the assessment practice but all contextual factors needed to be considered. According to the author, these predicted variables, however, were hard to be investigated using quantitative studies.

The reliance of quantitative methods on the final ratings and numerical analysis of data cannot capture various process-oriented factors such as raters’ cognitive process and behavior, perception of assessment criteria, interpretation of and interaction with frameworks or scales, judgment strategies, reading styles (Barkaoui, 2010a, 2010b; Brindley, 2000a, 2001a; Eckes, 2012; J. S. Johnson & Lim, 2009; Lim, 2011; Weigle, 1998) and contextual factors such as the socio-cultural, institutional and political factors that provide meaning and purpose for and shape the process and outcomes of the rating (Barkaoui, 2010a, 2010b). For understanding of these variables, researchers in the field called for the employment of qualitative methods to study the phenomenon in its process and natural settings, to collect qualitative data through methods like write-aloud, think-aloud verbal protocols, rater written comments, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, and to utilise qualitative analysis of data (Barkaoui, 2010a, 2010b; Brindley, 2001a; Eckes, 2012; J. S. Johnson & Lim, 2009; Knoch, 2011; Lim, 2011; Lumley, 2005; Weigle, 1998).

### 3.4.2 Advantages of Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods enable the researcher to view the phenomenon as social reality being constructed by participants interacting in their social worlds (M. D. Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; B. Johnson & Christensen, 2000; S. B. Merriam, 1998). It allows the researcher to take a holistic viewpoint, to see various dimensions, layers and detailed information of a phenomenon, and to reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole (B. Johnson & Christensen, 2000; S. B. Merriam, 1998). In addition, qualitative approach gives the researcher the opportunity to see the phenomenon from the insider or the participant’s perspective (B. Johnson & Christensen, 2000; S. B. Merriam, 1998). Creswell (1998) and Johnson and Christensen (2008) summarise key features of qualitative studies which include exploratory nature; in-depth examination of multiple factors in natural settings;
focus on insiders’ viewpoints and multiple perspectives; using words, images and categories as data; analysis of data for patterns, themes and holistic features; and using narrative reports with contextual description and direct quotes from participants. These features resemble in qualitative studies on application of assessment frameworks and scales in the following ways.

Firstly, qualitative studies, with qualitative methods only or as subordinate to quantitative research methods, tend to study factors involved in the application of assessment frameworks or scales in a natural setting of a centre, school, program, or country (see Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Davison, 2004; Papageorgiou, 2010; Sanguinetti, 1995) and/or in an actual rating process (see Kim, 2009; Knoch, 2009; Llosa, 2011; Lumley, 2005; Papageorgiou, 2010; Smith, 2000). They presented the perceptions and practices of insiders including test designers and framework or scale developers (see Alderson, et al., 2006; Bailey & Huang, 2011; Hudson, 2005; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004), raters and examiners (see Baker, 2012; Eckes, 2012; Kim, 2009; Lumley, 2005; Papageorgiou, 2010; Smith, 2000) and teachers as assessors (see Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Davison, 2004; Llosa, 2011; Sanguinetti, 1995).

These studies collected qualitative data in the forms of language and content of assessment frameworks or scales (Alderson, et al., 2006; Bailey & Huang, 2011; Brindley, 2000; Hudson, 2005; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004), raters’ recorded write-aloud and think-aloud verbal protocols of their decision-making or rating processes (Davison, 2004; Eckes, 2012; Kim, 2009; Llosa, 2011; Lumley, 2005; Smith, 2000), and rates’ or teachers’ replies to questionnaires and interviews, entries to reflective journals, conversations and group discussions with researchers and researchers’ notes from assessment practice observation (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Davison, 2004; Kim, 2009; Knoch, 2009, 2011; Papageorgiou, 2010; Sanguinetti, 1995). The verbal data was then analysed qualitatively through intensive reading and rereading; categorising words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs for units of analysis; and developing codes, themes, patterns and explanations.

The utilisation of qualitative data and data analysis methods provided significant findings on the operation of the two vital factors— the scales or frameworks in operation and the raters in their actual rating processes or assessment contexts. Qualitative research findings on rating scales and frameworks revealed a wide range of issues from the usage of
terminology, performance criteria, level discrimination to accommodating targeted learners, teachers as assessors, raters, assessment task designers (Alderson, et al., 2006; Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Bailey & Huang, 2011; Breen, et al., 1997; Knoch, 2009; Lumley, 2005; Papageorgiou, 2010; Sanguinetti, 1995; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004). Qualitative research findings on raters in their rating process or contexts also yielded valuable insights into their perceptions, roles, behaviours, styles, strategies in assessment practices (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Davison, 2004; Kim, 2009; Knoch, 2009; Llosa, 2011; Lumley, 2002; Sanguinetti, 1995; Smith, 2000). In addition, qualitative research illuminated the effects of various contextual factors such as teachers’ working contexts (Breen, et al., 1997; Sanguinetti, 1995), sociocultural environments (Davison, 2004), students’ personality, classroom behaviour, and grading and external pressure (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Llosa, 2011).

3.4.3 Adoption of Mixed Methods

In summary, the application of assessment frameworks and scales has been subject to both quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative studies have made significant contributions to understanding of causal relationships between different variables and the effects of individual factors on rating consistency and rater reliability. However, quantitative investigation of individual factors in isolation and the reliance on statistical analysis of numerical data in the forms of final scores and ratings are limited in capability to account for the intricate nature of LLN framework application which features the interaction among different variables and the effects of various contextual factors. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, feature the investigation of the actual rating and application process in specific contexts of particular centres, schools, and programs with specific frameworks or scales. Qualitative studies capture the natural emergence and interaction of various variables concerning scales, raters, teachers, assessors, learners’ performance and other contextual factors. Qualitative studies allow collection of data from raters’ and teachers’ application process and analysis of their actual wordings for themes, categories, patterns. Qualitative studies ascertain more comprehensive accounts of LLN framework application in action.

The present study applied mixed methods, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, for data collection and data analysis to investigate the application of the ACSF to
assessment in the SEE program. As defined by Johnson and Christensen (2008), mixed methods research combines features of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, serving both confirmative and exploratory purposes, viewing behaviour as somewhat predictable, connecting the local and general and studying behavior in more than one context, perspective or condition. Data is collected in both numerical and word and image forms using multiple methods and analysed for both statistical relationships and themes and patterns. Findings provide both insider and outsider view points and are reported in both numerical and narrative forms.

In this research, mixed methods can help to confirm or disconfirm the presence of various issues identified in the literature review and explore issues specific to the ACSF assessment application in the particular context of the SEE program. Mixed methods approach enables the phenomenon to be invested from the viewpoints of both the researcher, an outsider who looks at the ACSF assessment function from a holistic perspective, and the research participants, the insiders who views the ACSF assessment functions from their inner working contexts. In addition, mixed methods approach allows the connection between the local or the immediate context of the ACSF application in the SEE program and the general knowledge on the development and application of LLN assessment frameworks, which is the ultimate aim of this research project.

Mehdi Riazi and Candlin (2014, pp. 143-145) sum up five different purposes that mixed methods can serve in education research, which is useful to the present research. These purposes include triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion. For the purpose of triangulation, a study uses both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods to seek convergence and corroboration of research results and reduce bias by one single method. For the purpose of complementarity, the two methods are employed to collect and analyse different types of data, addressing different research questions relating to different aspects or layers of the research issue. Each method is carried out interactively or interdependently and concurrently for enriched insight into the research issue. For the purpose of development, one method is used to develop or inform the other and the two are implemented independently and sequentially. For the purpose of initiation, mixed methods are used to seek areas of non-congruence and contradiction to initiate interpretations, suggest areas for further analysis or recast the entire research question. The two methods can be employed concurrently or sequentially with
equal priority to both. Lastly, for the purpose of expansion, quantitative and qualitative methods are used to study different components of a program or elements of a research issue. The two methods are conducted side by side sequentially or concurrently with less integration, leaving different elements of the research subject to be true to their own.

In the present study, mixed methods are applied to serve two purposes of development and triangulation and with quantitative methods being secondary to qualitative methods. Details of the approach, specific methods applied and the sequence of application will be presented in the next chapter of the research design and execution.
Chapter 4 Research Design and Execution

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents the overall research design, details of the case under research, and descriptions of the data collection and data analysis methods and procedures. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the strengths and limitations of the research.

4.2 Overall Research Design

A research design is “a logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial questions and ultimately, to its conclusions” (Yin, 2009, p. 26). A research design consists of four elements: the questions to be studied, the relevant data, data collection methods, and data analysis methods (Philliber, Schwab & Samsloss, 1980, in Yin, 2009). This research aimed to answer the research question “How does the ACSF realise its assessment application in the SEE program?” and focused on three features concerning the assessment application of the ACSF, which included:

- the LLN constructs;
- accounting for SEE learners, particularly their performance, needs and progress; and
- accounting for teachers as assessors, both their constraints and contributions.

To investigate these three areas of focus and answer the research question, the research adopted a case study approach, examining the application of the ACSF to assessment by teachers in a specific SEE training organisation. The research used three sources of data – the ACSF document, the SEE teachers’ reported perspectives and the SEE teachers’ rating of learners’ writing performance against the ACSF. The data collection methods employed included acquisition of the ACSF document, questionnaires and interviews to participant SEE teachers and think-aloud verbal protocols recording participant teachers’ rating processes. Data analysis methods were mainly qualitative through examining and developing coding themes for wordings and content of the ACSF document, the teachers’
<table>
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<tr>
<td>The ACSF Document</td>
<td>Qualitative analysis of: + the constructs the five Core Skills in the ACSF; + information on the framework development; + available assessment guidance and support.</td>
<td>Researcher’s perspectives on: + the defined LLN constructs in the ACSF; + the framework’s accounting for targeted learners; + the frameworks’ accounting for teachers as assessors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers’ application of the ACSF to assessment in a training organisation: + Teachers’ perspectives of the assessment application of the ACSF; and + Teachers’ ratings of learners’ writing performances against the ACSF.</td>
<td>Questionnaires to twenty SEE teachers in a training organisation for: + teachers’ demographic information; + teachers’ rating of ten areas of the ACSF assessment application in a five-level scale of satisfaction; and + teachers’ open-ended comments on ten areas of the ACSF assessment application.</td>
<td>+ Statistical analysis of participant teachers’ demographic information; + Statistical analysis of teachers’ ratings of ten areas of the ACSF assessment application; + Qualitative analysis of teachers’ comments on ten areas of the ACSF assessment application.</td>
<td>SEE teachers’ perspectives on and recalled experience with the ACSF assessment application, particularly: + how the defined LLN constructs work in application; + how SEE learners are accounted for in the application of the ACSF; and + how SEE teachers’ constraints and contributions are accounted for in the application of the ACSF.</td>
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<td>Audio-recorded Interviews with eight SEE teachers for their perspectives on and recalled experiences of applying the ACSF to assessment.</td>
<td>Audio-recorded Think-aloud verbal protocols of eight teachers’ rating three SEE learners’ writing samples against the ACSF.</td>
<td>Qualitative Analysis of full transcriptions of eight teachers’ interviews for prominent themes concerning teachers’ application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program.</td>
<td>Objective observation of SEE teachers’ rating of SEE learners’ writing performance for insights into: - How the constructs of the writing skills are operationalised by SEE teachers in rating processes; - How SEE learners’ writing performance are accounted for in rating processes; - How SEE teachers’ constraints and contributions are accounted for in rating processes.</td>
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replies to questionnaires and interviews and records of teachers’ think-aloud verbal protocols. Quantitative data analysis methods or statistical analyses were only applied the data concerning the teachers’ demographic information, their rankings of ten statements about the assessment application of the ACSF and their overall ratings of the learners’ performance. The overall research design is shown in Table 4-1. The sections below explain in detail the research design and execution.

4.3 Document Analysis of the ACSF

The research project started with a detailed document analysis of the ACSF for insights into the framework’s realisation of assessment application. As shown in the literature review, document analysis has been widely used in studies of LLN framework application yielding valuable findings (see Alderson, et al., 2006; Bailey & Huang, 2011; Brindley, 2000; Hudson, 2005; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004). Drawing on previous studies using document analysis by Scott and Erduran (2004), Bailey and Huang (2011) and Alderson, et al. (2006), the document analysis of the ACSF looked closely into the following areas in the ACSF:

- the defined constructs of the five core skills, learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy;
- information presented in the documents on the development of the frameworks;
- available assessment guidance, assessment tools, examples of texts and tasks, explanation of terminology, provision of performance scenarios, etc.

The analysis sought insights into:

- the LLN constructs, particularly, the division of LLN domains, the inclusion and exclusion of LLN aspects, the hierarchical interrelationships among LLN components, level discrimination of LLN descriptors, and the language or terminology usage;
- accounting for targeted learners, particularly, their LLN performance, needs and progress; and
- accounting for constraints and contributions of teachers as assessors.

The purpose of the document analysis was twofold. Firstly, the analysis provided the researcher’s perspectives on the ACSF realisation of the assessment application with reference to insights from the literature review. Secondly, the comprehensive analysis of
the ACSF document provided the researcher with thorough understanding of the document, enabling the design of the items in the questionnaire, questions in the guided interviews and the coding scheme for analyses of the teachers’ comments in the think-aloud verbal protocols. The research findings from the document analysis of the ACSF are presented in Chapter 5.

### 4.4 The Application of the ACSF to Assessment in a SEE Training Organisation

#### 4.4.1 Selection of a SEE Training Organisation for the Case Study

The present research applied an *instrumental case study* (Stake, 2000) to investigate the application of the ACSF to assessment by SEE teachers from one SEE training organisation in Melbourne. The case study enabled a full exploration of the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE training organisation through questionnaire survey to all the SEE teachers, and in-depth interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols with selected teachers with the most experience of using the ACSF to assessment.

The researcher chose four different organisations with the minimum of fifteen SEE training staff and SEE training delivery in both metropolitan and regional areas to contact for recruitment of participant teachers. The above requirements of teaching staff and training areas helped to ensure the diversity of the assessment contexts, the learner cohorts and the teacher population that the ACSF is expected to accommodate. The researcher contacted the SEE manager of each organisation through emails with an explanation of the research project and Plan Language Statement attached. The researcher got reply from one SEE manager who agreed to meet the researcher in person and granted the approval for the researcher to access training sites and recruit SEE teachers for the research.

The participant SEE training organisation provided a wide range of both LLN and vocational training programs, employing twenty full-time and casual teachers for the SEE program alone. The organisation delivered SEE training in four different centres in both metropolitan and regional areas. The main centre hosted ten classes of between fifteen to twenty two learners in each. The other three smaller training centres hosted between one and three SEE classes of between ten and twenty nine learners in each. Fifteen SEE teachers worked in the main centre and five in the other three smaller centres.
The learner cohorts in the four centres comprised both native English speakers or literacy and numeracy learners and non-native English speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The learners also had different educational experiences ranging from no schooling experience to university graduates and experienced professionals in their first languages. The learners also represented a wide age range from recent school leavers to close-to-retirement adults.

The SEE teachers came from different language backgrounds including native English speakers and teachers originating from Europe and Asia. The teachers possessed either degrees or post graduate qualifications in TESOL or adult language and literacy education. Given the above contextual features, the SEE training organisation offered a diverse training context with features typical to the expected contexts of the ACSF application. The following sections provide details of the three data collection methods, the questionnaire survey, the interviews and the think-aloud verbal protocols.

4.4.2 Questionnaire Survey’s Purpose, Design and Participants

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), a questionnaire is a self-report data collection instrument which can be used to obtain information about how participants think, feel and experience a phenomenon. Questions in questionnaire can be closed-ended with responses predetermined by the researcher for confirmation of already known dimensions of a variable, open-ended for exploration of unknown dimensions, or mixed of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The content and organization of a questionnaire can be designed to correspond to the researcher’s research objectives. Questionnaires are suitable for data collection on clearly delineated issues, worth pursuing on a broader scale and can be cheap, fast and easy to cover wide geographical areas (J. D. Brown, 2001). McKay (1995) applied a classroom survey for teachers’ feedback on the ESL Bandscales and found positive results of 90% of teachers rating the framework as sufficiently representative and highly representative of school ESL learner development.

In the present research, a questionnaire survey was conducted to gather teachers’ perspectives on the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. The questionnaire survey in this research project contained two sections. The first one sought participant teachers’ demographic information concerning their ages, workplaces, SEE
teaching experience, and the ACSF assessment application experience. The information gathered in this section was useful to understand the teachers’ perspectives expressed in the follow-up interviews and their application of the ACSF in the later think-aloud verbal protocols. In addition, the teachers’ demographic information was also used to select suitable participants for further in-depth interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols in the next stages of the case study.

The second section of the questionnaire sought teachers’ ranking and comments on ten statements concerning three major areas of the ACSF which were underscored in the literature review. These areas included the defined LLN constructs, and accounting for SEE learners’ LLN needs, performance and progress and accounting for SEE teachers’ constraints and contributions in the application of the ACSF to assessment. The teachers were first asked to rank each statement on a 5 point-scale (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, and 5-Strongly Agree) and then to provide further comments in response to open-ended questions for the ten areas stated. The teachers’ rankings and comments helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment application of the ACSF regarding the three areas of concern. They also provided the basis for the researcher to tailor questions for the follow-up in-depth interviews with the teachers.

Following Brown and Rodgers’ (2002) suggestion, the questionnaire was first trialed on two SEE teachers working in another SEE training organisation who possessed extensive experience with using the ACSF for assessment in the SEE program. The trial helped to identify any problems with administration, ambiguity, confusion or content of the questionnaire survey. The feedback from the teachers’ trial resulted in two minor changes: the inclusion of the explanation diagram with reference to the ACSF to remind teachers of the terminology used in the questionnaire; and the addition of the “Other Comments” section to invite comments on features not mentioned in the questionnaire. Except for these changes, the final version of the questionnaire stayed the same as the initially designed version. The questionnaire sample is provided in Appendix A.

Upon being granted approval for the research from the SEE manager, the researcher applied an ongoing sample selection process (S. B. Merriam, 2009) for recruitment of participant teachers. The researcher arranged visits to the four centres and handed in most of the questionnaires, the Plain Language Statements and Consent forms in person to each teacher with a brief oral explanation of the research and ethical concerns. The purpose was
to know the teachers in person and establish a rapport for the next stages of interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols. A couple of the questionnaires were handed to teachers through the administration staff and via email due to teachers’ absence on the researcher’s visits. The questionnaire responses and signed consent forms were collected in the same manner over the period of four weeks. The teachers had the chance to clarify with the researcher on any points of the questionnaire before replying. Out of the twenty questionnaires distributed, fifteen were returned. The questionnaire responses were then roughly analysed for information of participants and major themes to plan the next two phases of the interview guide and the think-aloud verbal protocols.

4.4.3 The Interview Guide’s Purpose, Design and Participants

An interview is a data collection method in which the researcher asks questions for answers or data from the research participants (B. Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Interviews aim to find out from people those things we cannot directly observe, like their behaviors that took place at some previous point of time, or what is on their mind, their thinking or feeling about something (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Johnson and Christensen (2000) summarise four types of interviews, informal conversational interview, the interview guide, standardised open-ended interview and closed quantitative interview. The interview guide approach is the form of interviews in which the specific topics or issues to be covered have been decided in advance and the interviewer asks open-ended questions and follows no strict rules on wording or sequence to explore the topics (Patton, 2002).

 Interviews have been widely used in studies of teachers and raters’ evaluation of scales or frameworks. Using informal conversations and interview guide, research on application of assessment frameworks resulted in valuable insights into the individual teachers’ application of specific scales and frameworks in specific application contexts (see ANTA, 2003; Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Davison, 2004; Knoch, 2009; North & Schneider, 1998; Sanguinetti, 1995).

This study also utilised the interview guide approach to explore teachers’ perspectives and experience of using the ACSF as an assessment framework. The interviews aimed to explore individual teachers’ perspectives of and experiences with the ACSF for assessment in relation to their specific workplaces and learner cohorts and to seek their clarification and elaboration on issues salient in their questionnaire responses. Adopting the interview
guide approach, the eight interviews followed the same format with eight questions for teachers’ report of their perspectives and reflection of their experience of using the ACSF for assessment, clarification of their comments in the questionnaires and suggestions for improvement of the ACSF. The specific content and wordings of the interview questions for each teacher slightly differed corresponding to their individual questionnaire responses and specific experiences with the ACSF. The general interview guide is presented in Appendix B.

*Purposeful sampling* using *key informants* (J. P. Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005) was applied to recruit teacher participants in the interviews as well as the think-aloud verbal protocols. Among the fifteen teachers participating in the questionnaire survey, the researcher just received agreement from four teachers to participate in the follow-up interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols, one of whom with little experience in using the ACSF for assessment. Meanwhile, the analysis of the teachers’ demographic information revealed eight potential teachers who worked as class coordinators as well as placement assessors, which meant they had to apply the ACSF to both pre-training and achievement assessment. With so much involvement in assessment, the eight teachers were likely to provide resourceful information to the present study. With the facilitation of the three potential teachers who agreed with further participation in the research, the researcher met the other five teachers in person, providing explanation on the purpose and manner of the interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols and seeking their participation.

Together with the first three teachers, the five teachers agreed to participate in the interviews and verbal protocols and requested the researcher to provide the list of the interview questions for preparation. The researcher provided the eight teachers with the interview questions, together with the Plain Language Statements and Consent Forms for the interviews and the think-aloud verbal protocols. The participant teachers had a chance to clarify any unclear points concerning the manner and the questions of the interview before the data collection started.

The interviews were conducted with each of the eight teachers in an interview room in their own training centre on the days and at the times suitable to each teacher. In each interview, before the actual recording, each of the eight teachers were given time to note down ideas for the given interview questions if they found it necessary. The actual wordings and sometimes the order of the questions changed and new relevant questions were added in the
course of the interview corresponding to the teachers’ actual replies. The ACSF was provided to the teachers and the researcher encouraged and gave the teachers time to check and refer to the ACSF during the interviews.

The interviews were recorded and the teachers could listen to the recordings again with the researcher after the interview if they wished to. The recorded interviews lasted for between 15 to 35 minutes depending on teacher assessors’ preference of brief or elaborative replies. All the teachers took between 5 to 10 minutes before the interview to study the list of the main questions given to them in advance and take notes for their answers. Some also required extra time to listen to the recordings with the researcher after their interviews.

The researchers listened to and transcribed each interview recording again right after the interview was completed. This allowed the researcher to have a general view of each teacher’s perspectives and experience, clarify with the interviewees on any unclear statements in the following field visit, find out themes worth exploring in the subsequent interview with the next teacher, utilise questions that helped to elicit informative replies and paraphrase questions that caused confusion or off-track answers. The researcher also asked each teacher at the end of the interview if they required a copy of the interview transcription for checking and providing feedback. Only one teacher asked to see the transcript but provided no feedback or correction.

4.4.4 Think-aloud Verbal Protocols

Verbal protocols are introspective research in which “the researcher using introspective techniques usually sets a task and then asks participants to report on what their brains (or hearts) are processing as they carry out the task” (J. D. Brown & Rodgers, 2002, p. 53). The participant is asked to think aloud or talk aloud as the task is carried out for concurrent reports, or after the task is carried out for retrospective reports (Green, 1998). The verbalisation is seen as a record of information that is or has been attended to by the participant, and the verbal data gathered can be used for inferences of the cognitive processes performed by the participant. The researcher can choose to examine both the content and the sequence of the information in the verbal protocols or just the content alone (Green, 1998). Data from think-aloud verbal protocols can be analysed qualitatively directly from the data or quantitatively through transformation of data into coding of individual segments and looking at frequency (Yin, 2009).
Think-aloud verbal protocols have been widely used in studies on rating processes for factors effecting rating consistency such as raters’ reading strategies (Smith, 2000), decision-making styles (Baker, 2012), interpretation of assessment criteria and justification of scores (Davison, 2004; Llosa, 2011; Lumley, 2002), and novice and experienced raters’ interpretation of written performance and application of rating scales (Barkaoui, 2010b). In those studies, a group of raters or teachers were given a set of learners’ actual written texts and were required to rate those texts against a particular rating scale or assessment framework. They were asked to “talk aloud” or “think aloud” in their rating, judgment or decision-making processes. The verbalised records were then transcribed and analysed for insights into both the ratings and rating processes and the interaction of various variables related to the raters or teachers and the assessment frameworks or scales.

In this research project on teachers’ application of the ACSF to assessment, think-aloud verbal protocols were applied to gather data on teachers’ ratings of three learners’ writing performances against the ACSF. The eight teachers were given three sets of two written texts produced by three learners and required to rate each learner’s written texts the way they normally did and verbalise and audio record their judgments in their rating processes. Each learner’s writing performance comprised two written texts because this was the normal assessment requirement in the SEE program. The written texts used in the research were selected among the texts produced by three learners in the SEE training organisation, one for achievement or Block Exit assessment and two for placement or Pre-training assessment. With the help of the SEE manager, the texts were chosen to cover a range of the ACSF levels. The written texts by the three learners can be found in Appendices C, D and E.

As the teachers were all familiar with the rating process which was part of their work in the SEE training organisation, no training on rating was needed. Each teacher, however, was given a trial think-aloud verbal protocol to familiarise them with the recoding device and process and to explain what was expected and not expected in their think-aloud verbal protocols. In the trial, the researcher provided each teacher with a short writing sample, a computer with an audio recording application and an explanation of how to conduct the think-aloud verbal protocols. The researcher then provided feedback and clarification of any confusion from the trial before the actual think-aloud verbal protocols.
The actual verbal protocols were conducted by individual participant teachers in an interview room in their centres as they normally did and without the presence of the researcher. The researcher provided each teacher with the writing samples by the three learners, a copy of the ACSF document and a verbal explanation and a written instruction note on how to conduct and record the think-aloud verbal protocol. The teachers were then left on their own to perform the task. The oral and written instruction notes were as follows:

“You are going to rate the writing samples by three different learners:

- Learner 1 – Mind-map and Text about ‘My Day’;
- Learner 2 – Picture Description of a Rice Field and Instruction of How to Change Battery of a Smoke Detector;
- Learner 3 – Picture Description of a Fruit Market and Recipe Writing

1. Judge each learner’s samples against both Indicator .05 and Indicator .06 in the same manner as you normally do BES and PTA and verbalise your judgment in the process;
2. Please “talk through” to the microphone when you are rating each learner’s writing performance;
3. Record and save your judgement and rating for each learner separately in three different files named Learner 1, Learner 2 and Learner 3.”

All the eight teachers took between twenty to thirty minutes to complete their think-aloud verbal protocols. Three teachers went further to note on the writing samples in their rating processes and provided the researcher with both their audio records and their notes.

4.5 Data Analysis Methods

4.5.1 General Approaches

Yin (2009) specifies four analytical strategies for a case study data analysis which include:

- Relying on theoretical propositions that have led to the case study;
- Developing a case description or developing a descriptive framework to either describe the case for purely descriptive purposes or for causal links analysis;
- Using both qualitative and quantitative data in mixed methods design with quantitative data analysis supplement to the central qualitative data analysis; and
- Examining rival explanations.
According to Yin (2009), a researcher can use any of these strategies in any combination to ensure fair treatment of evidence, compelling analytical conclusions and account for alternative interpretations. The present research mainly used three strategies, *developing a case description*, *relying on theoretical propositions* and *using both qualitative and quantitative data*, for the analyses of the data from the questionnaires, interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols.

In particular, the analyses of the three types of data constituted a descriptive framework to describe the case of the ACSF assessment application by teachers in the SEE training organisation. The data from the questionnaire was analysed for general demographic information of all the SEE teachers in the organisation and their overall perspectives on the assessment application of the ACSF. The analysis of the data from the interviews provided individual perspectives and self-reported assessment experiences and reflections by selected SEE teachers with extensive usage of the ASCF for assessment. The analysis of the think-aloud verbal protocol data presented the teachers’ actual application of the ACSF in their ratings of SEE learners’ writing performance. Together, the three sources of data brought about a comprehensive description of the ACSF assessment application in the specific case of the selected SEE training organisation. The description was more of descriptive purposes rather than establishment of causal links among variables.

In addition, the analyses of all the three types of data were broadly guided by the theoretical propositions on the three major areas of concern identified in the literature review. Specifically, the LLN constructs, accounting for targeted learners, and accounting for teachers formed the overall conceptual framework or categories for the analyses of all the three sources of data. Further sub-categories were developed from the findings that emerged from each source of data.

The analyses of the three sources of data were mainly qualitative with only three parts of data being analysed quantitatively. These three parts included the SEE teachers’ demographic information and rankings of the ACSF assessment application in the questionnaire and their ratings of the SEE learners’ writing performance in the think-aloud verbal protocols. The rest of the data, including the teachers’ comments in the questionnaire, replies to interview questions and comments on the SEE learners’ writing performance, were analysed qualitatively through coding data, finding patterns, labeling themes and developing category systems (B. Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Miles &
Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2009). Following Miles and Huberman’s (1994) systematic qualitative data analysis approach, the qualitative analyses involved data deduction (selecting, abstracting, coding and organising key data into categories, clusters, themes), data display (presenting reduced data in matrices or tables with rows and columns), and data conclusion and verification (confirming and verifying propositions, emerging patterns and explanations through making contrasts and comparisons, noting patterns and themes). The following sections present in detail how the above data analysis strategies and techniques were applied in the analyses of the data from the questionnaires, interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols.

4.5.2 Analysis of Questionnaire Data

The analysis of the questionnaire started with a summary of the participant teachers’ demographic information concerning gender, age, workplace, experience of teaching and assessment in the SEE program and using the ACSF. The teachers’ demographics were presented in a table in the order from the least to the most experienced with teaching and assessment in the SEE program (see Table 6-1 in page 83). The summary of the teachers’ demographics served not only as descriptive information about a specific context of the ACSF application but also the basis for the researcher to select participant teachers for the follow-up interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols. The information about the ACSF levels and skills that each teacher had experience with was also used to inform the interview questions for each participant teacher and explain the teachers’ perspectives and application of the ACSF to assessment in the later stages of data collection and analysis.

The analysis continued with a summary of teachers’ rankings of the ten statements about the assessment application of the ACSF. The summary was presented in two tables, one focusing on aspects related to the LLN constructs and terminology usage and the other on aspects related to accounting for SEE learners and SEE teachers’ assessment (see Table 6-2 and Table 6-3 in page 85). The summary listed the teachers with their rankings in the same order of teachers as presented in the summary of the teachers’ demographic information to enable a link between individual teachers and their perspectives on the ACSF. Calculations of average rankings for each statement and each teacher were done to show the degree of teachers’ overall satisfaction with each area of the ACSF assessment application and the degree of individual teacher’s satisfaction with all the aspects of the ACSF assessment.
application as the whole. The analysis provided a snapshot of the teachers’ perspectives and identified salient areas of strengths and weaknesses of the ACSF assessment application from the teachers’ viewpoints to be further investigated in the follow-up one-to-one interviews with selected teachers.

The final part of the questionnaire with teachers’ comments on ten features of the ACSF assessment application was analysed qualitatively. The analysis sorted out the teachers’ comments under the three major themes identified in the literature review. The analysis then applied a similar technique as Knoch (2009) to further classify the teachers’ comments into positive and negative categories to identify salient areas of strength and weakness of the assessment application of the ACSF from the teachers’ viewpoints. The identified salient areas were later explored in the interviews with selected teachers. The analysis of the questionnaire responses and the discussion of findings are presented in Chapter 6.

4.5.3 Analysis of Interview Data

Following Knoch’s (2009) study on the raters’ perceptions of two different rating scales, the interview data were fully transcribed and then analysed qualitatively via a hermeneutic process of reading, analysing and re-reading. The coding scheme for the interview analysis relied on both theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009) or pre-coding and subsequent coding or coding generated from the data, aspired to the language and context of participants (Simons, 2009, p. 122).

In particular, the three major themes identified in the literature review were used as the starting point for pre-coding of the interview data. Each interview transcript was first read and coded into units of analysis based on their content. Each unit might be a word, a phrase, a sentence or a segment of statements expressing the teacher’s viewpoints under the three major schemes – the LLN constructs, accounting for SEE learners, and accounting for SEE teachers as assessors. The units of analysis were further examined and categorised into sub-coding themes according to the salient issues that emerged within each pre-coding theme. Similar to Knoch (2009), the analysis of the interview data did not aim to provide quantitative findings of how often or how many times any major theme emerged or any statement was made, but focused on which themes emerged from the teachers’ replies and what viewpoints the teachers expressed toward them. The final results of the interview analysis were presented under the themes generated from both pre-coding and
subsequent coding, with direct quotes from the teachers’ responses. The analysis of the interview replies and the discussion of findings are presented in Chapter 6.

4.5.4 Analysis of Think-aloud Verbal Protocol Data

The think-aloud verbal protocols contained two major parts, the teachers’ comments on and their overall ratings or the ACSF levels assigned to the three learners’ writing performance. Previous studies of the application of assessment frameworks and scales (see Eckes, 2012; Lumley, 2002; Papageorgiou, 2010; Smith, 2000; Weigle, 1998) suggested the need to analyse both the final ratings and the comments by teachers for understanding of teachers’ or raters’ application of LLN frameworks or scales in the rating process. The analysis of the think-aloud verbal protocols in this research examined both the teachers’ overall ratings and their comments in justification of their ratings to generate understanding of how the SEE teacher operationalised the constructs of the writing skills, how the SEE learners’ writing performance was accounted for by the writing constructs in operation, and how the SEE teachers’ constraints and contributions were accounted for in the application process.

Following Lumley (2002), Smith (2000) and Papageorgiou (2010), the verbal protocol analysis started with full orthographic transcriptions of the eight teachers’ recorded verbal protocols and the development of a coding scheme. As noted by Lumley (2002, 2005), it is necessary to develop a coding theme that adequately describes the raters’ think-aloud data and addresses the research questions. In order to describe the teachers’ comments and ratings of the learners’ writing performances against the constructs of the writing skills in the ACSF, a coding scheme was developed with categories derived from the constructs of the writing skills and two additional categories – one for teachers’ extra comments that did not adhere to the defined constructs and one for overall ratings or the final ACSF levels assigned to each learners’ writing performance. The constructs of the writing skills in the ACSF, defined into two Indicators, Indicator .05 and Indicator .06, with their accompanying performance features and descriptors are presented in Appendix F and Appendix G. The think-aloud verbal protocol data was only concerned with the first three levels of the writing skills in the ACSF as these three levels accounted for the majority of the SEE learner population and were demonstrated in the selected sample written texts being rated.
The final coding scheme for analysis of the think-aloud verbal protocol data consisted of two set of categories, one for teachers’ ratings for Indicator .05 and one for their ratings for Indicator .06. As the initial examination of the teachers’ comments revealed only a few comments extra to the performance features and descriptors in the ACSF and they did not contribute significantly to the teachers’ final ratings, the additional category of ‘Extra Comments’ was removed from the coding scheme. As a result, the final coding scheme for teachers’ ratings and comments consisted of five categories corresponding to five performance features under each Indicator in the ACSF and an additional category for ‘Conclusion’ or final levels or ratings assigned. In particular, the coding scheme for analysis of the teachers’ comments and ratings for Indicator .05 was made up of six categories – ‘Range’, ‘Audience and Purpose’, ‘Structure and Cohesion’, ‘Register’ and ‘Plan, proof, draft and review’ and ‘Assessor’s Conclusion’. The coding scheme for analysis of the teachers’ comments and ratings for Indicator .06 was also made up of six categories – ‘Vocabulary’, ‘Grammar’, ‘Punctuation’, ‘Spelling’, ‘Legibility’ and ‘Assessor’s Conclusion’.

The transcript of each teacher’s think-aloud verbal protocols was then reread and divided into units of texts – a word, a phrase, a whole sentence or a segment of statements, according to their contents, which were coded under the coding scheme developed. As the analysis aimed to identify how the writing construct was applied or not applied by the teachers, the focus of the analysis was on what range of categories the teachers covered rather than quantifying instances of category coverage. For that reason, in cases when a category was repeatedly evinced from a teacher’s comments, only one typical unit of text was quoted for evidence.

After being coded, the teachers’ transcripts were further analysed at two levels. The first level analysed the teachers’ overall ratings for a snapshot of their application of the ACSF writing levels to the learners’ writing performances. The consistency of the teachers’ overall ratings to each learner’s writing performance presented the first snapshot on how the writing construct helped to measure the learners’ writing performance and how the teachers interpreted and applied the ACSF levels in actual ratings. The findings from the analysis of teachers’ overall ratings also helped to identify similarity and differences in teachers’ ratings to facilitate the next stage of grouping and analysing the teachers’ comments.
The second level of analysis compared and contrasted the comments given by the teachers within the same rating groups and across different rating groups with reference to their coverage, interpretation and application of the writing skill construct to the three learners’ writing samples. The analysis helped to generate insights into the construct of the writing skill, how the learners’ writing performance was accounted for by the defined construct and the application process, and how the teachers’ contributions and/or constrains were exhibited and accounted for in the rating process. The analysis of the think-aloud verbal protocols and the discussion of findings are presented in Chapter 7.

4.6 Strengths and Limitations of the Present Research

The present research possesses several major strengths regarding the research methods. Firstly, the focus on one single case of the application of the ACSF to assessment by SEE teachers in a training organisation allowed an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon in a real-life context with features typical to the contexts of the ACSF application in the Australian adult LLN training sector. Secondly, the employment of different data collection and analysis methods enabled a thorough examination of the ACSF assessment application with multiple sources of data and from different angles and perspectives including the researcher’s with guidance from the literature review, the teachers’ or the insiders’ of the ACSF application process, and objective observation and analysis of the teachers’ assessment practices. In addition, the application of different methods promised enriched findings, which not only complemented each other to generate comprehensive understandings of the phenomenon but also triangulated each other for validation of final conclusions.

The research, however, bears several limitations in terms of research methods. Firstly, the research on one SEE training organisation with a small number of teachers hindered the generalisation of the research findings to other SEE training organisations with different characteristics, for example, training organisations with a small number of teachers and learners or with learners from aboriginal backgrounds. In other words, the research offered more analytic generalisation or comparison of results from a case to theoretical propositions generated from literature review than statistic generalisation or inference to the wider population (Yin, 2009, p. 38).
Secondly, the think-aloud verbal protocols covered only writing skills and the first three levels of the ACSF due to the availability of data. This might not sufficiently reflect the assessment application of the ACSF to the other four skills, Learning, Reading, Oral Communication and Numeracy and at higher levels of performance such as level four and five. Thirdly, the writing samples were also limited, being collected from only three learners, which could not fully represent the SEE learner cohorts, especially the ones at writing level 3 and above and the cohorts from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In addition, the data collection was conducted in a short period of time within three months and at the very early stage of the ACSF adoption, the second year to be exact. The findings therefore might not reflect the application of the ACSF to assessment in later stages when the teachers obtain more understanding and ownership of the framework.

Finally, the research examined the application of the ACSF in the SEE program which featured rigorous requirements on assessment and reporting for funding purposes. Findings on the SEE teachers’ application of the ACSF to assessment might not reflect the application of the framework in other LLN training programs or sectors in Australia, for example, the Workplace English Language and Numeracy, the state-funded Lear Local program or the embedded LLN training in vocational sector, which do no bear similar requirements on assessment and reporting as in the SEE program.
Chapter 5 Realisation of Assessment Function in the ACSF

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses findings from the document analysis of the ACSF for insight into the realisation of the assessment function in the framework. Drawing on similar studies using document analysis of assessment frameworks (see Alderson, et al., 2006; Bailey & Huang, 2011; Brindley, 2000; Hudson, 2005; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004), the document analysis of the ACSF examined the defined LLN constructs, information on the development of the ACSF, and the assessment guidance provided to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the ACSF in defining and operationalising LLN constructs, accounting for targeted learner cohorts and accounting for teachers as assessors.

The document analysis revealed that the ACSF presented comprehensive LLN constructs with the incorporation of current LLN conceptualisation, stressing LLN performance contexts, covering multiple LLN dimensions and constructing intricate hierarchical interrelationships among LLN elements. Nevertheless, several shortcomings still persisted, which included inconsistent coverage of LLN elements in across levels, unclear hierarchical interrelationships between descriptors and the described performance features, overused descriptors, descriptors with multiple parts covering multiple LLN dimensions, undefined normative terminology, indistinguishable synonymic expressions for level discrimination, limited account for heterogeneous LLN learner cohorts and limited guidance and instruction for teachers’ assessment. The following sections detail the document analysis and the research findings.

5.2 Strengths and Shortcomings of the Defined LLN Constructs

The analysis of the ACSF document showed that the ACSF defined and operationalised LLN constructs though a complex hierarchical structure of six major components and multiple sub-components as summarised in Table 5-1. As can be seen in Table 5-1, the LLN constructs were divided into five major core skills: ‘Learning’, ‘Reading’, ‘Writing’, ‘Oral Communication’ and ‘Numeracy’ (see first column). Each core skill was defined through five major components: ‘Statements’, ‘Indicators’, ‘Performance Features’, ‘Descriptors’, and ‘Sample Activities’.
Table 5-1: Summarised Structure and Components of LLN Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Core Skills</th>
<th>Statements of</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Performance Features</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Sample Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.01 Awareness of self as a learner, learning orientation, approaches</td>
<td>6 Features: Goal setting; Designing learning pathways; Awareness of strengths, weakness, learning styles; Engagement, resilience; Constructing knowledge; Metacognition</td>
<td>0 to 3 descriptors per feature</td>
<td>Personal Cooperative Procedural Technical Systems Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>.02 Acquisition and Application of Learning Strategies</td>
<td>5 Features: Managing learning; Managing learning resources; Transferring knowledge/skills; Cognitive strategies; Social construction</td>
<td>1 to 4 descriptors per feature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text &amp; Task Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.03 Audience, purpose, meaning making strategies</td>
<td>6 Features: Audience &amp; purpose; Complexity; Prediction; Text Structure; Textual Analysis; Critical Literacy</td>
<td>1 to 4 descriptors per feature</td>
<td>Personal Cooperative Procedural Technical Systems Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>.04 Text structure, features, grammar, vocabulary</td>
<td>4 Features: Strategies; Textual clues; Grammar; Vocabulary</td>
<td>0 to 5 descriptors per feature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text &amp; Task Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.05 Audience, purpose, meaning making strategies</td>
<td>5 Features: Range; Audience and purpose; Structure &amp; cohesion; Register; Plan, proof, draft, review</td>
<td>0 to 4 descriptors per feature</td>
<td>Personal Cooperative Procedural Technical Systems Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>.06 Vocabulary, grammar, conventions</td>
<td>5 Features: Vocabulary, Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling, Legibility</td>
<td>0 to 5 descriptors per feature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text &amp; Task Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Communication</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.07 Speaking</td>
<td>8 Features: Range; Audience &amp; purpose; Register; Cohesion &amp; structure; Grammar; Vocabulary; Pronunciation &amp; fluency; Paralinguistic</td>
<td>0 to 3 descriptors per feature</td>
<td>Personal Cooperative Procedural Technical Systems Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>.08 Listening</td>
<td>7 Features: Range &amp; context; Audience &amp; purpose; Structure &amp; grammar; Comprehension; Vocabulary; Rhythm, Stress, Intonation; Paralinguistic</td>
<td>1 to 5 descriptors per feature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text &amp; Task Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.09 Identification of mathematical meaning</td>
<td>3 Features: Level of comprehension; Explicitness of information; Complexity of information &amp; presentation</td>
<td>3 to 4 descriptors for all features</td>
<td>Personal Cooperative Procedural Technical Systems Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>.10 Problem-solving &amp; mathematical process</td>
<td>4 Features: Problem-solving process; Estimating &amp; reflecting; Methods of solution; Mathematical knowledge and skills: number, calculations, shape, space, etc.</td>
<td>8 to 10 descriptors for all features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text &amp; Task Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.11 Mathematical language, symbols, conventions</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 Features: Written mathematical language; Oral mathematical language; Complexity of mathematical symbolism, representation and conventions</td>
<td>2 to 3 descriptors for all features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70
Statements’ component provided brief and general descriptions of ‘support’ given by teachers in assessment contexts and the required complexity and range of ‘contexts’, ‘texts’ and ‘tasks’ for each skill at each level of performance (see second column). ‘Indicators’ component presented the division of each core into two or three dimensions. For example, ‘Learning’ skill was divided into Indicator .01 for ‘awareness as a learner’ and Indicator .02 for ‘learning strategies’ (see third column, third and fourth rows). Similarly, ‘Writing’ skill was divided into Indicator .05 for ‘audience, purpose and meaning making strategies’ and Indicator .06 for ‘grammar, vocabulary and conventions’. Each ‘indicator’ was further divided into up to five or six performance features (see forth column, third and fourth rows). Each performance feature was then defined by a number of detailed descriptors (see fifth column, third and four rows). In addition to the hierarchical structure with multiple levels of description and specification, each core skill was also accompanied by an extensive list of ‘sample activities’ for examples of LLN performance in six different real life contexts including ‘Personal’, ‘Corporative’, ‘Procedural’ ‘Technical’, ‘Systems’ and ‘Public’ (see six column, third row).

A close look at both the individual components and their hierarchical organisation revealed several strengths and shortcomings of the ACSF in defining and operationalising LLN constructs. The sections below specify those strengths and weaknesses.

5.2.1 Strength in Provision of Comprehensive LLN Constructs

The document analysis of the ACSF revealed the development of comprehensive LLN constructs with the incorporation of current complex LLN conceptualisation. The LLN constructs entailed three important features: the context of LLN performance; the coverage of multiple LLN elements, both knowledge-based and performance-oriented; and the application of intricate hierarchical structure to realise the interrelationships among multiple LLN elements.

The define LLN constructs featured a strong emphasis on ‘contexts’ of LLN performance, a vital aspect highlighted in current LLN conceptualisation. The definition of every core skill at each level of performance started with ‘Statements’ component which required the consideration of the nature and range of LLN performance contexts in addition to degrees of teachers’ ‘support’ and ‘text’ and task’ complexity (see second column). The definition of each core skill also encompassed LLN performance contexts through the inclusion of ‘Sample Activities’ in six ‘aspects of communication’ or ‘real-life’ LLN performance

In addition, the defined LLN constructs also featured the inclusion of a wide range of LLN elements, both traditional knowledge-based and currently emphasised performance-oriented, in each core skill. ‘Reading’ and ‘Writing’ skills, for example, consisted of not only the traditional knowledge-based elements like ‘vocabulary’, ‘grammar’, ‘spelling’ and ‘punctuation’ (see Indicators .04 and .06, Performance features in third and fourth columns of Table 5-1) but also other currently highlighted performance-based elements like ‘audience and purpose’, ‘register’ and ‘critical literacy’ (see Indicators .03 and .05, Performance features in third and fourth columns). In the same manner, ‘numeracy’ skill covered not only various types of traditional mathematical knowledge and skills concerning numbers, calculation, shapes and space but also more complex ‘problem solving’ skills, ‘estimation and reflection’ and ‘methods of solution’ (see Indicator .10, Performance features in third and fourth columns). Such broad coverage of multiple LLN elements resulted in comprehensive LLN constructs with multiple components and sub-components as can be seen in Table 5-1.

Finally, the defined LLN constructs represented a valiant attempt to realise the complex interrelationships among multiple LLN elements through a hierarchical organisation of four layers: the five core skills (first column), the indicators under each skill (third column), the performance features under each indicator (fourth column), and the descriptors under each performance feature (fifth column). Each core skill was made up of different indicators, each indicator different performance features, and each performance feature different sets of descriptors, except for the case of ‘numeracy’ skill (last three rows) with no separation of descriptors for each performance feature. The intricate hierarchical organisation of multiple LLN elements in the ACSF represented another remarkable attempt to define and operationalise the ever expanding LLN constructs in the current LLN education landscape.

In short, with the coverage of LLN performance contexts, the inclusion of multiple LLN elements and the development of complex hierarchical structure to categorise and interrelate LLN elements, the ACSF offered comprehensive LLN constructs of the five core skills, realising the development and complexity of current LLN conceptualisation. Further examination of the major components and sub-components of each skill in the
ACSF, however, uncovered several issues of concern about the LLN constructs as being presented in the sections below.

### 5.2.2 Inconsistent Coverage of LLN Elements across Levels

A close look at descriptors of each performance feature across the five levels of performance in the ACSF revealed inconsistency in coverage of LLN elements. The descriptors of ‘Spelling’ feature of ‘Writing’ skill, for example, included spelling devices like ‘spellchecker’ and ‘dictionary’ for levels 2 and 3 but not levels 1, 4 and 5; types of vocabulary for level 3 and level 4 but not for levels 1, 2 and 5. Descriptors of ‘Audience and Purpose’ for ‘Speaking’ skill included ‘vocabulary and grammatical choices’ for levels 2 and 3 but not levels 1, 4, and 5. Descriptors of ‘Complexity’ of ‘Reading’ skill included text types like ‘local advertisement’ and ‘short personal story’ for level 1 and ‘recount’, ‘narrative’ and ‘procedural’ for level 2, but switched to ‘integration of a number of ideas and pieces of information’ for level 3, ‘information presented in graphic, diagrammatical or visual form’ for level 4 and ‘technical specialty’ for level 5. It was unclear why some LLN elements were present at some levels but absent in others. Such inconsistency in LLN element coverage causes confusion about the essence of the defined performance feature and the comparability of LLN performance across levels.

### 5.2.3 Unclear Hierarchical Interrelationships

An examination of the performance features and their accompanying descriptors further revealed unclear interrelationships between these two hierarchical components. Examples of this shortcoming are shown in Table 5-2. As can be seen in the second and third rows, it is hard to see how ‘conversational skills’, ‘openings’ and ‘closings’ help to define ‘Grammar’ for ‘Speaking’ skill, and how ‘main ideas in written texts’ helps to define ‘grammar’ for ‘Reading’ skill. Drawing on Bachman’s (1990, pp. 88-89) CLA model, ‘conversational skills’, ‘openings’ and ‘closings’ and ‘main ideas’ belong to ‘Textual Competence’ while ‘grammar’ belongs to a different category ‘Grammatical Competence’.
In the same manner, as can be seen in the last two rows, it is hard to see how ‘topic shifts’ and ‘points of clarification’ help to define ‘Paralinguistics’ and how ‘skim’, ‘scan’ and ‘locate specific information’ help to define ‘Textual Clues’. Under the ‘Multiliteracies’ (Cazden, et al., 1996), ‘topic shifts’ and ‘points of clarification’ belong to ‘Linguistic Design’, while ‘Paralinguistics’ belongs to ‘Gesture Design’. Similarly, ‘scan’ and ‘locate specific information’ belong to the ‘Redesigning’ or ‘Meaning making’ process, while ‘Textual Clues’ belong to a different category, ‘Design Element’. The unclear hierarchical interrelationships raise skepticism about the essence of each descriptor and each performance feature and therefore the construct of the core skill being defined.

### 5.2.4 Over-used Descriptors

The ACSF also contained a number of descriptors which were repeatedly used to describe different performance features and different skills. Table 5-3 presents some examples of these descriptors. The first column lists different performance features and skills and the second column lists the same descriptors being used to describe these features and skills. As can be seen in Table 5-3, one descriptor was used to describe three different performance features of three different skills (see the second, third and fourth rows) or descriptors with the same content were used to define four different performance features of four different core skills (see the last four rows). Such overused descriptors again question the essences of different performance features and different skills and the constructs they purported to define.

---

**Table 5-2: Examples of Descriptors with Unclear Hierarchical Interrelationships**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features &amp; Skills</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar (Speaking, Level 2)</strong></td>
<td>‘Refines conversational skills by using common openings and closings’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar (Reading, Level 2)</strong></td>
<td>‘Identifies main ideas in written texts containing sentences of 1 or 2 clauses linked by simple cohesive devices such as and, but ...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paralinguistics (Listening, Level 4)</strong></td>
<td>‘Responds to topic shifts and points of clarification, and give non-verbal feedback’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Textual Clues (Reading, Level 2)</strong></td>
<td>‘Begins to skim and scan familiar texts, often using pictures and graphics to locate specific information’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5-3: Examples of Over-used Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Features &amp; Skills</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prediction &amp; Prior Knowledge (Reading Level 2)</td>
<td>‘Make connections between personal knowledge and experience and the ideas and events ....’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience &amp; Purpose (Writing Level 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion &amp; Structure (Speaking Level 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Literacy (Reading Level 2)</td>
<td>‘Recognises some differences between the formal and informal registers of familiar written texts’; or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register (Writing Level 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register (Speaking Level 2)</td>
<td>‘Begins to demonstrate a recognition of the differences between the formal and informal registers’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience &amp; Purpose (Listening Level 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.5 Multiple-part Multidimensional Descriptors

A close look at individual descriptors in the ACSF also revealed that most of the descriptors in the ACSF were made up of multiple parts with multiple LLN dimensions. Examples of such descriptors are shown in Table 5-4 (the words in bold show different parts and slash signs separate the parts in a descriptor).

Table 5-4: Examples of Descriptors with Multiple Parts and Multiple Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills, Performance Features (Level)</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy (Different Levels)</td>
<td>‘Locates/ and recognises key mathematical requirements’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Uses/ and applies rates … knowledge about space…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Reads/ and comprehends the symbolism…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Identifies/ and comprehends mathematical meanings…’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Identifies/ and uses familiar whole numbers …’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing, Grammar (Level 2)</td>
<td>‘Uses action words/ and simple verb tenses/ in sentences of 1/ or 2 clauses’;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Uses adjectives,/ pronouns /and prepositions/ to describe people,/places,/ things/ and events’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking, Register (Level 2)</td>
<td>‘Uses vocabulary, grammar and structure to register in order to exchange or obtain goods and services,/establish, maintain and develop relationships, and to gather and provide information’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two problems arise from such descriptors. Firstly, as can be seen in the second row some descriptors contained two or three verbs, which makes it difficult to understand whether they can seen as the same or different strategies. Secondly, as can be seen in the last two rows, some descriptors contained up to three or more parts with different foci, making it hard to see whether they should be treated as a whole or as selective and independent units.

5.2.6 Descriptors with Undefined Normative Terminology

A close look at the wordings of the descriptors in the ACSF showed excessive usage of undefined normative terminology to describe LLN texts, tasks and contexts and discriminate levels of performance. Typical examples of these undefined normative terms can be found in ‘statements’ component which defined the nature of ‘support’, ‘context’, ‘text’ and ‘task’ across the five levels of performance as shown in Table 5-5 (the normative terms are highlighted in bold). It is unclear from the terminology what specific support, texts, tasks and contexts are required at each level. The terms are open to subjective interpretation from the ACSF users.

Table 5-5: Examples of Normative Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements of</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>‘full support’</td>
<td>‘high level of support’</td>
<td>‘moderate support’</td>
<td>‘minimum support’</td>
<td>‘little or no support’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>‘highly familiar’</td>
<td>‘very restricted range’</td>
<td>‘familiar and predictable’</td>
<td>‘limited range’</td>
<td>‘range of familiar … some less familiar routine’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>‘short and simple texts, highly explicit purpose; limited, highly familiar vocabulary’</td>
<td>‘simple, familiar texts; clear purpose; familiar vocabulary’</td>
<td>‘routine texts; some specialised vocabulary’</td>
<td>‘complex texts; specialised vocabulary’</td>
<td>‘highly complex texts, highly specialised language’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>‘concrete tasks of 1 or 2 processes’</td>
<td>‘explicit tasks, limited number of familiar processes’</td>
<td>‘tasks include a number of steps’</td>
<td>‘complex task analysis’</td>
<td>‘sophisticated task analysis’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.7 Descriptors with Synonymic Wordings at Different Levels

Another issue emerging from the examination of the descriptors in the ACSF is the usage of synonymic expressions to describe different levels of performance. Typical examples of these expressions are presented in Table 5-6. The first column lists the skills and features being described and the other five columns present the descriptors for performance features
at different levels (the parts in bold indicate the synonymic wordings). As can be seen in Table 5-6, the framework attempted to use different wordings or expressions to discriminate levels of each skill but such wordings and expressions were actually synonymic and hardly showed differences in performance across levels.

Table 5-6: Examples of Descriptors with Synonymic Wordings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills &amp; Features</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>‘Develops a simple learning plan with several sequenced steps, with assistance’</td>
<td>‘Develops a sequenced learning plan with assistance from an appropriate person’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading (Strategies)</td>
<td>‘sounding out letters and words, word recognition’</td>
<td>‘knowledge of letter-sound relationship, whole word recognition’</td>
<td>‘phonic and visual letter patterns’</td>
<td>‘visual and phonic patterns’</td>
<td>‘patterns and rules that characterise English spelling’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing (Audience &amp; Purpose)</td>
<td>‘Recognises that words and grammatical choices may vary to meet the requirements of audience and purpose’</td>
<td>‘Demonstrate the need to vary written language to meet requirements of audience and purpose’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening (Structure &amp; Grammar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Understands oral texts which use complex syntactic structures’</td>
<td>‘Follows oral texts which include structurally complex sentences’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Limited Accommodation of Targeted Learners and Teachers as Assessors

In addition to the issues with the LLN constructs, the examination of the ACSF document also revealed several issues with the extent to which the framework accounted for targeted learners and teachers as assessors. Little information was available in the ACSF on how the framework accounted for targeted LLN adult learners. The information provided is limited to ‘Sample Activities’ component, which listed six types of contexts relevant to adult learners’ real life LLN performance, and the inclusion of three ‘spiky profile’ scenarios, which explained how a learner’s LLN competence might vary across the five
core skills and indicate different areas of LLN needs (see DEEWR, 2008, pp. 10-11). The framework also mentioned but did not detail the incorporation of different theories or understandings of ‘adult learning, language, literacy and mathematical development’ and of ‘philosophies about human, psychological and social capital’ (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2). Apart from the above statements, no information was available on whether the framework had been trialed on actual learners and how different adult LLN learner cohorts could be accounted for in the implementation of the framework at the national scope in diverse Australian training contexts to diverse learner cohorts.

The document analysis of the ACSF also revealed little information about LLN practitioners and limited guidance and instruction for teachers as assessors. Though the framework claimed that the development process involved consultation with experienced LLN practitioners, no information was available on whether LLN practitioners had participated in any trials of the ACSF in actual assessment and how their feedback was incorporated into the framework’s development. Besides, the framework only included one single page in the Appendix titled “the ACSF and assessment” to remind users about the needs to use a range of tasks with clear and explicit instructions for assessment, allow reasonable time for learners to do assessment, maintain moderation and validation within and across training organisations and adjust assessment for learners with special needs. Elsewhere, other instructions were only limited to giving learners different degrees of support at different levels and using the ACSF as guiding samples ‘to ensure consistent and reliable interpretation of the indicators at each level’ rather than as an exhaustive check list (DEEWR, 2008, p. 8). Apart from the above information and instruction, no assessment tasks, tools or guidance on assessment administration and judgment of learners’ performance were provided.

5.4 Discussion

The document analysis of the ACSF revealed several areas of strength and weakness of the framework in realisation of the assessment function. In terms of strengths, the ACSF appeared to realise its aim of providing “a rich, detailed picture of real-life performance in adult learning English language, literacy and numeracy” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2) through the development of comprehensive LLN constructs. The LLN constructs in the ACSF featured the necessary incorporation of current LLN conceptualisation through the inclusion of LLN
performance contexts, coverage of traditional knowledge-based and contemporary performance-oriented LLN elements and realised in the complex interrelationships among LLN elements through an intricate hierarchical structure with multiple layer components. The comprehensiveness of the defined LLN constructs in the ACSF resembled current LLN theoretical models like Bachman’s (1990) CLA model, Cazden et al.’s (1996) ‘Multiliteracies’ model and Gal, et al.’s (Gal, et al., 2003) Numeracy Conceptual Framework. The ACSF presented another attempt to tackle the challenging task of “a never-ending search” for “grammar of communication in human interaction” (Davies, 1995) and a reply to the call for incorporation of current theories in framework development by experts in the field (see Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007; McNamara, 2001). The analysis of the ACSF, however, still uncovered several issues of concern with the LLN constructs and accounting for targeted learners and accounting for teachers as assessors.

In the first place, the ACSF still exhibited some limitations in satisfying the fundamental requirements to define the construct being measured “clearly, precisely and unambiguously” (Bachman, 1990, p. 41) and to operationalise the construct by isolating it from other constructs, making it observable, and indicating levels or degrees of performance (Bachman, 1990, p. 43). The framework seemed not yet to be able to overcome several shortcomings identified in other previously developed LLN frameworks like the CEFR (Alderson, et al., 2006; Papageorgiou, 2010), the CGEA (Sanguinetti, 1995), the CSWE (Brindley, 2000a; Smith, 2000) and the English Companion (Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004). In particular, the ACSF possessed similar widely reported issues with inconsistent coverage of LLN elements across levels; unclear hierarchical interrelationships between descriptors and the defined performance features; usage of multiple-part multidimensional descriptors; overuse of the same descriptors to define different performance features and different core skills, and excessive use of undefined normative terminology for description of complexity of texts, tasks and contexts and synonymic expressions to discriminate LLN performance at different levels.

As noted by Teasdale & Leung (2000) and supported by studies like Arkoudis and O’Loughlin (2004), Smith (2000) and Brindley (2000a, 2001a), the lack of clarity and consistency in LLN constructs might result in divergence in teachers’ interpretation and application of assessment frameworks in actual assessment, especially in large-scale
teacher assessment. The identified shortcomings with the LLN constructs in the ACSF might affect the realisation of the framework’s primary aim to provide “a consistent national approach to the identification of the core skills requirements in diverse personal, community, work and training contexts” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2). Further examination of this issue would be pursued in the questionnaires and interviews for SEE teachers’ perspectives and the think-aloud verbal protocols of SEE teachers’ actual application of the ACSF to rating of learners’ writing samples.

In addition to the issues with the LLN constructs, the ACSF also bore some limitations with accounting for the targeted LLN learner cohorts. While the development of large-scale frameworks like the ESL Bandscales (McKay, 1995; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004) and the CEFR (North & Schneider, 1998) underscored the accommodation of various aspects related to the learner cohorts like learners’ stages of development, differences between native and non-native English speaking learners, representativeness of the LLN constructs to the targeted learners, the development of the ACSF seemed not to incorporate these factors despite the framework’s application at a national scope to a diverse adult LLN learner population. The limited information on the targeted learner cohorts in the ACSF raised concerns about the framework’ accounting for the LLN needs and progress and performance by Australian adult LLN learners. This issue would also be further investigated in the questionnaires, interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols with the SEE teachers.

The last crucial issue of concern with the realisation of the assessment function in the ACSF revolved the limited assessment guidance for teachers as assessors. Unlike the CEFR (Alderson, et al., 2006; North & Schneider, 1998; Papageorgiou, 2010), the ESL Bandscales (McKay, 1995; C. Scott & Erduran, 2004) and the CSWE (Brindley, 2000a; Brindley & Slatyer, 2002), the ACSF did not contain the vital guidance for assessment conduct and judgment, definitions of terminology and accompanying assessment tasks and tools. The absence of such provision raises concerns on how teachers conduct assessment and judge learners’ performance using the ACSF. This issue would be further examined in the next stages of data collection and analysis.
Chapter 6 Teachers’ Perspectives on Assessment Application of the ACSF in the SEE program

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of and discusses findings from the questionnaires and interviews for teachers’ perspectives on the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. Similar to the document analysis, the exploration of the teachers’ viewpoints also focused on the three areas of concern identified in the literature review: the LLN constructs, accounting for SEE learners and accounting for SEE teachers as assessors. The chapter starts with findings from the questionnaires on the demographic information of the fifteen participant teachers and their rankings and comments on ten statements about the three areas of focus. The chapter continues with findings from the follow-up interviews with eight teachers, which further explored their main viewpoints expressed in the questionnaires and their experience of applying the ACSF to assessment. The chapter concludes with a discussion on major findings from the questionnaire and the interview data analyses with reference to both the findings from the document analysis and insights from the literature review.

The findings from the questionnaires and interviews both confirmed and extended the findings from the document analysis of the ACSF. In particular, the teachers’ satisfaction with the broad and detailed LLN constructs supports the conclusion from the document analysis on the strength of the ACSF. However, the teachers’ viewpoints also problematise areas concerning wording and terminology usage, lack of level discrimination, lack of account for preliminary SEE learners and for differences between native and non-native English speakers, difficulty with matching learners’ performance to the ACSF levels and limited assessment guidance provided. Furthermore, the analysis of the teacher’ perception identifies the teachers’ confusion in coverage of the extensive LLN constructs in actual assessment, lack of current theoretical knowledge, strong reliance on professional experience and professional community and need for assessment training and support in application of the ACSF. The following sections present the research findings from the questionnaire and interview data analyses.
6.2 Demographic Information of Participant Teachers

The demographic information of the fifteen participant teachers is summarized in Table 6-1 in the order from the least to the most experienced. The majority of the participant teachers had been working in the SEE program between one and five years. The least experienced teacher had been teaching in the SEE program for less than one year and the three most experienced more than five and up to ten years. Half of the teachers had been using the ACSF for more than two years since its replacement of the NRS while the other half just less than two years.

Further demographic information concerning the teachers’ linguistic and education backgrounds was also gathered from the researcher’s meetings with the teachers during the field work. Out of the fifteen participant teachers, four were Australian, four Indian, three Filipino, one Russian, one Bangladeshi, one Sri Lankan and one Malaysian. Only one teacher had only Diploma in Adult Education while all the other fourteen had Bachelors of Art with majors in TESOL, Adult Education or Psychology in either Australia or their own countries. Seven teachers had Master Degrees and six teachers had Diplomas or Postgraduate Diplomas in TESOL or Adult Education.

Out of the fifteen teachers participating in the questionnaire survey, eight teachers (highlighted in grey colour) were selected for participation in the follow-up individual interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols as they had the most experience using the ACSF for assessment in both PTA and BES. Their participation promised resourceful information. The eight selected teachers also presented a range of assessment experience, from the least experienced teachers like Vivien and Emily with less than one and two years using the ACSF, to more experienced teachers like Carl, Lona, Natalie and Denis with more than two years, and the most experienced teachers like Simone and Diana with more than two years using the ACSF for assessment and more than five and ten years of teaching in the SEE. This range of experience enabled the researcher to explore the perspectives and practices of teachers at different degrees of familiarity with the SEE program and the ACSF.
### Table 6-1: Demographic Information of Participant Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>SEE Teaching</th>
<th>Work Sector(s)</th>
<th>SEE Assessment</th>
<th>Time Using ACSF</th>
<th>Experience with ACSF Levels &amp; Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Richard</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>&lt; 1 yr</td>
<td>Non-Pro</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>6m -1yr</td>
<td>Level 1 + 3 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Vivien</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>Non-Pro</td>
<td>BES, PTA</td>
<td>6m-1yr</td>
<td>Level 1 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Kim</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>Non-Pro</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>1-2 yr</td>
<td>Levels 1,2,3 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>Non-Pro</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>1-2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Emily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>Non-Pro</td>
<td>BES, PTA</td>
<td>1-2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2,3 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Denis</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>TAFE, Non-pro</td>
<td>BES, PTA</td>
<td>&gt;2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2,3 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Kate</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>TAFE, Non-pro</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>6m-1yr</td>
<td>Levels 1,2 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Natasha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>Non-pro</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>1-2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 2 + 1 skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Natalie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>TAFE, Non-pro</td>
<td>BES, PTA</td>
<td>&gt;2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2,3 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lona</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>TAFE, Non-pro</td>
<td>BES, PTA</td>
<td>&gt;2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2,3 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Carl</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>Non-pro</td>
<td>BES, PTA</td>
<td>&gt;2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2,3 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Britney</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>1-5 yrs</td>
<td>Non-pro</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>&gt;2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Simone</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>5-10 yrs</td>
<td>TAFE, Non-pro</td>
<td>BES, PTA</td>
<td>&gt;2yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2,3 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Dianna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>&gt;10 yrs</td>
<td>TAFE, Non-pro</td>
<td>BES, PTA</td>
<td>&gt;2 yrs</td>
<td>Levels 1,2,3 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Alison</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>&gt;10yrs</td>
<td>TAFE, Non-Pro</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>&gt; 2yrs</td>
<td>Level 1 + 5 skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The grey rows highlight the eight teachers selected for Interviews and Think-aloud Verbal Protocols; yr = year; yrs = years; m = month; Non-pro = Non-profit organisations; BES = Block Exit Assessment; PTA = Pre-training assessment; > =more than; < =less than.
In addition, the eight teachers also worked in different SEE centers with different training contexts and learner cohorts. Emily, Natalie, Denis, Lona and Carl worked together in one main center with ten classes and mainly non-native English speaking learners, Vivien and Simone in two different smaller centers with one or two classes of learners from both native and non-native English speaking backgrounds, and Diana as an assessor and assessor trainer working across four different centres. Such variations in the teachers’ working contexts and learner cohorts were likely to provide comprehensive data on teachers’ application of the ACSF to assessment in actual diverse LLN training contexts. The sections that follow present the teachers’ perspectives on the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program.

6.3 Teachers’ Perspectives from the Questionnaires

Table 6-2 summarises the fifteen teachers’ rankings of five statements about the defined LLN constructs in the ACSF. Table 6-3 summarises the teachers’ rankings of five statements about the framework’s accounting for SEE learners and SEE teachers as assessors. In addition to the rankings on the scale of 1 to 5, representing the range from strongly disagreed to strongly agreed, the teachers also replied to open-ended questions which required written comments on the above ten aspects of the ACSF assessment application. Findings on the teachers’ perspectives through their rankings and comments are presented below.

6.3.1 Teachers’ Different Levels of Satisfaction

As can be seen in Table 6-2 and Table 6-3 the average rankings by individual teachers indicate that half of the teachers were satisfied with the ACSF assessment function, giving average rankings of above 3.0, while the other half were not, giving average rankings of below 3.0. The eight teachers selected for the follow-up interviews and verbal protocols equally represented both the groups. Four teachers, Denis, Carl, Simone and Diana, indicated satisfaction with the assessment application of the ACSF giving the average rankings of between 3.4 and 4.4 to each statement concerning the LLN constructs, the terminology usage and the extent the framework accounts for SEE learners and teachers as assessors. Meanwhile, the other four teachers, Vivien, Emily, Natalie and Lona, indicated slight dissatisfaction, giving these areas the average rankings of between 2.0 and 2.8. The eight teachers, therefore, would be likely to represent the perspectives and practices of the teachers in the training organisation.
Table 6-2: Teachers’ Rankings of the Defined LLN Constructs in the ACSF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Teachers’ Rankings</th>
<th>Average by Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Appropriate division of 5 core skills</td>
<td>Ri 4, Vi 2, Ki 4, Ma 3, Em 4, De 4, Ka 4, Na 4, Lo 4, Ca 4, Br 4, Si 5, Di 4, Al 3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Appropriate specification of indicators for each skill</td>
<td>Ri 4, Vi 2, Ki 4, Ma 3, Em 4, De 4, Ka 4, Na 4, Lo 4, Ca 4, Br 4, Si 5, Di 4, Al 3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Appropriate specification of performance features for each indicator.</td>
<td>Ri 4, Vi 2, Ki 4, Ma 3, Em 4, De 4, Ka 4, Na 4, Lo 4, Ca 4, Br 4, Si 5, Di 4, Al 3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Appropriate descriptions of each performance features.</td>
<td>Ri 3, Vi 3, Ki 4, Ma 2, Em 4, De 4, Ka 4, Na 3, Lo 1, Ca 2, Br 4, Si 4, Di 3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Appropriate terminology and terminology definitions.</td>
<td>Ri 3, Vi 2, Ki 2, Ma 2, Em 4, De 4, Ka 4, Na 3, Lo 1, Ca 2, Br 4, Si 4, Di 2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average by Individual Teachers</td>
<td>Ri 3.6, Vi 2.2, Ki 3.6, Ma 3.0, Em 2.8, De 3.8, Ka 4.0, Na 3.8, Lo 2.8, Ca 2.8, Br 3.2, Si 3.6, Di 4.4, Al 3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-3: Teachers’ Rankings of the Extent to account for SEE Learners and Teachers as Assessors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Teachers’ Rankings</th>
<th>Average by Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Well classifies learners’ levels.</td>
<td>Ri 2, Vi 2, Ki 4, Ma 1, Em 2, De 4, Ka 4, Na 4, Lo 2, Ca 4, Br 2, Si 4, Di 3, Al 2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Well reflects learners’ progress.</td>
<td>Ri 2, Vi 2, Ki 2, Ma 2, Em 4, De 4, Ka 4, Na 2, Lo 3, Ca 4, Br 3, Si 3, Di 4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Well matches with learners’ learning needs</td>
<td>Ri 3, Vi 2, Ki 3, Ma 3, Em 3, De 3, Ka 4, Na 4, Lo 2, Ca 4, Br 3, Si 3, Di 2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Appropriate guidance for assessment administration.</td>
<td>Ri 4, Vi 2, Ki 4, Ma 3, Em 3, De 3, Ka 4, Na 4, Lo 2, Ca 4, Br 3, Si 5, Di 3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Appropriate guidance for judgment of learners’ performance</td>
<td>Ri 3, Vi 2, Ki 3, Ma 3, Em 4, De 4, Ka 2, Na 2, Lo 3, Ca 4, Br 2, Si 4, Di 3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average by Individual Teachers</td>
<td>Ri 2.8, Vi 2.0, Ki 2.8, Ma 2.4, Em 2.6, De 3.4, Ka 4.0, Na 4.0, Lo 2.0, Ca 2.4, Br 3.4, Si 3.6, Di 4.0, Al 2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The two letters like ‘Ri’, ‘Vi’ represent the teachers’ pseudonyms, e.g. Ri = Richard. The grey columns highlight the rankings by the eight teacher assessors selected for Interviews and Think-aloud Verbal protocols.
6.3.2 Teachers’ Satisfaction with LLN Constructs but Dissatisfaction with Terminology

As can be seen in Table 6-2, the teachers’ average rankings for individual statements indicate their satisfaction with the division of the 5 core skills (average ranking of 3.9) and specification of indicators (average ranking of 3.7). The teachers appeared to be less satisfied with the accompanying performance features (average ranking of 3.1) and descriptors (average ranking of 3.3). They seemed to be least satisfied with terminology usage in the ACSF (average ranking of 2.8).

The teachers’ comments in the open-ended questions reflected the same perspectives. Most of the teachers’ positive comments revolved the comprehensiveness of the five core skills and specification of indicators and performance features, for examples, ‘they cover the core skills we need to teach our clients’ (Natalie), ‘quite relevant and comprehensive’ (Alison); ‘broad but allows mapping with curriculum’ (Kate), ‘adequate for the LLNP’ (Kim), ‘good, assess students’ ability in all areas’ (Diana) and ‘well-defined’ (Simone).

Meanwhile, most of the teachers’ negative comments centered the usage of language and terminology in performance features and descriptors, for examples, ‘some specification can be too technical which may cause confusion among assessors’ interpretation of meaning’ (Emily); ‘the language describing the performance features is too vague’ (Lona); ‘should be written in easy to understand language’ (Natalie); ‘sometimes confusing and vague terminology, need further explanation’ (Alison). The teachers called for simplification of terminology, inclusion of ‘examples’, ‘more detailed explanation’ or ‘a glossary for complex words’ and ‘constant seminars and professional development’ to ‘enlighten the users’.

6.3.3 Teachers’ Slight Dissatisfaction with Accounting for SEE Learners and Mixed Feedback for Accounting for Teachers as Assessors

As shown in Table 6-3, the teachers expressed slight dissatisfaction with the ACSF in terms of classification of learners’ levels, reflecting learners’ progress and needs, and guiding teachers’ judgment of learners’ performance (average rankings of 2.9 and 2.8). The teachers expressed slight satisfaction with the ACSF guidance for assessment administration (average ranking of 3.2).
In replies to the open-ended questions, most teachers expressed two major concerns regarding the framework’s accounting for SEE learners. Firstly, they found the framework lacked level classification for learners with little or no English. Typical comments include: ‘no level classifying the students who have no English at all ... level zero could be included’ (Emily); ‘nothing for the pre-beginners in ACSF, no guideline provided’ (Maria). Secondly, the teachers found it hard to match learners’ performance and progress neatly to the levels in the ACSF. Typical comments include: ‘a learner may display features of a high level 1 in a core skill but may not display enough performance features for a level 2’ (Natasha); ‘learners have various needs so at times their levels are different and it’s difficult to classify them appropriately’ (Britney); ‘if I stay faithful to ACSF, I can only reflect on certain parts of the students’ progress’ (Richard).

The guidance for assessment administration and judgment of learners’ performance received mixed feedback from the teachers. Some teachers expressed satisfaction with the level of detail of the ACSF, the provision of sample activities and the inclusion of information on levels of support given by teachers. They found that ‘the detail provided against each level as performance indicator is quite helpful’ (Richard); ‘sample activities are good’ (Natasha); ‘the support level written assists assessors” (Dianna). Most of the teachers, however, expressed concern about insufficient clarity and guidance for assessment. Novice teachers found the ACSF had ‘little guidance ... may not be responding or substantial to me as an assessor’ (Vivien) or ‘in terms of guiding a new assessor to the complex assessment procedure, it lacks clarity’ (Richard). More experienced teachers found it ‘easier if some examples are included’ (Natalie) and challenging to judge learners’ performance due to learners’ familiarity with topics and formality of tasks:

‘Sometimes it is hard to judge the performance of speaking, writing and listening. If a familiar topic is given, practiced before, a learner would be able to write a paragraph, but he doesn’t have the skills to write about a new topic. Listening to informal conversations may be good for literacy students but formal listening may be not’ (Dianna)

6.3.4 Conclusion

In summary, the analysis of the teachers’ rankings and replies to open-ended questions on the ACSF assessment function identified some areas of strength and weakness in the ACSF.
from the teachers’ perspectives. The teachers favoured the broad and detailed LLN constructs and guidance on degrees of teachers’ support to learners at different levels. The teachers, however, raised concerns about confusing language and terminology usage, lack of level classification for learners with no English or schooling experience, difficulty in matching learners’ performance to the ACSF levels, lack of clarity and guidance for assessment, and the effects of tasks’ familiarity on learners’ performance. The identified areas of concern were further explored in the follow-up interviews with the eight selected teachers. The following sections present the findings from the follow-up interviews.

6.4 Major Findings from the Interviews

The analysis of the follow-up interviews with the eight teachers both clarified and expanded the findings from the questionnaire survey. The analysis revealed teachers’ preference of but confusion about covering extensive LLN constructs, their difficulty with interpreting and reaching agreement on meanings of terminology and expressions, their struggle with assessing learners with limited English and schooling experience and matching learners’ performance to the ACSF levels, the lack of account for the differences between native and non-native English speaking learners, insufficient assessment guidance, and the teachers’ reliance on professional community and professional knowledge in assessment.

6.4.1 Teachers’ Preference but Contradictory Coverage of Extensive LLN Constructs

The teachers’ replies in the follow-up interviews further reflected their satisfaction with the broad and detailed LLN constructs in the ACSF. However, the teachers’ coverage of the extensive LLN constructs in assessing learners was contradictory regarding how much and what they should cover in the ACSF in actual assessment. On the one hand, the teachers struggled with coverage of the large amount of performance features and descriptors in the ACSF as one noted:

‘I guess the one that I find challenging is the numeracy for level 3. I feel that there are too many features. If you look at the ACSF there are eight features for 3.10. To be fair and cover appropriately I believe you cover 5 of the 8 minimum to obtain an exit three. It’s quite hard to have one task that covers the minimum of five features to match that. And the actual features are actually wordy. There is a lot of
On the other hand, the teachers also took advantage of selective coverage of different descriptors in the comprehensive LLN constructs to accommodate and pass different learners in assessment:

‘I can choose certain descriptors suitable to that learner and other features for other learners so that it is flexible enough. There is enough flexibility in there to help each learner to get through each level.’ (Carl’s Interview Extract)

6.4.2 Teachers’ Struggle with Interpreting and Agreeing on Meanings of Terminology

The areas that the teachers most struggled with involved interpreting and reaching agreement on meanings of the language and terminology used in the ACSF descriptors. The teachers found it hard to interpret phrases such as ‘use common every day informal language’ (Lona), ‘basic punctuation with inconsistence’ (Natalie) ‘engage in learning where scaffolding minimizes risk-taking’, ‘degree of resilience (Vivien). According to Vivien, ‘the meaning is understandable but it is hard to claim it when you want to provide evidence’. The following comments best illustrate the teachers’ confusion in interpreting and applying the language and terminology used in the ACSF:

‘Like what is 1.01, what are levels? What are ‘learning difficulties’? We need to see that for level 1. Then for 1.02 what are ‘strategies’. What are possible strategies for this student? What are ‘source of support’ for this student of this specific level. Something like that, not just the words.”

(Vivien’s Interview Extract)

‘Writing, let say writing .06 and let’s go with the most basic level 1 ‘begins to use basic punctuation’ right and it said there is ‘inconsistency’. So how much of the mistake do we allow the student or client to make before we can actually decide the student is NYA in this indicator. I think the ACSF need to be clear about that otherwise this is very open to interpretation. One assessor may say you only allow five mistakes. Others may say no let’s be more generous and allow more. So where you draw the line?’

(Emily’s Interview Extract)
Researcher: So what is the hard thing?

Denis: Interpretation. I see my client’s result differently and my colleagues can see differently. And when they justify their interpretation I agree with them but that does not mean I disagree with mine. And then it becomes even more confusing because I see what they are saying is also right and what I am saying is also right which is not matching.

Researcher: So what caused the confusion?

Denis: The reading of the performance features and elements and how they apply them to the client’s performance and how I apply them. And then they said but he says this and I would say but he also says that.

(Denis’ Interview Extract)

The teachers called for the inclusion of specific examples to clarify what different common terms actually required learners to demonstrate at a particular level:

‘In CGEA, if they have used technical terms like ‘highly familiar situations’, then they explain that terms in the range statement, further document to give you examples like ‘advertising leaflets’, ‘notices’, or ‘signs’ or ‘simple price list’, etc. So by giving that, the teachers and assessors are not left to interpret the term “highly familiar situations” on their own’

(Denis’ Interview Extract)

6.4.3 Poor Level Discrimination in Descriptors

The lack of level discrimination in descriptors was also raised by the teachers. Diana, the most experienced teacher and assessor who was also responsible for assessor training noted this issue in her comments on the defined learning and oral communication skills:

‘I think it needs better precise details for some areas like learning and oral communication. It needs to show the difference of each level. Learning level 1 and 2, I can’t see a big difference because it says just goals and resources, things like that. And Oral also, listening, it is the same. Listen to simple questions. Speaking the same, ask simple questions, things like that so I want to see specific differences between the two levels like it is given in reading and writing.’

(Diana’s Interview Extract)
As shown in the section below, Diana actually applied her professional knowledge to short out the problem in assessor training. Most teachers called for the inclusion of samples of learners’ performance across levels to assist assessors in assigning levels: ‘So if we have samples at each level given to us, at least we know what is expected and how to assess.’ (Natalie’s Interview Extract); ‘with basic learners’ samples and assessors’ comments... they could give samples of evidence with performance features used, also give ways to assess, for example, the difference of level 1 from level 2’ (Vivien’s Interview Extract).

6.4.4 Difficulty in Assessing Learners with Limited English and Schooling

The majority of the teachers expressed concern about the lack of account for learners with little or no English and schooling experience:

‘Most of the client come in with very little or no English at all. That’s the biggest make-up of our LLNP. We can’t base much on the ACSF because there is nothing say or explain or describe about the students with zero English. Level 1 description basically mentions that for students who do have some English or able to make sentences or put words together. But what do you do with clients who come in and can’t even tell his name. They even can’t understand you ask for their first name.’ (Emily’s Interview extract)

The teachers struggled to accommodate this learner cohort and resorted to class drilling, repetition and full support during assessment as the solution:

‘There is so much pre-teaching involved. So it is basically repetition, repetition all the time every single day. So it’s just a class of drilling lessons. It’s not real teaching at all. You are just drilling them with the same things again and again.’ (Emily’s Interview Extract)

‘I give a lot of tasks. I do a lot of pre-teaching, covering the aspects including in the task as well as giving a lot of support when they actually do the task.’ (Natalie’s Interview Extract)

However, the degree of support given by teachers was questionable:

‘Full support’, some people may think ‘full support’ is the assessor is writing and they are copying. They need to clarify what they mean by ‘full support’. I think if you are writing three sentences in half an hour with assessor’s support
that means it’s not level 1. And if you are taking one hour for writing a paragraph with assessor’s support, it is not level 2.’

(Diana’s Interview Extract)

The teachers called for the inclusion of preliminary level to describe the performance and capture the progress of those learners:

‘You have to spend a lot a lot of time with them. You have to drill a lot and they need a lot of support and extensive support. That is why I think the pre-ACSF is needed. You could do block exit in writing if they could copy. So if they could copy a document that was Ok. But in the ACSF they have to actually construct a sentence at the lowest level.’

(Simone’s Interview Extract)

6.4.5 Familiarity to Texts and Tasks by Different Learner Cohorts

According to Diana, who had experience assessing learners across the four centers in the SEE provider, the descriptors for writing skills, particularly, the ones requiring to “produce 1 or 2 simple sentences” about oneself for level 1 and ‘personal history’ for level 2, did not reflect the abilities of using sentence structures and paragraph writing of non-native-English speaking learners due to their more familiarity to this particular types of writing compared to native-English speaking learners:

‘Level 1 if they write about themselves, it is easy to say like ‘I’m Ann Le. I live in Springvale’. So that is two sentences. But actually they can write only that because they have practiced in previous study when they did their 510 hours in AMES. If we ask them to write sentences about daily routines, they don’t know how to use sentence structures, paragraph writing. That’s mainly for migrants, not for Australians. If you take local students, if they don’t write, they don’t write at all.’

(Diana’s Interview Extract)

Similarly, the descriptors for level 2 of Oral Communication which required formal conversation seemed not to well reflect oral communication ability by native-English speaking learners due to their unfamiliarity with this type of conversation:

‘And oral one, listening, some of the local students, they are scared of school...they hate formal conversations. When you ask formal questions, they
will just give one answer, they just give one answer to get rid of. And then the same client walked out of the place because the phone rang and he was informally talking very well. So we can’t judge listening and speaking by local clients in a formal situation.’

(Diana’s Interview Extract)

6.4.6 Difficulty with Matching Learners’ Performance to the ACSF Levels

According to the teachers, ‘sometimes the responses that we have from the students do not well match the ACSF or visa versa’ (Carl’s Interview Extract). Some features in the ACSF were hardly found in the learners’ performance, while others were available event at a lower level. Most of the teachers cited descriptors for writing as examples. In particular, the teachers found ‘sentence structures’ and ‘verb tenses’ for level 1 were too hard for the learners to demonstrate while ‘linking words’ and ‘adjectives’ included in level 2 were too easy:

‘I think the writing, the sentence structure is always a problem and it takes time to understand which format to write things in, and grammar. Some never really understand the grammar and still try to interpret the grammar rules.”

(Simone’s Interview Extract)

‘The including of some indicators is sometimes not practical. For example, using conjunctions ‘but’ and ‘and’ fall under level 2 in writing, so as using ‘adjectives’. But often, some clients’ writing does not meet level 1 requirement, … basic conjunctions like “and” … many level 1 students use it’

(Lona’s Interview Extract)

Similarly, in assessment of numeracy skills, descriptors for ‘calculation’ were found too easy for learners compared to descriptors for using language for ‘directions’ and ‘shapes’:

‘I had a client who had a level 3 of .10 indicator but the same client could not read a map and give direction so it appears to me that I could claim 1.09, 3.10 and 1.11 indicators, which is a bit controversy to me…..It was difficult for me to decide the level of the client because they get between 1.09 and 3.10’

(Lona’s Interview Extract)

‘All levels struggle with ‘shapes’. They can’t remember the shapes or spell the shapes or say the shapes. The calculation is a lot higher than the other parts of numeracy.’ (Simone’s Interview Extract)
6.4.7 The Vital Role of Professional Knowledge and Professional Community

Two major themes that emerged from the teachers’ interviews were the vital roles of teachers’ professional knowledge and professional community. Vivien, the novice teacher and assessor found that she needed knowledge and understanding of the actual learners to make sense of the ACSF:

‘By the time we work with the ACSF, we were just told this is how it is done and the supervisor would show us how to use it. But because it takes time, you can’t really use or understand it more fully unless you are already practicing, you are already spending time with your students. You already know what they need, where they fall short.’

(Vivien’s Interview Extract)

Diana, the assessor trainer, resorted to her professional knowledge to solve the problem of lack of level discrimination in the ACSF. She added examples of learners’ replies to show increase in complexity for learning from level 1 to level 2 and 3 in her assessor training:

‘Most of the times when they do assessment by themselves, they have mistakes for learning and oral, so I have to write down to show like specific learning goals in level 1 would be ‘I want to do a job’, but in level 2 they may say that ‘I want to be a cleaner’, and level 3 would be ‘I want to do training to be a professional cleaner’. You know things like that.’

(Diana’s Interview Extract)

In addition to professional knowledge, the role of the professional community was also another reoccurring theme in teachers’ interviews. For most the teachers, their assessment professional development rooted in their immediate professional community with their colleagues and direct supervisor:

‘It takes a while to get used to using it for both PTA and BES. At the beginning, it was very difficult. I guess it doesn’t come naturally and requires a lot of correction and feedback from coordinator of our centre plus again having other people to have a look and getting some feedback from them as well. There are no examples of PTA or Block Exit to show how it is used. We basically learn from each other in our centre. I don’t think there is sufficient guidance for assessment.’

(Carl’s Interview Extract)
All the teachers who worked in the main center together resorted to peer discussions for interpretation and application of the ACSF. Natalie’s comment best sums up the teachers’ points:

‘At the beginning, I think, when I started using the ACSF, it was a bit daunting but with use it started becoming a bit more clearer. It becomes easier when we discuss because a lot of time when at points we are not very clear so we discuss with other assessors. And then slowly with use, it started getting a bit better’.

(Natalie’s Interview Extract)

In addition, most of the teachers also emphasised the vital role of the wider professional community they had through moderation workshops:

‘Moderation workshops have been particularly useful in terms of the framework interpretation because different teachers interpret it differently. One particular task has been assessed as level one by one teacher, as level two by another and even as level three by the third teacher. This is the nature of the industry I guess. For me, moderation workshop is very beneficial.’

(Lona’s Interview Extract)

6.5 Discussion

6.5.1 Pros and Cons of Extensive LLN Constructs in the ACSF

The SEE teachers’ preference of the LLN constructs, in particular the division and specification of the five core skills, the indicators, the performance features and ‘Sample Activities’ supports the finding from document analysis on the strength of the ACSF in offering extensive LLN constructs with texts and tasks relevant to adult learners. The fact that teachers found the ACSF relevant to and allowed assessment of a vast area of skills for SEE learners is encouraging given the feedback on the previous framework, the NRS (Coates, et al., 1995), which was found too narrow and not holistic enough to capture various aspects of real-life LLN performance (ACAL, 2008; OMI, 2008; VALBEC, 2008). This further confirms the success of the ACSF in offering “a rich, detailed picture of real-life performance in adult learning English language, literacy and numeracy” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2).
Such acceptance of the defined LLN constructs from the teachers is crucial for the implementation of the ACSF because as noted by McKay (1995), Breen et al. (1997) and North and Schneider (1998), teachers’ acceptance constituted the first vital step in the adoption of any new framework. The SEE teachers’ satisfaction with the broad and detailed LLN constructs in the ACSF also supports Knoch’s (2009) finding on raters’ preference of a detailed and analytical scale to a holistic scale. However, despite their satisfaction with the extensive LLN constructs, the SEE teachers’ approaches to coverage of the multiple elements in the constructs pose some concerns.

The teachers’ struggles with coverage of multiple performance features and descriptors in application of the ACSF reflect Davies’ (1995) and Widdowson’s (2001) skepticism about the possibility for extensive LLN constructs to be covered in assessment. Though it was noted in the ACSF that the performance features and descriptors were supposed to be guidance for assessment rather than a checklist (DEEWR, 2008, p. 8), the teachers’ current approach of selecting different descriptors to assess and pass different learners is problematic. In the first place, it is uncertain how selective coverage of the LLN constructs to accommodate learners’ competence could ensure fairness and validity of assessment. Further, given the diverse training contexts and heterogeneous learner cohorts, selective coverage of the LLN constructs based on individual learners’ strengths and weaknesses is likely to cause great divergence in teachers’ application of the ACSF and lessen the possibility for the framework to provide “a consistent national approach to the identification of the core skills requirements in diverse personal, community, work and training contexts” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2). It is necessary to further investigate the teachers’ actual application of the ACSF to rating learners’ performance for more insights into their coverage of the LLN constructs and levels of consistency. Chapter 7 will set some light into this issue.

6.5.2 Teachers’ Interpretation of Terminology and Theoretical Understandings

The SEE teachers’ dissatisfaction with the wordings and terminology in the ACSF further confirms the findings from the document analysis on the weakness of the ACSF in this area. Similar to the findings from the document analysis, the teachers reported difficulty with and differences in interpreting terms like ‘highly familiar’ and ‘every day informal language’. Though the SEE teachers did not directly mention the problem with synonymic
expressions, their struggle to see the differences in descriptors between levels, particularly for learning and oral communication skills, indicate this to be the area of concern. The problems with normative terminology and synonymic wordings were also reported in studies on other frameworks like the CEFR (Alderson, et al., 2006) and the CSWE (Brindley, 2001a; Smith, 2000). Drawing on Smith’s (2000) suggestions, it is necessary to revise wordings in descriptors and eliminate vague terminology in the ACSF. In addition, the inclusion of examples of texts, tasks and actual learners’ performance across levels as suggested by the SEE teachers is also advisable to reduce the confusion with interpretation and application of normative and synonymic terms.

The issue with interpretation of terminology, however, seems not to reside only in the ACSF but also in the SEE teachers’ professional knowledge or theoretical understandings. The teachers’ perception of terminology in the ACSF as ‘too technical’ and their struggle with interpretation of terminology like ‘learning difficulties’ and ‘learning strategies’ suggest that some of the concepts, such as the one presented in the construct of ‘Learning Skills’, might be unfamiliar to the teachers. Concerns about teachers’ lack of theoretical understandings had been raised in studies by Brindley (2001a), Arkoudis and O’Loughlin (2004) and Llosa (2011). This supports McKay’s (1995) position that teachers might lack knowledge of current theories in application of a new framework. Given the ever-expanding theoretical LLN models and thus the LLN constructs in any newly-developed and adopted frameworks like the ACSF, teachers’ lack of sufficient theoretical understandings for interpretation of terminology or understanding of new LLN concepts is not a surprise and deserves due consideration. This issue will be further discussed in a section below and in the next chapter.

6.5.3 Accounting for the SEE Learner Cohorts

Accounting for Low Literacy Learners

Apart from terminology, accounting for targeted learners is another pressing concern by the teachers. The teachers expressed concern about the lack of level descriptions for learners with little English and schooling experience, the lack of account for specific characteristics native and non-native English learners in suggested texts and tasks, and the difficulty with matching SEE learners’ performance to the ACSF. The finding illustrates the framework’ limitation in accounting for targeted learner cohorts identified in the document analysis and
indicates the need for the ACSF to be trialed on actual and different learner cohorts. Similar to the cases of other frameworks like the ESL Bandscales (McKay, 1995) and the CEFR (North & Schneider, 1998), this can help to determine the representativeness of the ACSF to the targeted learner population. In addition, insights from the review of literature shed more light into the identified issues with accounting for targeted learners in the application of the ACSF to assessment.

Firstly, the issue with accounting for low literacy learners had been reported in a number of studies on LLN framework application (Breen, et al., 1997; McKay, 1995; Sanguinetti, 1995). Other frameworks like the CGEA (DEECD, 2010), the ESL framework (DIIRD, 2008) and the CSWE (AMES, 2008), were actually expanded to include an initial or preliminary level to cater for low literacy learners in the course of their development and implementation. The implementation of the CSWE even went further to study specific characteristics, needs and LLN performance of low literacy learners and account for them in the AMEP program (AMEP, 2006; Gunn, 2003; More, 2007; Nawrocki, 2004; Ollerhead, 2010; Ross, 2000). It is necessary for the ACSF and its implementation to do just that, developing and including another level below the current level 1 in the ACSF to cater for low literacy learners in the SEE program. This can be done with reference to the experiences and research findings on the development and implementation of the above frameworks. Just by so doing can SEE teachers avoid the current undesirable teaching practice of drilling low level learners for achievement of level 1 requirements and ensure genuine teaching, assessment and reporting of LLN performance by this learner cohort.

Accounting for Characteristics of Different Learner Cohorts

The different levels of familiarity to different types of texts and tasks in the ACSF by native and non-native English speaking learners again touch upon the thorny issue of consistent application of one single framework to diverse learner cohorts. The issue of the differences in performance and linguistic developmental pathways between native and non-native learners was also reported in studies of the application of the CGEA (Sanguinetti, 1995) and different assessment frameworks at school in Australia (Breen, et al., 1997). In the case of the ACSF application, the complication might be more paramount given the learners’ wide age range, divergent social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and different employment and education experiences.
It is necessary to consider two available solutions to this issue from the review of the literature. McKay (1995) incorporated factors concerning school learners’ age, experience, school contexts and their ESL development in Australian environment in the development of the ESL Bandscales, which, if applied to the case of the ACSF, might result in an extremely complicated framework given the extremely heterogeneous Australian adult LLN learner population. Different from McKay (1995) who solved the issue mainly in the framework development, Ross (2000) offered another solution which resided in the application process. Ross (2000) examined the effects of adult learners’ genders, mother tongues, age ranges, education backgrounds and time of residence in Australia on their progress and achievement of the CSWE levels and suggested different bands or learning pathways to cater for different learning paces of CSWE learners.

As the targeted learner cohorts of the ACSF are far more complex than the ones of the ESL Bandscales and similar to the ones of the CSWE, Ross’ (2000) process-oriented solution appears more suitable and feasible in the case of the ACSF than McKay’s (1995) incorporation of learners’ characteristics in the framework itself. Taking the examples given by the SEE teachers in this study, it would be difficult to ensure descriptors in the ACSF to account for all the differences between and to be neutral to native and non-native English speaking learners, needless to say, learners from various backgrounds. Studies like Ross (2000), however, provided useful indication of the effects of various characteristics of diverse learner cohorts on their performance. Findings from such studies can be used to inform guidance and training to teachers to better assess diverse learner cohorts in the application of the ACSF.

Difficulty with Matching Learners’ Performance to the ACSF

The SEE teachers’ struggles with matching the learners’ performance to the ACSF and the difference in levels of difficulty of some descriptors at the same level are consistent with findings reported in the literature (Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Brindley, 2000a; Simons, 2009). On the one hand, this further underscores the need for trial of the ACSF in ratings of actual learners to determine, eliminate and revise descriptors or LLN elements which fail to describe and discriminate levels of performance. On the other hand, this supports Lumley’s (2009) position that it is impossible for any LLN framework or scale to prescribe performance by all and different learners. The author called for assessment training instead to resolve the problem. This issue and the two solutions suggested above will be discussed.
in details in the next chapter where more relevant findings emerge from the think-aloud verbal protocols.

6.5.4 Accounting for the SEE Teachers as Assessors

Provision of Assessment Guidance

The teachers’ replies to the questionnaires and the interviews support the finding from the document analysis on the lack of guidance for teachers’ assessment practices. The teachers required the inclusion of glossary for terminology, assessment tasks and assessment tools, samples of learners’ performance across levels and examples of best practices for guidance of both BES and PTA. These types of assessment supports were considered as vital to the implementation of assessment frameworks like the CEFR (Alderson, et al., 2006; North & Schneider, 1998) and available for the application of other LLN frameworks like the ESL Bandscales (C. Scott & Erduran, 2004) and the CSWE (Brindley, 2000a). For the ACSF to realise its assessment functions, more guidance for teachers’ assessment is necessary.

Caution with Teachers’ Reliance on Professional Experience

The SEE teachers’ strong reliance on their professional experience, especially their own understanding of their SEE learners, to make sense of terminology, to clarify vague descriptions and to select different descriptors in assessment is consistent with findings from other studies on framework application (Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Davison, 2004; Llosa, 2011; Lumley, 2005). The SEE teachers’ recalled experience with the ACSF reflects the first two stages of framework application noted by Breen, et al. (1997), which featured teachers’ initial acceptance of a new framework basing on its suitability to the learners and their subsequent selective adaptability of the framework to suit the learners in their assessment contexts. The finding also supports Lumley’s (2005) position that no matter how well-designed an assessment framework could be, it cannot function by itself without teachers’ application of professional knowledge and understanding of learners to make sense of the framework.

However, while studies like Breen, et al. (1997), Arkoudis and O’Loughlin (2004) and Davison (2004) suggested more weight to be given to professional judgment rather than to prescribed descriptors in the application of assessment frameworks, caution should be exercised in the case of the ACSF application. The SEE teachers’ struggle with interpretation of terminology, especially the ones used to define new concepts like learning
skills and strategies, indicates the lack of understanding of current theories which might set certain limitations to their professional judgment. In addition, the SEE teachers’ recalled experience also indicated different degrees of professional experience and knowledge among the teachers. While some teachers already moved to the ‘ownership’ stage where they could critique the ACSF and supplement its shortcomings with their professional knowledge and understanding of the learners, others were still in the initial process of getting to know the learners and making sense of the ACSF accordingly. As the teachers’ unfamiliarity with certain learner cohorts was observed in other studies of framework application in Australia (Murray, 2003; Ollerhead, 2010) and their lack of experience and expertise in assessment was also well reported in the literature (Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Brindley, 1998a, 2000a, 2001a), cautions should be exercised to the reliance on professional judgment and professional knowledge in the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. Further discussion on this issue will be presented in the next chapter.

The Vital Role of Professional Community and the Need for Assessment Training

The SEE teachers’ drawing on professional community for reaching agreement on interpretation of the ACSF is well supported by the literature (Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Breen, et al., 1997; Claire, 2001; Davison, 2004; Sanguinetti, 1995). The professional community in the SEE program included both the peers and supervisors in the teachers’ immediate working places and the wider professional community of teachers participating in moderation workshops. The availability of such professional communities facilitated teachers’ discussions, arguments and agreement on meanings of descriptors in the ACSF and how they could be applied to rating learners’ performance. Sharing and discussions in their professional community provided the SEE teachers with the major means to ensure consistent interpretation and application of the ACSF to assessment.

However, it was also evident from interviews that the SEE teachers also relied on their immediate professional community to develop their assessment expertise, an observation not reported in the literature. On the one hand, this suggests more guidance needed in the ACSF to assist for teachers’ assessment. On the other hand, this indicates the lack of and the need for systematic assessment training to teachers. Moderation workshops, though highly valued by the SEE teachers, seem to contribute more in terms of reaching agreement on interpretation of the ACSF than in terms of assessment training, a point already made by
Australian LLN practitioners (ACAL, 2008; VALBEC, 2008). Given the primary role of teachers as assessors and the reliance on assessment results to account for funding in the SEE program, assessment training for SEE teachers is essential. Specific areas in need for assessment training for teachers will be discussed in the next chapter on the teachers’ actual application of the ACSF to assessing the SEE learners’ writing performance.
Chapter 7 Teachers’ Application of the ACSF to Rating Learners’ Writing Performance

7.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the think-aloud verbal protocols of eight SEE teachers’ rating three learners’ writing performance and discusses findings on teachers’ application of the ACSF in their actual rating processes. The chapter first summarises the overall ACSF levels assigned by the eight teachers to the three learners’ writing performance for both Indicator .05 and Indicator .06, of the writing skill. The degree of consistency in teachers’ overall ratings shown in the summary helped to predict the degree of matching between the learners’ writing performance and the defined writing skill construct as well as the degree of consistency of teachers’ overall application of the writing skill construct. The chapter then presents the analyses of the teachers’ comments on each learner’s writing samples to examine how the teachers arrived at their final ratings, how they interpreted and applied specific performance features and feature descriptors in Indicator .05 and Indicator .06, and what factors affected the consistency of their ratings and interpretations. The chapter concludes with a discussion on major findings from the think-aloud verbal protocols.

The analyses of the think-aloud verbal protocols revealed that the teachers exhibited different levels of rating discrepancy in the three learners’ cases. Factors affecting teachers’ rating consistency and their application of the ACSF included both the performance features and the descriptors in the construct of the writing skills and the teachers’ assessment practices and expertise. The findings both supported and extended the findings from the document analysis, the questionnaires and interviews and the key issues identified in the literature review of LLN assessment framework application. The following sections detail the analyses and discussions on the major findings from the think-aloud verbal protocols.

7.2 Rating Consistency of Three Learners’ Writing Performance

Table 7-1 and Table 7-2 summarise the overall ratings given by the eight teachers to the three learners’ written texts for Indicator .05 and Indicator .06. In general, the rating discrepancy of between one and three levels was observed in all three cases. The teachers’ ratings were most consistent in the case of learner 1 with the majority of the teachers
assigning 2.05 and 2.06. Only three out of eight teachers rating at 1.05 for Indicator .05 and two out of eight at 1.06 for Indicator .06. The teachers’ ratings were more divergent in the cases of learner 2 and learner 3 with either three levels assigned or two different levels assigned by equal number of teachers. The following sections present the analyses of the teachers’ ratings and comments on each learner’s writing performance for Indicator .05 and Indicator .06 to examine how the construct of the writing skills was operationalised in teachers’ ratings.

7.3 Learner 1: Performance Well Matching the ACSF

As can be seen in Appendix C, the writing performance by learner 1 consisted of a mind map of the learner’s activities for morning, afternoon and evening and a written text about the learner’s daily routines based on the mind map. The mind map contained vocabulary for daily activities and the written text contained three small paragraphs for activities in three parts of the day and used simple and compound sentences and full stops, capital letters and commas. With the demonstration of the above features, the learner’s writing performance matched well to the descriptors of 2.05 and 2.06 in the ACSF (see Appendix F and Appendix G for the descriptors).

Table 7-3 and Table 7-4 summarise the teachers’ ratings and comments on the learner’s writing performance against Indicator .05 and Indicator .06. The teachers were grouped according to the ratings they gave and their comments were grouped under the performance features and descriptors that the comments referred to or inferred. In general, the teachers’ comments mostly adhered to the performance features and feature descriptors in the ACSF. However, the analysis of the teachers’ comments revealed issues with teachers’ insufficient coverage of multiple-part descriptors and confusion with normative terms as well issues with limited level discrimination of descriptors due to the use of synonymic expressions and low value-added elements. The sections bellow detail the analysis.
Table 7-1: Summary of Eight Teachers’ Ratings of Three Learners’ Writing Performance for Indicator .05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NYA</th>
<th>ACSF Levels</th>
<th>Ratings of Learner 1 by 8 Teachers</th>
<th>Ratings of Learner 2 by 8 Teachers</th>
<th>Ratings of Learner 3 by 8 Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.05</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.05</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.05</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.05</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-2: Summary of Eight Teachers’ Ratings of Three Learners’ Writing Performance for Indicator 1.06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NYA</th>
<th>ACSF Levels</th>
<th>Ratings of Learner 1 by 8 Teachers</th>
<th>Ratings of Learner 2 by 8 Teachers</th>
<th>Ratings of Learner 3 by 8 Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.06</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.06</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.06</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.06</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.06</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The first column presents five levels of the writing skills in the ACSF. Abbreviations like ‘Vi’ represent the teacher’s pseudonym. Columns in different colours indicate different levels assigned by the teachers to each learner’s writing performance.
7.3.1 Teachers’ Insufficient Coverage of Multiple-part Descriptors and Confusion with Normative Terms

The analysis of the teachers’ comments revealed that the major causes of rating discrepancy in this case of learner 1 resided in the insufficient coverage of multiple-part descriptors and confusion with normative terminology in 1.05 descriptors for ‘Range’ and ‘Structure and Cohesion’ and 1.06 descriptors for ‘Vocabulary’ and ‘Grammar’ by three teachers who rated the learner at 1.05 and 1.06, Vivien, Emily and Carl.

The descriptor of 1.05 for ‘Range’ contained several parts which required ‘writes 2 short simple text types, e.g. fills in the form with basic personal details, produces 1 or 2 simple sentences’. However, as can be seen in Table 7-3, the comments by Vivien, Emily and Carl on ‘Range’ only focused on one part ‘simple sentences’ in ignorance of the major part of the descriptor concerning ‘short simple text types’ and another subordinate part concerning text length of ‘1 or 2’ sentences. Vivien and Carl actually noticed the learner’s ‘paragraph’ writing (see Vivien’s comment on ‘Structure and Cohesion’), which was described in 2.5 ‘Range’ descriptor ‘writes at least one paragraph’, but they seemed not to take this into account in their final ratings. In the meantime, the teachers rating the writing performance at 2.05 all acknowledged the learner’s ‘paragraph’ writing and clearly assigned 2.05 to the learner’s demonstration of ‘Range’ performance feature.

In addition, the comments by Vivien and Emily on ‘Structure and Cohesion’ indicated their confusion with normative terms like ‘short’, ‘simple’ and ‘limited’ in 1.05 descriptors ‘write short texts with simple structures’ and ‘demonstrates a very limited understanding of sequence’. Vivien and Emily considered learner 1 paragraph writing as ‘simple structure’ and Vivien considered the learners’ writing about morning, afternoon and evening activities as 1.05 ‘limited’ understanding of sequence rather than 2.05 ‘begins to sequence writing with some attention to organising principles of time, importance’ and ‘recognise that texts have a structure, e.g. beginning, middle and end’. Meanwhile, the comments by Simone, Denis, Natalie and Lona, who rated the learner at 2.05, all indicated the learner’s demonstration of the above descriptors for 2.05 ‘Structure and Cohesion’. 
## Table 7-3: Summary of Teachers’ Ratings and Comments for Learner 1 - Indicator .05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Vivien (+1.05)</th>
<th>Emily (+1.05)</th>
<th>Carl (+1.05)</th>
<th>Simone (+2.05)</th>
<th>Denis (+2.05)</th>
<th>Natalie (+2.05)</th>
<th>Diana (+2.05)</th>
<th>Luna (+2.05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>She was able to use simple sentences for text types (+1.05)</td>
<td>This student could actually write short simple sentences about his or her daily routines (1.05+)</td>
<td>Could write three paragraphs (+2.05)</td>
<td>I look at the text more closely and look at level 2, the learner was able to write paragraphs (+2.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>I think that this client has met the requirement for 2.05. The client has focused on the topic (+2.05)</td>
<td>It looks like level 2 because it has paragraphs (+2.05)</td>
<td>And in terms of meeting 2.05 competency, I think the mind map demonstrated ability to convey personal information in this formatted way (+2.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience and Purpose</strong></td>
<td>She has recognised the purpose of this text is to describe her daily routines (+1.05)</td>
<td>The student could identify the purposes of the writings, writing about daily routines (+1.05).</td>
<td>In the final paragraph, the grammar structures, sentence structures are also very confusing, so not yet 2.05 (+2.05)</td>
<td>I look at level 2. Just to compare to level 3, did not meet the familiar text types, could not choose the best text type to communicate (-3.05)</td>
<td>2.05 The client was able to recognize that words and grammatical choices may vary to meet the requirements of audience and purpose while describing her daily routines (+2.05)</td>
<td>I can see some connection with the client’s own experience, his daily routines, which he is talking about in his writing (+2.05)</td>
<td>She could write paragraphs for the purpose of describing daily routines (?)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure and cohesion</strong></td>
<td>It is obvious that with the support and guidance of the teacher she was able to organise and then wrote a simple structure (+1.05) which is a short paragraph about her daily routines (+2.05). She also demonstrated a limited understanding of sequence (+1.05). That means she knows the action she did first the morning, afternoon and lastly evening (+2.05).</td>
<td>He or she could write simple structure. This is probably due to class drilling or guidance from the teacher during class time when they practice writing about their daily routines (+1.05)</td>
<td>Could write three paragraphs, one for morning, one for afternoon and one for evening with the text on My Day (+2.05)</td>
<td>Writing sequence was definitely not level 3 (-3.5), and I feel that it was an exit level 2 (+2.05)</td>
<td>Client could recognize that text has structures, beginning, middle and end as shown in the daily plan to describe different activities done at different times (+2.05)</td>
<td>The text has the structure. You can see the beginning, middle and end (+2.05)</td>
<td>If the support is not given, individually completed it would be 2.05 (+2.05)</td>
<td>We can see events these chronological order, quite a good chronological sequence of events, in the morning, then another paragraph in the afternoon, and another one in the evening (+2.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Register</strong></td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan, proof, draft, review</strong></td>
<td>There is a clear proof that the learner went through planning, proof-reading, drafting and reviewing. This was evident when she made a word map. (+2.05)</td>
<td>The learner has actually used bubbles as well to develop his or her ideas and has also written a first draft as evidence of plan, proof and draft strategy in writing (+2.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>Begins to plan writing, uses strategies such as listing to organise writing; Was able to review comments in draft process (+2.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>The client has made a draft, making points to use with the final piece of writing. And he has planned the writing because you can see evidence of the drafting process (+2.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>The learner can plan his writing (+2.05) and check his writing by re-reading (+1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessor’s Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>So I give her a 1.05.</td>
<td>So the student has actually achieved level 1 competency so that’s 1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Green colour represents comments for 1.05; Blue colour for 2.05; Brown colour 3.05; Red colour shows comments not matching the ACSF.

(+ ) sign represents teacher’s confirmation of demonstration of level; (- ) sign teacher’s confirmation of non-demonstration of level; (?) sign indicates uncertainty of ACSF level in teacher’s comments.

Text in bold and italics indicates teacher’s using wordings in descriptors in the ACSF.
Table 7-4: Summary of Teachers’ Ratings and Comments for Learner 1 - Indicator .06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Vivien (+1.06)</th>
<th>Carl (+1.06)</th>
<th>Emily (+2.06)</th>
<th>Simone (+2.06)</th>
<th>Denis (+2.06)</th>
<th>Natalie (+2.06)</th>
<th>Diana (+2.06)</th>
<th>Lona (+2.06)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>She indeed can use small bank of words to describe her daily routines (+1.05)</td>
<td>Vocabulary, 'In the afternoon, I pick up my children from school', a lot of that again are very short, short words, lost yet level 2 (-2.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>Able to write about everyday life, yes (+2.06)</td>
<td>Vocal isn’t for level 3 (-3.06)</td>
<td>He’s able to extend key vocabulary to include personal details and everyday life, example writing her detailed daily routines (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>The learner has put vocabulary appropriately under each heading. Overall the vocabulary is correct. It is appropriate vocabulary to his immediate environment, his everyday life (+2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
<td>She was able to use simple sentences, simple verbs (?)</td>
<td>My assessment of this learner would be for 1.05, 1.06 mainly because the text on my day sentences are too short (+1.06). I would probably expect and assess the candidate on a little bit more in the structure of sentence area. Sentences like 'My children wake up at 7.20 am and I make breakfast at 7.30 pm after a little'. you know, there should be more complex in sentence structure to get them to 2.06 (-2.06).</td>
<td>The student could use time markers “in the morning”, ‘then’; could also use simple cohesive devices such as ’and’ I have a shower and get dressed’ and I make breakfast at 7.30 am’, ‘and take the bus to school’ (-2.06) - could also uses simple verb tenses in a basic structure sentence as well as in a basic 2 clause sentence with regards to using ‘and’ (+2.06).</td>
<td>Look, at basic structures and able to use simple verb tenses, yes (+2.06) Uses prepositions; yes (+2.06) Uses time markers like ‘before’ (+2.06)</td>
<td>Client could use action verbs and simple verb tenses in the given task (+2.06). Was able to use simple cohesive devices such as ‘and’ but and ‘then’ (-2.06).</td>
<td>He’s able to use action verbs and simple verb tenses. (+2.06) I can also see use of pronouns and adjectives, cohesive devices and time, location markers. (+2.06)</td>
<td>Correct sentence structures. Has conjunctions. Time markers like: “then”, “before”, “but” (+2.06)</td>
<td>I see that the learner tries to use compound sentences here. Even though the word order wasn’t correct but this is a good attempt (+2.06). Again it’s a compound sentence with two clauses which indicate level 2 grammar (+2.06). The learner is using ‘and’, ‘so’, ‘then’, … actually is quite confidently using prepositions overall (+2.06). The grammar meets the requirement of level 2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punctuation</strong></td>
<td>She uses full stops in her sentences (?)</td>
<td>A lot of confusion with use of capital letters (?)</td>
<td>A lot of confusion with use of capital letters in his or her writing (?)</td>
<td>Uses punctuation, capital letters, full stops (+1.06)</td>
<td>Could use basic punctuation while describing daily routines. (+2.06)</td>
<td>Basic punctuation can be used as well as spelling. (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>Full stops are here, commas are here even though not consistent but still I think meet level 2 requirement. (+2.06)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Spelling**           | Her spelling is excellent (?) | (Not mention) | There were spelling mistakes but in the final piece of writing could spell familiar words correctly (?) | (Not mention) | Was able to use almost correct spelling in the whole task (7) | (Not mention) | 2.06 as she has used correct spelling (+2.06) | I think there are some spelling mistakes (?)
| **Legibility**         | His script is legible. (+2.06) | She can also use an appropriate orientation of writing. She started writing clearly from left to right (+1.05) | (Not mention) | The script is legible (+2.06) | Writing’s legible (+2.06) | (Not mention) | His script is legible. (+2.06) | The script is legible and clear. (+2.06) |
| **Assessor’s Conclusion** | So I give her a 1.06. I maintain a level 1 for 1.06. | He or she achieves level two or 2.06. | I would say exit 2.06. | The client satisfies the requirements for 2.06. | | | | |

Notes: Green colour represents comments for 1.06; Blue colour for 2.06; Brown colour for 3.06; Red colour shows comments not matching the ACSF; (+) sign represents teacher's confirmation of demonstration of level; (−) sign teacher's confirmation of non-demonstration of level; (?) sign indicates uncertainty of ACSF level in teacher’s comments; Text in bold and italics indicates teacher’s use of words in descriptors in the ACSF.
In the same manner, 1.06 ‘Vocabulary’ descriptors required ‘uses a small bank of individual words and phrases or word lists related to giving personal details or meeting survival needs. May be memorised, transcribed, formulaic’ (see Appendix G). Vivien’s and Carl’s comments on ‘Vocabulary’ revealed confusion with both the multiple parts and the normative term in the descriptor. As shown in Table 7-4, both Vivien and Carl found the learner demonstrated a small bank of words for 1.06 ‘Vocabulary’. Their comments reflected their focus on only one part and confusion with the term ‘small’ in ignorance of other parts which specified the types of vocabulary for ‘giving personal details or meeting survival needs’. The learner’s vocabulary usage for daily routines actually went beyond 1.06 and better fit 2.06 ‘extends key vocabulary to include personal details of self, family and relevant others, most aspects of everyday life and other vocabulary of personal significance’, which was acknowledged by Simone, Denis Natalie and Lona, who clearly assigned 2.06 or applied 2.06 descriptors to the learner’s writing samples.

Insufficient coverage of multiple-part descriptors was also observed in Vivien’s and Carl’s comments on ‘Grammar’. ‘Grammar’ descriptors required ‘begins to use basic structures and limited verb tenses’ at 1.06 and ‘uses action words and simple verb tenses in sentences of 1 or 2 clauses’ at 2.06 (see Appendix G). Vivien’s comment on ‘simple sentences and simple verbs’ for ‘Grammar’ did not reflect either 1.06 or 2.06 descriptor and Carl’s comment contradicted when he considered the sentence ‘my children wake up at 7.20 am and I make breakfast at 7.30 am’ as ‘too short’ and not sufficiently complex for level 2 despite the presence of action words, simple verb tenses and 2 clauses as required by 2.06. On the contrary, all the six teachers who rated the learner at 2.06 clearly quoted 2.06 Grammar descriptors concerning sentence structures, verb tenses, action verbs, cohesive devices, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, etc. in their comments.

7.3.2 Limited Level Discrimination in Descriptors Due to Synonymic Wordings and Low Value-added Variables

The analysis of the teachers’ comments also revealed the use synonymous wordings and low value-added variables in some descriptors, which resulted in the rating discrepancy and contributed little to level discrimination. The teachers’ application of descriptors for 1.05 and 2.05 ‘Audience and Purpose’ and ‘Spelling’ indicated the lack of level discrimination due to the use of synonymous wordings in descriptors.
As can be seen in Table 7-3, seven teachers commenting on ‘Audience and Purpose’ either applied descriptors of two different levels to the same writing performance or failed to indicate which descriptors or levels were applied. Two teachers, Vivien and Emily, indicated the application of 1.05 descriptor ‘shows some recognition that texts have different purposes’, while two others, Denis and Natalie, applied 2.05 descriptor ‘recognises that words and grammatical choices may vary to meet the requirements of the audience and purpose’. Two other teachers, Simone and Diana, did not refer to either descriptors in their comments. Similarly, all the eight teachers’ comments on ‘Spelling’ focused on the accuracy of spelling but none matched either 1.06 descriptor ‘approximates spelling, with inconsistency and variation apparent’ or 2.06 descriptor ‘shows some variation in spelling that does not interfere with overall meaning’. The teachers’ application of both level 1 and level 2 descriptors for “Audience and Purpose” and “Spelling” or lack of reference to them suggested that different wordings in the descriptors did not help teachers to discriminate performance at the two levels in their ratings.

The teachers’ comments also revealed some problems with the variables used to describe and discriminate levels in descriptors for ‘Punctuation’. ‘Punctuation’ descriptors required ‘begins to use basic punctuation, but this may be inconsistent, e.g. capital letters, full stops’ at 1.06 and ‘uses basic punctuation, e.g. capital letters, full stops, commas’ at 2.06. The major variables making the difference between the two levels in terms of ‘Punctuation’ were the allowance for ‘inconsistent’ at level 1 and the extra requirement of ‘commas’ for level 2 in addition to ‘full stops’ and ‘capital letters’ for level 1. However, as shown in Table 7-4, none of the teachers’ comments either adequately covered the multiple-part descriptors or accounted for the distinguishing elements included to discriminate the two levels despite their different ratings. Rating the learner at 1.06, Vivien chose to comment on ‘full stops’ while Carl on ‘capital letters’. Rating the learner at 2.06, Emily chose to comment on ‘capital letters’, Simone ‘capital letters’ and ‘full stops’, Denis just on ‘basic punctuation’ but not ‘commas’, and Lona ‘full stop’, ‘commas’ and ‘inconsistent’ but not ‘capital letters’. The presence or absence of the variables in the two multiple-part descriptors to discriminate ‘Punctuation’ performance at the two levels was not taken into account in the teachers’ ratings.

The issue with limited contribution of descriptors to level discrimination was also observed in the teachers’ application or avoidance of descriptors for ‘Register’ and ‘Plan, Proof, Draft and Review’ (see Table 7-3) and ‘Legibility’ (see Table 7-4). None
of the teachers commented on ‘Register’ and most of the teachers found the learner demonstrated 2.05 for ‘Plan, Proof, Draft and Review’ and ‘Legibility’ despite their different ratings. Such observation suggests that these three performance features and their descriptors might carry little weight in teachers’ ratings and contributed little to level discrimination.

### 7.3.3 Conclusion

In short, the writing performance by learner 1 presented a case that matched most of the descriptors for 2.05 and 2.06 in the ACSF. Although the teachers’ ratings were fairly consistent, the analysis of the teachers’ comments still revealed several issues of concern with both the teachers’ interpretation and the writing construct in the ACSF. The teachers exhibited insufficient coverage of descriptors with multiple parts and confusion with normative terminology in their application of the ACSF in ratings of the learner’s writing performance. Meanwhile, the use of synonymic expressions and low value-added variables in descriptors of writing skills resulted in poor level discrimination and limited contribution to overall ratings. The findings suggested specific areas for teacher assessment training and improvement of the ACSF which will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter.

### 7.4 Learner 2: Performance Matching Descriptors at Different ACSF Levels

As can be seen in Appendix D, the writing performance by learner 2 consisted of a description of a rice field picture and an instruction on changing batteries in a smoke detector. The picture description contained two short paragraphs written in complex sentences though with no use of full stops. The instruction contained one heading and five sequenced steps written in imperative forms and numbered steps. The learner’s writing samples presented a case that did not match neatly to but demonstrated descriptors at different levels across different performance features of the writing skill construct. Table 7-5 and Table 7-6 summarise the eight teachers’ comments for Indicator .05 and Indicator .06 according to their final ratings or levels assigned and the performance features and feature descriptors that their comments referred to.

As can be seen in Table 7-1 along with Table 7-5 and Table 7-6, the teachers’ ratings of learner 2 writing performance were significantly inconsistent for Indicator .05 with three levels assigned by almost equal numbers of teachers but fairly consistent for
Indicator .06 with six out of eight teachers assigning 2.06 and one teacher 1.06 and another teacher Not Yet Achieved 1.06. Similar to the case of learner 1, the analysis of the teachers’ comments again revealed the teachers’ confusion with multiple-part descriptors and normative terminology and the lack of efficiency in describing and discriminating levels of performance by some descriptors. In addition, the teachers’ comments highlighted the vital role of professional judgment and the need for peer discussions in rating writing performance which did not fit well into the descriptors and levels in the ACSF.
### Table 7-8: Summary of Teachers’ Ratings and Comments for Learner 2 - Indicator .05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Vivien (+1.05)</th>
<th>Simone (+1.05)</th>
<th>Emily (+2.05)</th>
<th>Carl (+2.05)</th>
<th>Dana (+2.05)</th>
<th>Natalie (+3.05)</th>
<th>Diana (+3.05)</th>
<th>Lona (+3.05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>The learner can write two sentences to describe a picture. (+1.05)</td>
<td>Write at least 1 paragraph, yes, that is done (+2.05)</td>
<td>The student could produce 2 text types (+2.05). This is about writing a picture and I think he or she describes probably a field, some sort of plantation or field. He or she could actually write two paragraphs to describe a picture (+2.05). The second piece of writing which is writing instruction and the student has chosen how to change the battery in the smoke detector. The student could write in dot points when writing instruction. (+2.05)</td>
<td>Writing about the picture consists of two relatively well presented paragraphs (+2.05). Short on number of sentences in each one. 2.05 Client was able to create two text types description of a picture and writing instructions (+2.05) Was able to write factual information while giving instruction (+2.05)</td>
<td>He or she could produce a range of familiar text types, free writing about a picture as well as writing an instruction, (+3.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>I have two pieces of writing. The first one is writing about a picture. The text is written in two paragraphs. The second one is writing instruction, changing battery in a smoke detector. The client put it under number 1, 2, 3. Through both of these pieces of evidence I would say the client meets 3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience and Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Has recognized the purpose of the text, which is a descriptive writing. (+1.05)</td>
<td>Recognises that word and grammar choices may vary to meet requirements, I would say no this in one (-2.05)</td>
<td>The student was able to recognize the purpose of the writing (+3.05). Obviously, he or she is aware that this is not a piece of form but it’s describing a picture. The student could use words and expression to describe the picture (+2.05) The student could relate his or her experience to the writing (+3.05)</td>
<td>In terms of writing instructions, the key points I guess are there. Some of the points are clear to me fully. But when we write an instruction I guess level 2 is expected more. I don’t think that is demonstrated in the assessment here (-3.05)</td>
<td>Was able to make comments between own experience and knowledge and the ideas while describing a picture (+2.05) Was able to recognize that words and grammatical choices may vary to meet the requirement and purpose of the text, examples in both the tasks of describing a picture and giving an instruction (+2.05)</td>
<td>Can vary the language to meet requirements of audience and purpose when writing description and instruction (+3.05)</td>
<td>The description, the vocabulary is really good, the language, the grammar, it has passive voice also. The instruction, has used the correct imperative forms, the vocabulary is really good. The instruction was clearly given. I would give 3.05, definitely 3.05 (+3.05)</td>
<td>He could convey information about the picture. (?) He could relate what he could see in the picture to his personal experience to the second paragraph, “about what you can see in the picture is what you can’t see”. (+2.05) And the client is using his imagination (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure and cohesion</strong></td>
<td>The structure is pretty basic (+1.05), and the paragraphs are only short. There were only two paragraphs (+2.05) Yes there is limited sequence. He could have organised his sentences more logically (+1.05)</td>
<td>(Description) The structure is basic (+1.05), not sufficient for level 2 beginning, middle and end (+2.05), Some sequencing (+1.05)</td>
<td>The student could also use some sequencing to develop her description. There are some parts of flow as you read it (?).</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Register</strong></td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>Could recognise different registers (?)</td>
<td>Has recognised different registers of writing (?)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan, proof, draft, review</strong></td>
<td>I think he planned what to write, but he didn’t practice fully (-2.05)</td>
<td>Could not see any planning Could not see any review (-2.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>Obviously, he was able to see the process of planning while writing two pieces of evidence (?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Vivien (+1.05)</th>
<th>Simone (+1.05)</th>
<th>Emily (+2.05)</th>
<th>Carl (+2.05)</th>
<th>Dana (+2.05)</th>
<th>Natalie (+3.05)</th>
<th>Diana (+3.05)</th>
<th>Lona (+3.05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>The learner can write two sentences to describe a picture. (+1.05)</td>
<td>Write at least 1 paragraph, yes, that is done (+2.05)</td>
<td>The student could produce 2 text types (+2.05). This is about writing a picture and I think he or she describes probably a field, some sort of plantation or field. He or she could actually write two paragraphs to describe a picture (+2.05). The second piece of writing which is writing instruction and the student has chosen how to change the battery in the smoke detector. The student could write in dot points when writing instruction. (+2.05)</td>
<td>Writing about the picture consists of two relatively well presented paragraphs (+2.05). Short on number of sentences in each one. 2.05 Client was able to create two text types description of a picture and writing instructions (+2.05) Was able to write factual information while giving instruction (+2.05)</td>
<td>He or she could produce a range of familiar text types, free writing about a picture as well as writing an instruction, (+3.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>I have two pieces of writing. The first one is writing about a picture. The text is written in two paragraphs. The second one is writing instruction, changing battery in a smoke detector. The client put it under number 1, 2, 3. Through both of these pieces of evidence I would say the client meets 3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience and Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Has recognized the purpose of the text, which is a descriptive writing. (+1.05)</td>
<td>Recognises that word and grammar choices may vary to meet requirements, I would say no this in one (-2.05)</td>
<td>The student was able to recognize the purpose of the writing (+3.05). Obviously, he or she is aware that this is not a piece of form but it’s describing a picture. The student could use words and expression to describe the picture (+2.05) The student could relate his or her experience to the writing (+3.05)</td>
<td>In terms of writing instructions, the key points I guess are there. Some of the points are clear to me fully. But when we write an instruction I guess level 2 is expected more. I don’t think that is demonstrated in the assessment here (-3.05)</td>
<td>Was able to make comments between own experience and knowledge and the ideas while describing a picture (+2.05) Was able to recognize that words and grammatical choices may vary to meet the requirement and purpose of the text, examples in both the tasks of describing a picture and giving an instruction (+2.05)</td>
<td>Can vary the language to meet requirements of audience and purpose when writing description and instruction (+3.05)</td>
<td>The description, the vocabulary is really good, the language, the grammar, it has passive voice also. The instruction, has used the correct imperative forms, the vocabulary is really good. The instruction was clearly given. I would give 3.05, definitely 3.05 (+3.05)</td>
<td>He could convey information about the picture. (?) He could relate what he could see in the picture to his personal experience to the second paragraph, “about what you can see in the picture is what you can’t see”. (+2.05) And the client is using his imagination (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure and cohesion</strong></td>
<td>The structure is pretty basic (+1.05), and the paragraphs are only short. There were only two paragraphs (+2.05) Yes there is limited sequence. He could have organised his sentences more logically (+1.05)</td>
<td>(Description) The structure is basic (+1.05), not sufficient for level 2 beginning, middle and end (+2.05), Some sequencing (+1.05)</td>
<td>The student could also use some sequencing to develop her description. There are some parts of flow as you read it (?).</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Register</strong></td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>Could recognise different registers (?)</td>
<td>Has recognised different registers of writing (?)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan, proof, draft, review</strong></td>
<td>I think he planned what to write, but he didn’t practice fully (-2.05)</td>
<td>Could not see any planning Could not see any review (-2.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>Obviously, he was able to see the process of planning while writing two pieces of evidence (?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

Notes: Green colour represents comments for 1.05; Blue colour for 2.05; Brown colour 3.05; Red colour shows comments not matching the ACSF. (+) sign represents teacher’s confirmation of demonstration of level; (-) sign teacher’s confirmation of non-demonstration of level; (?) sign indicates uncertainty of ACSF level in teacher’s comments; Text in bold and italics indicates teacher’s using wordings in descriptors in the ACSF.
### Table 7-6: Summary of Teachers’ Ratings and Comments for Learner 2 – Indicator .06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Simone (-1.06)</th>
<th>Vivien (+1.06)</th>
<th>Emily (+2.06)</th>
<th>Carl Emily (+2.06)</th>
<th>Denis (+2.06)</th>
<th>Natalie (+2.06)</th>
<th>Diana (+2.06)</th>
<th>Lona (+2.06)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Instruction)</td>
<td>(Description)</td>
<td>Could use some good</td>
<td>Was able to extend</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>The vocabulary</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Could use small bank of words (+1.06)</td>
<td>Could use some good vocabulary so it is not a low level 2 but high level 2 (+2.06)</td>
<td>key vocabulary to include personal details and most aspects of everyday life, example writing instruction (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>really good but I don’t think we can put 3.06 because there are a few mistakes like “we were passing” as “we where passing” (+3.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction)</td>
<td>Vocabulary is evident with the use of imperatives (7)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Description)</td>
<td>There are no basic sentences (7)</td>
<td>(Description) Yes, he was able to use verbs, adjectives, modal and a clause (+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>With there were not many clauses present, sentence structures are very basic (+1.06)</td>
<td>(This student could use complex and compound sentences as well (+3.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>She also used imperative in instruction in the second evidence (+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Instruction) Spelling is not that evident. No full stops and capitalisation wasn’t observed (-1.06)</td>
<td>(Description) Once again the sentence structures in both are light on. Some grammar parts of it are a mess in writing about a picture task. So if I put them to level 3, they would probably struggle (-3.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction) Punctuation is not that evident. No full stops and capitalisation wasn’t observed (-1.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction)</td>
<td>Spelling is reasonably accurate (3.06)</td>
<td>Some problems with use of capital letters in words like “Asia”. Missing some punctuation (?)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Description) There are a few hiccups in punctuation. There is a little inconsistency in capitalisation as well. Also full stops, they are not consistent. (+1.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction)</td>
<td>Spelling was reasonably accurate (3.06) but again there are a few misspelling here and there. Two instances of misspelling were “spell as ‘where’ (7)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction) Spelling is evident (7)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td>(+1.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction)</td>
<td>Writing is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>The writing itself is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>He is unable to spell very simple words like “were” correctly (?)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The script is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction)</td>
<td>Writing is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>The script is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The script is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessor’s Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Look at this I would say NYA because of no capital letters or full stops. Looking at both pieces of work I would say it’s not exit level 1 or NYA 1.06.</td>
<td>For learner 2, he or she has achieved 1.06. Well the reason being that the grammar is not so bad and at least she has used good vocabulary.</td>
<td>Looking at both pieces of writing overall I give a 2.06 for both pieces of writing only because I think this student could have done a little bit more in writing instruction, that would have pumped him or her up to level 3 but for now it is overall 2.06</td>
<td>For .06 I am a bit doubtful as for most of the performance features are concerned, the client fulfilled for level 3 but the only drawback is punctuation and spelling ... I am not too sure ... I think I can put him to exit 2.</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
<td>(+3.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>The script is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction)</td>
<td>The script is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Instruction)</td>
<td>The script is legible, (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td>(+2.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Green colour represents comments for 1.06; Blue colour for 2.06; Brown colour for 3.06; Red colour shows comments not matching the ACSF; (+) sign represents teacher’s confirmation of demonstration of level; (-) sign teacher’s confirmation of non-demonstration of level; (?) sign indicates uncertainty of ACSF level in teacher’s comments; Text in bold and italics indicates teacher’s using words in descriptors in the ACSF.
7.4.1 Teachers’ Insufficient Coverage of Multiple-Part Descriptors and Confusion with Normative Terms

The analysis of teachers’ comments again revealed that the rating discrepancy in the case of learner 2 was caused by the insufficient coverage of multiple-part descriptors for ‘Range’ and ‘Grammar’ and confusion with normative terms in descriptors for ‘Structure and Cohesion’ and ‘Vocabulary’ by Vivien and Simone.

As can be seen in Table 7-5, Vivien’s comment on ‘Range’ focused on ‘sentences’ and ignored the other parts regarding text types and types of sentences in 1.05 descriptor ‘writes 2 short simple text types, e.g. fills in the form with basic person details, produces 1 or 2 simple sentences’. Vivien did not acknowledge the presence of complex rather than simple sentences in and the ‘paragraph’ length of the picture description, which made the writing performance go beyond 1.05 and satisfy 2.06 ‘Range’ descriptors ‘writes at least one paragraph’. On the contrary, all the teachers rating the learner at 2.05 and 3.05 acknowledged the learner’s demonstration of paragraph writing in their comments.

Simone and Vivien also seemed to be confused in their comments on ‘Grammar’. As shown in Table 7-6, Simone’s comment “no basic sentences” seemed to be based on the absence of punctuation in the learner’s writing, which did not reflect 1.06 ‘Grammar’ descriptor ‘begins to use basic structures and limited verb tenses’. In the meantime, Vivien, instead of applying descriptors to determine a certain level, scattered her comments on one or two elements of different descriptors at three different levels of 1.06 ‘begins to use basic structures and limited verb tenses’, 2.06 ‘uses action words and simple verb tenses in sentences of 1 or 2 clauses’ and ‘uses adjectives, pronouns and prepositions to describe people, places, things and events’, and 3.06 ‘uses some complex and compound sentences’, ‘uses grammatical forms and vocabulary to give instruction, gives explanations, asks questions and expresses viewpoints’ and ‘uses dependent clauses introduced by words such as although, when, if and while’. On the contrary, the comments by the other six teachers rating the learner at 2.06 all acknowledged the learner’s demonstration, though with errors, of compound and complex sentences as described in 2.06 and 3.06.

Simone’s and Vivien’s comments also exhibited confusion with normative terminology like ‘short’ and ‘simple’ in descriptors for ‘Structure and Cohesion’ 1.05 ‘writes short texts with a simple structure’ and ‘small’ in 1.06 ‘Vocabulary’ descriptor ‘use a small
bank of individual words and phrases or word lists related to giving personal details or meeting survival needs’. As can be seen in Table 7-5, Vivien and Simone found the structure of the learner’s picture description ‘short’ and ‘basic’ as described in 1.05 despite the learner’s writing in two paragraphs which matched 2.05 descriptors. In the same manner, Vivien only found the learner demonstrated ‘small’ bank of words for ‘Vocabulary’. She did not acknowledge that the learner’s vocabulary usage in the picture description and instruction went beyond ‘personal details’ or ‘survival needs’ for 1.06 and better matched 2.06 ‘extends key vocabulary to include personal details of self, family and most aspects of everyday life and other vocabulary of personal significant’, which was well recognised by the three teachers who rated the learner at 2.06. Their comments on ‘sequence’ did not indicate the whether the learner had demonstrated ‘limited understanding of sequence’ for 1.05. Meanwhile, three teachers, Natalie, Diana and Lona, who rated the learner at 3.05, clearly indicated 3.05 for learner’s demonstration of ‘sequence’.

7.4.2 Descriptors with Limited Level Discrimination Due to Synonymic Wordings and Low Value-added Variables

The teachers’ comments showed that some descriptors contained synonymic wordings and low value-added variables that contributed to the rating discrepancy and made little contribution to level discrimination. These descriptors included the ones for 1.05, 2.05 and 3.05 ‘Range’, ‘Audience and Purpose’, ‘Spelling’ and ‘Punctuation’.

As can be seen in Table 7-5, both the teachers who rated the learner at 2.05 and the teachers rating the learner at 3.05 cited the same evidence ‘writing about a picture’ and ‘writing instruction’ to claim 2.05 descriptors ‘writes at least two text types…writes at least one paragraph …writes factual or personal information using notes or dot points’ and 3.05 descriptor ‘produces a range of familiar texts types with appropriate structures across a range of aspects of communication’. Similarly, the teachers’ comments on ‘Audience and Purpose’ also revealed the application of descriptors from three levels, 1.05 ‘shows some recognition that texts have different purposes’, 2.05 ‘recognises that words and grammatical choices may vary to meet the requirements of audience and purpose’, and 3.05 ‘demonstrates the need to vary written language to meet requirements of audience and purpose’.

In the same manner, among the five teachers who chose to comment on ‘Spelling’, Vivien’s comment indicated the application of 1.06 descriptor while Emily’s comment
indicated the application of 3.06 descriptor. The other teachers’ comments did not indicate whether they applied 1.06 ‘approximates spelling, with inconsistency and variations apparent’, or 2.06 ‘shows some variation in spelling that does not interfere with overall meaning’ or 3.06 ‘spell with reasonable accuracy’. Both the teachers’ application of descriptors from two or three different levels to the same evidence and their lack of reference to the descriptors and the levels in their ratings suggested the limitation of the descriptors in discriminating levels of the learner’s performance.

Further, the teachers’ comments on ‘Punctuation’ again revealed the limitation in describing performance and discriminating levels of descriptors for 1.06 ‘begins to use basic punctuation, but this may be inconsistent, e.g. capital letters, full stops’ and 2.06 ‘uses basic punctuation, e.g. capital letters, full stops, commas’. As can be seen in Table 7-6, two teachers, Simone and Vivien who rated the learner at NYA 1.06 and 1.06 chose to comment on ‘full stops’ and ‘capital letters’ or the absence of them. Meanwhile, Emily, who rated the learner at 2.06, focused more on inconsistency in the learner’s use of punctuation. The comments by three other teachers who rated the learner at 2.06 all focused on ‘capital letters’, or errors with capital letters, but ignored ‘full stops’ and ‘commas’. None of the teachers’ comments fully covered either 1.06 or 2.06 descriptors and took into account the additional elements for level discrimination despite their different overall ratings. The teachers’ comments again suggested that the inclusion and exclusion of different variables in two different levels of ‘Punctuation’ did not help the teachers with discriminating levels of the learners’ performance.

Last but not least, the teachers’ ignorance of ‘Register’ and ‘Plan, Proof, Draft and Review’ in their comments indicated little significance of these performance features in the teachers’ ratings. The lack of contribution by descriptors for ‘Legibility’ was also evident in the four teachers’ application of 2.06 descriptors to the learner’s writing despite their different ratings.

7.4.3 The Vital Role of Teachers’ Application of Professional Knowledge and Weighing of Evidence

The written performance by learner 2 represented a typical case of writing performance which did not well fit the ACSF levels. The writing performance sat on the border between 2.05 and 3.05 and demonstrated mixed levels of the ACSF with grammar and vocabulary at 3.06 but punctuation at Not Yet Achieved 1.06. The teachers had to resort to professional judgment and weighing evidence to arrive at the overall ratings for the
writing performance. In their conclusions on the final ratings for Indicator .05, Emily and Carl both acknowledged the learner’s demonstration of between 3.05 and 2.05 and decided to marked down to 2.05. Similarly, the five teachers who rated the learner at 2.06 all traded the learner’s strengths in grammar and vocabulary at 3.06 for the learner’s weakness in punctuation at Not Yet Achieved 1.06 to conclude the final rating of 2.06. The analysis of the teachers’ comments illuminated the vital role of the teachers’ application of professional judgment and weighing of evidence in rating the learner’s performance against the ACSF.

7.4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, similar to the ratings of learner 1 writing performance, the analysis of the eight teachers’ comments on writing samples by learner 2 again revealed teachers’ confusion with multiple-part descriptors and normative terms and the lack of level discrimination and contribution by descriptors for ‘Punctuation’, ‘Register’ and ‘Plan, Proof, Draft and Review’ and ‘Legibility’ due to synonymic expressions and low value-added variables. In addition to the above findings, the analysis revealed the teachers’ reliance on weighing of evidence and professional judgment to arrive at final ratings for this difficult case of writing performance which matched descriptors across different levels of the ACSF. The findings suggest specific areas for improvement of the writing construct and teacher assessment training as well as the need to account for teachers’ professional judgment in the ACSF application. Further discussions on the research findings are provided at the end of the chapter.

7.5 Learner 3: Performance with Inconsistent Demonstration of the ACSF

The writing performance by learner 3 consisted of a piece of writing about a picture of a fruit market and another piece of writing about a recipe (see Appendix E). The picture-based writing contained simple sentences written in an uncompleted paragraph and with appropriate use of capital letters and full stops. The recipe was also written as a paragraph with sentences in imperative forms but without using punctuation. The writing samples presented a case of inconsistent demonstration of the ACSF level regarding grammatical structures and punctuation usage. Table 7-7 and Table 7-8 present the comments by the eight teachers for Indicator .05 and Indicator .06 in groups according to their ratings and under the performance features that their comments referred to.
Table 7-7: Summary of Teachers’ Ratings and Comments for Learner 3 – Indicator .05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Vivien (+1.05)</th>
<th>Emily (+1.05)</th>
<th>Simone (+1.05)</th>
<th>Carl (+1.05)</th>
<th>Denis (+1.05)</th>
<th>Natalie (+1.05)</th>
<th>Diana (+1.05)</th>
<th>Lena (+2.05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range and Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text written does not contain a full range of descriptive sentences about the picture (?)</td>
<td>The student could not write a few sentences describing a picture. The student is not describing anything about the market (?)</td>
<td>I have two pieces of evidence. The first one is about fruit and vegetable and the next one is a recipe instruction. Can use one or two simple sentences, yes that work has got two sentences correct (+1.05)</td>
<td>We are looking at a piece of writing about a picture and another writing instruction. This learner would take straight to level 1, two simple texts, so 1.05 (+1.05)</td>
<td>Client was not able to use dot points for 2.05 (-2.05)</td>
<td>The client can write about the fruit picture. She has attempted to write an instruction but struggled with it, so not level 2 (+2.05)</td>
<td>Client could write a paragraph to describe a picture (+2.05)</td>
<td>Could write a paragraph to describe a picture (+2.05)</td>
<td>The first one about the picture, the content has been conveyed. The instruction, the content I would say is logical. The logic is here. The logic is here in both of these writings (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience and Purpose</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The description, recognition of the text purpose wasn’t that clear (+1.05)</td>
<td>The instruction text lacks understanding of purpose (+1.05)</td>
<td>The student could not recognize the purpose of the text and started to write about the advantages of eating fruits and vegetables so that has got nothing to do with the market. (-1.05)</td>
<td>The description is about cooking a specific type of food. However, the instruction is very hard to follow so it’s not 2.05 (-2.05)</td>
<td>The client was able to show some recognition that texts have different purposes. Example, could describe a picture and give instruction for a recipe (+1.05)</td>
<td>The instruction serves the purpose, writing about the picture, and the instruction about a recipe. Yes, 1.05 serving different purposes. (+1.05)</td>
<td>The instruction serves the purpose, writing about the picture, and the instruction about a recipe. Yes, 1.05 serving different purposes. (+1.05)</td>
<td>Grammar is fine. Vocabulary is OK. The writing meets 2.5 requirements because the grammar and the vocabulary are here in the picture description and the recipe (+2.05)</td>
<td>The client could use familiar vocabulary and write about familiar topics quite well or I would say reasonably well to me, so I think 2.5 requirement (+2.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure and Cohesion</strong></td>
<td>(Description) Structure is quite poor with no cohesion and continuity of thought (-1.05)</td>
<td>The sequence does not convey order of ideas and the details were not in order (-1.05)</td>
<td>And although there was evidence of basic structure but the student did not demonstrate enough to exit level 1 (-1.05)</td>
<td>(Description) I can’t see any sequencing (-1.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Instruction) There is a sequence (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Instruction) Structure is poor, no organization of details (-1.05)</td>
<td>(Instruction) There was some structure and also the use of cohesion such as ‘then’ in the writing. However, the learner did not use the right format, the right structure when writing instruction, so could not exit level 1 (-1.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>A recipe instruction. It is in sequence form. He or she uses two time markers but not consistently. The sequence is limited. (+1.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Register</strong></td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan, proof, draft, review</strong></td>
<td>This written text was not planned and proofread (-1.05)</td>
<td>And there is no evidence of student writing a plan and draft (?)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Instruction) There is no evidence of planning and proofreading of his own writing (-1.05)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers’ Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>So I would give it an NYA for 1.05.</td>
<td>So the student did not achieve 1.05, did not fully demonstrate level 1</td>
<td>Overall I would give both pieces exit level 1.05.</td>
<td>I don’t believe it is an NYA but it is not a level 2 either. It would sit fairly in a 1.05</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>I think I would give client exit 1</td>
<td>Definitely it would be 1.05</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Green colour represents comments for 1.05; Blue colour for 2.05; Brown colour 3.05; Red colour shows comments not matching the ACSF.
(+ ) sign represents teacher’s confirmation of demonstration of level; (- ) sign teacher’s confirmation of non-demonstration of level; (?) sign indicates uncertainty of ACSF level in teacher’s comments; Text in bold and italics indicates teacher’s using wordings in descriptors in the ACSF.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Vivien (-1.06)</th>
<th>Denis (-1.06)</th>
<th>Natalie (-1.06)</th>
<th>Dianna (-1.06)</th>
<th>Emily (+1.06)</th>
<th>Simone (+1.06)</th>
<th>Carl (+1.06)</th>
<th>Luna (+1.06)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Description, vocabulary was not fully appropriate for the text (7)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>Vocabulary is not complex enough to exit level two (-2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>There is a lot of good vocabulary in here. The use of certain vocabulary is very good (7)</td>
<td>Vocabulary is OK (7)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>(Description) Verb tenses were minimal</td>
<td>Client was not able to demonstrate ability to use basic structures and limited verb tenses in both the tasks (-1.06)</td>
<td>There is also inconsistency in the use of sentence structures, Not confident enough for 1.06 (-1.06)</td>
<td>(Description) correct sentence structures</td>
<td>(Description) He or she could use cohesive devices ‘and’ but grammar structures are not sufficiently accurate for level 2 (-2.06)</td>
<td>(Description) Uses limited adjectives, pronouns, limited cohesion devices (+2.06)</td>
<td>The sentence structures are not very good (7)</td>
<td>(Description) Five sentences, all of them are simple sentences. The structure, the grammar is fine. Ah, wrong structure here, the grammar is wrong here. In terms of 0.6 indicator I think the client doesn’t meet 2.06 even though she said “first of all”, “then” (-2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>The first task, punctuation is poor (7)</td>
<td>Client was not able to demonstrate ability to use basic punctuation, example incorrect use of capital letters in description task (-1.06)</td>
<td>Punctuation is not used correctly in both tasks. (-1.06)</td>
<td>(Description) The student could use some correct punctuation, full stops and capitalisation (+1.06)</td>
<td>(Instruction) No punctuation in this one (-1.06)</td>
<td>(Description) The punctuation is a sit back. (7)</td>
<td>(Instruction) The use of punctuation, the use of full stops is not present, which is a shame (-1.06)</td>
<td>(Instruction) Fruit, small letter instead of capital one, vegetable, ah, capital for this small one (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Some errors in spelling (7)</td>
<td>Could not check and correct spelling (7)</td>
<td>There are mistakes in spelling, simple word like “vegetables” (7)</td>
<td>(Description) The student uses mostly accurate spelling and obviously there are a few spelling mistakes such as “vegetables”, “protection”, “speciality” (7)</td>
<td>(Instruction) Familiar words like chicken has wrong spelling again familiar words misspelled there (7)</td>
<td>(Description) Spelling is quite low (7)</td>
<td>(Instruction) The spelling is very difficult to follow (7)</td>
<td>(Description) Spelling mistake, I don’t see any spelling mistakes only “speciality” she should write “especially” (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legibility</td>
<td>Script is legible (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>It’s a legible script (+2.06)</td>
<td>Writing is legible (+2.06)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
<td>(Not mention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessor’s Conclusion</td>
<td>NYA 1.06</td>
<td>Learner 3 Not Yet Achieved .06</td>
<td>For the 0.6 indicate I would give the client NYA or not yet achieved level one.</td>
<td>Not 1.06 yet.</td>
<td>I probably give it level 1 exit overall because the student is consistent with using verb tenses.</td>
<td>Showed some features of level 2 but not exit 2. If I look at both pieces for .06 I would give exit 1.</td>
<td>I believe it is fully 1.06</td>
<td>Looking at both writing samples, I would give 1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Green colour represents comments for 1.06; Blue colour for 2.06; Brown colour for 3.06; Red colour shows comments not matching the ACSF; (+) sign represents teacher’s confirmation of demonstration of level; (−) sign teacher’s confirmation of non-demonstration of level; (? ) sign indicates uncertainty of ACSF level in teacher’s comments; Text in bold and italics indicates teacher’s using wordings in descriptors in the ACSF.
As can be seen in Table 7-1 along with Table 7-7 and Table 7-8, the teachers’ ratings of learner 3 writing performance were fairly consistent for Indicator .05 with five out of eight teachers assigning 1.05, two NYA 1.05 and one 2.05, but rather inconsistent for Indicator .06 with two levels assigned by equal numbers of teachers. A close look at the teachers’ comments revealed that though the teachers attempted to address the performance features, their comments did not adhere to the content of specific descriptors. In addition, the teachers’ different weighing of evidence contributed the major cause to discrepancy in ratings for both Indicator .05 and Indicator .06. Some descriptors in the ACSF again appeared to lack efficiency in discriminating levels, describing the learner’s performance and contributing to the teachers’ overall ratings.

7.5.1 Teachers’ Lack of Adherence to Multiple-part Descriptors

The comments by three teachers, Vivien, Emily and Lona, revealed the lack of adherence to multiple-part descriptors for ‘Range’ and ‘Vocabulary’, which resulted in differences in their ratings compared to other teachers. As can be seen in Table 7-7, the comments by Vivien and Emily, who rated the learner at NYA 1.05, and Lona, who rated the learner at 2.05, did not reflect descriptors at either 1.05 ‘writes two short simple text types, e.g. fills in form with basic personal details, produces 1 or 2 simple sentences’ or 2.05 ‘creates at least two text types, e.g. personal history, recipe, email message’, ‘writes factual or personal information using notes or dot points’. Vivien and Emily focused on the learner’s failure to write descriptive sentences, while Lona on the ‘content’ and the ‘logics’ of the two pieces of writing, none of which reflected descriptors at either level 1 or level 2. Meanwhile, the comments by the five teachers rating the learner at 1.05 showed the teachers’ attempts to consider the learner’s performance against descriptors of both 1.05 and 2.05 to justify their ratings at 1.05.

The teachers’ lack of adherence to descriptors was also observed in their comments on ‘Vocabulary’. As can be seen in Table 7-8, five teachers’ comments on vocabulary reflected their general impressions rather than clearly addressing the types of vocabulary required at either 1.06 ‘use a small bank of individual words and phrases or word lists related to giving personal details or meeting survival needs. May be memorised, transcribed, formulaic’ or 2.06 ‘extends key vocabulary to include personal details of self, family and most aspects of everyday life and other vocabulary of personal significance’.
The teachers’ lack of adherence to the contents of the descriptors above suggested two possibilities. On the one hand, the descriptors might not well describe the writing performance at hand, causing the teachers to resort to their own impressions or criteria. On the other hand, this might indicate the teachers’ unfamiliarity with the multiple-part descriptors or the ways that the concepts of ‘Range’ and ‘Vocabulary’ were defined in the ACSF.

### 7.5.2 Teachers’ Different Weighing of Evidence

In addition, the five teachers’ comments on ‘Vocabulary’ revealed differences in their weighing of evidence, the second major cause of discrepancy in ratings of the learner’s writing performance. While two teachers, Vivien and Denis, gave negative comments and indicated Not Yet Achieved level, three others gave positive comments and indicated 1.06 level. Similar difference in weighing of evidence was observed in the teachers’ comments on ‘Audience and Purpose’, ‘Structure and Cohesion’, ‘Grammar’ and ‘Punctuation’. While Vivien and Emily found the learner did not demonstrate 1.05 for ‘Audience and Purpose’ and ‘Structure and Cohesion’, other teachers found the learner did. Simone and Lona even found the learner demonstrated 2.06 for ‘Audience and Purpose’.

In the same manner, while half of the teachers found the learner’s errors with sentence structures and punctuation as a failure to demonstrate 1.06 for ‘Grammar’, the other half found the errors as the failure to meet 2.06 ‘Grammar’. Similarly, half of the teachers clearly assigned NYA for ‘Punctuation’, while the other half seemed to be more lenient, acknowledging the demonstration of 1.06 in the learner’s description but not in the instruction. The teachers’ different weighing of evidence in judgment of the learner’s writing performance illustrated the complexity involved in rating performance with inconsistent demonstration of the ACSF. Different from the teachers’ rating of learner 2, the teachers did not come up with the same ratings for the learner’s writing performance.

### 7.5.3 Descriptors with Limited Level Discrimination Due to Synonymic Expressions, Normative terms and Low Value-added Variables

The analysis of the teachers’ comments also suggested the lack of level discrimination by some descriptors due to the use of synonymic expressions and low value-added variables. The teachers’ application of both 1.06 and 2.06 descriptors for ‘Audience and Purpose’ to
the writing performance again suggested that the teachers could not well perceive the level discrimination between 1.05 ‘shows some recognition that texts have different purposes’ and 2.05 ‘recognises that words and grammatical choices may vary to meet the requirements of audience and purpose’. The lack of level discrimination was also evident in the teachers’ comments on ‘Spelling’. Despite their different ratings, the teachers’ comments all noted the same spelling errors by the learners. None of the comments indicated whether 1.06 ‘Spelling’ ‘approximates spelling with inconsistencies and variations apparent’ had been achieved.

Moreover, among the eight teachers, only two teachers chose to comment on ‘Register’ and none on ‘Plan, Proof, Draft and Review’. This suggested that these features were of limited significance to the teachers. Legibility also seemed to carry little weight in the teachers’ final ratings as only three teachers commented on the feature and all rated at 2.06 for this feature despite their overall ratings at Not Yet Achieved and achieved 1.06.

### 7.5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of the eight teachers’ comments on the writing samples by learner 3 highlighted issues with teachers’ lack of adherence to multiple-part descriptors and the lack of level discrimination by descriptors for ‘Punctuation’, ‘Spelling’, ‘Register’ and ‘Plan, Proof, Draft and Review’ and ‘Legibility’ due to synonymic expressions and low value-added variables. In addition, the analysis highlighted another issue of teachers’ different weighing of evidence. These findings again suggest the need for improvement of the writing skill constructs, specific areas to address in teacher assessment training and caution to reliance on professional judgment in application of LLN frameworks to assessment. Further discussions on those issues are presented below.

### 7.6 Discussion

#### 7.6.1 Issues with the Construct of Writing Skills in Application

The analyses of the teachers’ think-aloud verbal protocols illuminate how the construct of writing skills was operationalised in teachers’ rating processes. The teachers’ general adherence to the defined writing construct in their ratings without applying extra criteria supports the finding from the questionnaire and interview on their general positive viewpoint towards the comprehensive LLN constructs in the ACSF. Both teachers’ positive
viewpoints toward and general adherence to the defined construct, however, do not sufficiently prove the soundness of the construct of writing skills in the ACSF. Further findings from the think-aloud protocol analyses reveal four major issues with the construct of writing skills in application by the SEE teachers.

Firstly, in their ratings of all the three learners’ performance, the teachers exhibited either different foci or lack of adherence to multiple-part descriptors. Such observation again supports the findings from the ACSF document analysis and various studies on the confusion caused by multiple-part descriptors (Alderson, et al., 2006; Llosa, 2011; Papageorgiou, 2010; Smith, 2000). Given the increasing complexity of LLN theoretical models and inevitably comprehensive LLN constructs in LLN frameworks, it might be argued that the use of multiple-part descriptors is unavoidable in any attempt to cover multiple necessary LLN elements. However, the findings from the present study together with well-reported confusion by teachers and raters suggest a great caution to designing descriptors with multiple parts covering multiple LLN elements. If the use of multiple-part descriptors is necessary, it should be made clear which part is superior or carries the essence of the whole descriptor and which parts are subordinate or further clarify the main part. In the case of equal importance given to all the parts, decisions must be made to whether these parts are designed to be fully covered in assessment or just as suggestive LLN elements to be covered selectively. Once these decisions are made, training and guidance should be given to teachers accordingly regarding interpretation and application of multiple-part descriptors.

The second prominent issue emerging from the teachers’ application of the writing skill construct is related to the teachers’ interpretation of normative terms. The analyses of the teachers’ comments showed that commonly used relative terms like ‘short’, ‘simple’, ‘basic’, ‘limited’ in the ACSF were interpreted differently by the SEE teachers. The finding supports the ACSF document analysis and the SEE teachers’ reflection in the interview. Similar issues were reported in other studies of LLN framework application (Alderson, et al., 2006; Brindley, 2000a; Llosa, 2011; Smith, 2000). Elimination of normative terms as suggested by Brindley (2000a) and Smith (2000) is desirable to improve the clarity of the LLN constructs in the ACSF. Otherwise, minimisation of usage or avoidance of extensive reliance on normative terms is advisable in any further revision of the framework. In addition, clarification of technical normative terms such as ‘simple sentences’ for a
sentence with one subject and one verb should be given through explanation or definition and/or examples. Other normative terms like ‘short, ‘simple’ texts/paragraph can be explained with examples or samples of learners’ performance. Interpretation of normative terms should also be addressed in assessment training for teachers.

The third area of concern with the writing construct in application is the use of synonymous expressions or wordings to describe performance at different levels. The finding is consistent with the ACSF document analysis and other studies like Alderson, et al.(2006) and Papageorgiou (2010). This further illustrates Hudson’s (2005) remind of the great challenge of writing descriptors in LLN framework development. Revision of synonymous expressions in descriptors for ‘Audience and Purpose’ and ‘Spelling’ is necessary to enhance level discrimination of descriptors and minimise rating discrepancy.

The last major issue identified with the writing skill construct is the limited contribution of some descriptors and performance features to describing and discriminating SEE learners’ writing performance. The teachers’ constant exclusion of some features like ‘Register’, ‘Legibility’ and ‘Plan, proof, draft, and review’ in their comments or ignorance of the learner’ demonstration of them in their overall ratings suggest that descriptors for these features might not well describe and discriminate levels of learners’ writing performance. It is necessary to reexamine the contribution of these features to the writing skill construct and eliminate or rewrite them to better reflect learners’ writing performance across levels.

### 7.6.2 Accounting for SEE Learners’ Writing Performance

The analyses of the teachers’ ratings and comments on the three learners’ writing performance indicate some limitations of the ACSF in accounting for SEE learners’ writing performance. As can be seen in the analysis, the writing samples by learner 1, which was done as progress assessment after training, best matched the ACSF descriptors and most nicely fit into the levels in the ACSF. Meanwhile, the writing samples by learner 2 and learner 3, done as pre-training assessment, did not either well match or consistently demonstrate the ACSF descriptors and levels. The teachers were found to compromise certain ACSF descriptors to come up with overall ratings for learner 2 writing performance and conflict on overall ratings for learner 3. The observation suggests that the framework is limited in describing and discriminating actual learners’ performance which is done without class training and preparation.
In addition, the teachers’ selective rather than full coverage of elements like ‘capital letters’, ‘full stops’ and especially ‘commas’, which are added to discriminate between level 1 and level 2 writing performance, questions the contribution of those elements in describing and discriminating SEE learners’ writing performance. Such observation supports the teachers’ viewpoint in the interview that that some descriptors of the same level in the ACSF were either too easy or too difficult compared to other descriptors of the same level. The finding is consistent with the other studies on two other frameworks, the CSWE (Brindley, 2000a) and the CEFR (Papageorgiou, 2010).

The above findings suggest the need for trial of the ACSF on actual learner cohorts in the same way as the ESL Bandscales (McKay, 1995) and the CEFR (North & Schneider, 1998) to eliminate mismatching or low value-added LLN elements and ensure better reflection of learners’ performance. In addition, the findings also support Lumley’s (2005) skepticism on the possibility of LLN frameworks to describe performance by all learners and suggest the need for assessment training to teachers on weighing descriptors or LLN elements in cases of performance mismatching the LLN constructs.

7.6.3 Accounting for SEE Teachers’ Constraints and Contributions

The analyses of the think-aloud verbal protocols highlight several constraints with the teachers’ application of the ACSF to assessment of SEE learners’ performance. The first constraint resides in the teachers’ lack of LLN theoretical understandings, which is reflected in their struggles and confusion with interpretation of multiple-part descriptors and normative terminology. Undeniably, part of the teachers’ confusion was caused by the ambiguity of the descriptors and the terminology as discussed above and reported in various studies (Alderson, et al., 2006; Arkoudis & O’Loughlin, 2004; Knoch, 2009; Llosa, 2011; Papageorgiou, 2010). However, the problem seems to go beyond the ambiguity of the defined construct and attribute to teachers’ current understandings or knowledge of LLN conceptualisation. The teachers’ focus on ‘simple sentences’ in a multiple-part descriptor for ‘Range’ of ‘text types’ or own impression stead of specific types of vocabulary defined in multiple-part descriptors for ‘Vocabulary’ suggests their tendency to resort to familiar LLN elements to make sense of the whole descriptor and avoid unfamiliar LLN elements. Teachers’ lack of theoretical understanding of LLN constructs was also
evident in their expressed confusion with terminology like ‘learning strategies’, ‘learning difficulties’, ‘degree of resilience’ in the interview.

It seems that while LLN constructs keep expanding and getting increasingly sophisticated, SEE teachers are not yet equipped with theoretical knowledge to cope with the development. McKay’s (1995) and North and Schneider’s (1998) concern about teachers’ unfamiliarity with current theories in their interpretation and application of a new scale or framework holds true in the case of the ACSF assessment application. Solutions to teachers’ confusion in interpretation of LLN constructs, therefore, require more than clarification and explanation of terminology, minimisation of normative terms and careful craft of multiple-part descriptors. The essential remedy resides in equipping teachers with current LLN conceptualisation, especially the concepts of various LLN elements that are unconventional to teachers’ current knowledge. It is advisable that LLN conceptualisation forms part of LLN teacher training programs and professional development. In addition, McKay’s (1995) and North and Schneider’s (1998) suggestion for teachers to work alongside with LLN experts in validation and implementation of LLN frameworks seems valid in this case of the ACSF application to assessment in the SEE program.

In addition to the lack of the theoretical understanding, limited training and assessment experience with particular learner cohorts presents another constraint to teachers’ application of the ACSF to assessment. Vivien, the most novice teacher, exhibited the most confusion with interpretation of the ACSF and the most rating discrepancy. None of the ratings given by Vivien went beyond level 1, the level of her normal class, which indicated the influence of teachers’ experience with specific learner cohorts on their interpretation of LLN frameworks. In the interview, Vivien also revealed her struggle to make sense of the ACSF through getting to know her learners. Though Vivien presented only one single case with the most problematic interpretation and application of the ACSF in the SEE training organisation under research, the constraint is worth attending to as teachers’ lack of experience with different adult LLN learner cohorts (Murray, 2003; Ollerhead, 2010) and expertise in assessment (Arkoudis & O'Loughlin, 2004; Brindley, 1998a, 2000a, 2001a) in Australia has been well reported. In order to address the issue, Vivien asked for more guidance from both the ACSF and the SEE program manager in the interview. The finding suggests the need for novice teachers to work alongside with more experienced teachers or assessors to enhance their assessment practices and expertise.
Apart from the above constraints, the analyses of the teachers’ comments and ratings of writing performance by learner 2 and learner 3 highlight the vital contributions of the teachers’ weighing of evidence and shared professional judgment in rating of learners’ writing performance. The learners’ mixed level performance and inconsistent demonstration of the ACSF presented typical cases of ACSF failing to capture actual learners’ writing performance. The teachers’ rating therefore inevitably involved the SEE teachers’ weighing of evidence and application of professional judgment to decide and justify the ACSF levels for the writing performance. Such observation supports Davison’s (2004) and Sanguinetti’s (1995) positions on the need to incorporate professional judgment and weighing of evidence in the application of LLN frameworks.

However, caution should be exercised when relying on teachers’ weighing of evidence and professional judgment. Though five teachers could automatically arrive at the same rating for learner 2 writing performance, their ratings went bipolar in the case of learner 3 performance. This suggests the need for peer discussions for teachers to argue and reach agreement on evidence weighing and professional judgment. At the moment, the teachers in the SEE organisation seemed to share common understanding of the merit significance of grammar, vocabulary and spelling, which guaranteed automatic rating consistency despite the mismatch of learner 2 performance to the ACSF. They, however, seemed to differ vastly on weighing of evidence for learner 3 performance. Peer discussions among the teachers in the organisation are necessary. In the wider community of practice, moderation workshops among LLN training organisations across the country are vital as noted by the teachers in the interview. It would be advisable for teacher training and moderation sections to focus on special cases such as mixing levels or inconsistent demonstration of the ACSF as in the present research as well as the well-matched performance for samples of best practices.

Lumley (2005) emphasised the need for special assessment training to assist raters in rating mismatching performances, given the skeptical possibility of any LLN frameworks to well capture performance of all learners. Discussions and training for teachers on actual learners’ mismatching performance may provide valuable chances for teachers to not only reach agreements on the final ratings but also critique, articulate and validate LLN frameworks and improve their familiarity and ownership of the LLN constructs as suggested by Davison (Davison, 2004), Sanguinetti (1995) and Breen et.al. (1997).
Chapter 8 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

The present research offered a case study of the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. The research explored the case through a document analysis of the ACSF, questionnaires with fifteen SEE teachers and interviews and think-aloud verbal protocols with eight teacher assessors in a SEE training organisation. The case study allowed detailed examinations of the assessment application of the ACSF in the document itself and as perceived and put into action by the SEE teachers. The case study made several major findings on the LLN constructs of the ACSF and the extent to which the assessment application of the framework accounted for the needs, performance and progress of the SEE learners and the constraints and contributions of the SEE teachers as assessors. This chapter summarises the major findings of the research and makes some conclusions and recommendations to the application of the ACSF to assessment and further studies on the research issue.

8.2 Summary of Major Findings

The research revealed the strength of the ACSF in offering comprehensive LLN constructs which incorporated current expending LLN theoretical models or conceptualisation. The five core skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy were defined through a complex hierarchical structure of indicators, performance features, descriptors and suggested LLN performance contexts. The constructs of the five core skills were found to encompass various LLN elements including both the traditional knowledge-based and the contemporary performance-oriented. The defined constructs were appreciated by the teachers for enabling assessment of learners’ performance across a broad range of LLN skills in real life contexts relevant to adults in the SEE program. The research findings, however, indicated several shortcomings at more refined levels of the defined LLN constructs and several areas of concern with accounting for learners and teachers as assessors in the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program.

In the first place, the LLN constructs in the ACSF were found to lack consistency in coverage of LLN elements across levels, cohesive hierarchical interrelationships among
LLN elements, clarity and comprehensibility of normative terms and multiple-part descriptors, and effective level discrimination. The first two issues were apparent in the document analysis of the ACSF while the last two flagged up in all the sources of data, the document analysis and the teachers’ perspectives and their actual rating processes. They contributed the major causes of confusion in teachers’ interpretation of descriptors and discrepancy in teachers’ rating of learners’ writing performance.

Further, the research revealed specific areas of concern with accounting for targeted learner cohorts in the current application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. It was not evident in the ACSF document whether the framework had been trialed on actual learner cohorts and how the heterogeneous learner cohorts like the ones in the SEE program could be accounted for. The teachers’ perspectives and practices raised three major regarding the framework’s accommodating SEE learners.

Firstly, the ACSF were found to fail to reflect the LLN performance and progress by low literacy learners. The current level 1 descriptors did not include various skills normally acquired and exhibited by low literacy learners. As a result, the teachers were found to provide repetition, drilling lessons as well as a lot of support during assessment to ensure learners’ demonstration of the required knowledge and skills currently specified in the ACSF level 1. Secondly, the research findings also indicated the lack of account for distinctive characters of different learner cohorts, for examples, adult migrant learners with previous training in the AMEP upon arrival to Australia or native English speaking learners and school leavers. These learner cohorts exhibited different degrees of familiarity with different types of texts and tasks required at certain levels in the ACSF. Their performance of those text types and tasks, therefore, might not truly reflect the levels being assessed. Lastly, the research indicated the limitation of the ACSF in describing and discriminating levels of learners’ LLN performance. Certain LLN elements were found were either too high or too low compared to other elements at the same level. In their actual ratings, the teachers had to trade off learners’ demonstration of descriptors at higher levels with their non-demonstration of descriptors at lower levels to assign the level to the overall writing performance.

Other significant findings from the research revolved issues with assessment guidance and training to teachers, teachers’ theoretical understandings of the LLN constructs and the
incorporation of teachers’ professional judgment in ratings of learner’s performance. Firstly, the ACSF was found not to provide sufficient guidance and support to teachers’ assessment practices. Meanwhile the implementation process did not include assessment training to teachers either. Neither could the teachers rely on the framework for assessment guidance, nor did they receive sufficient assessment training. The teachers as assessors were left to pick up the knowledge and skills needed mainly on the job, from their peers, by trials and errors and from working with their actual learners, which seemed not adequate to ensure teachers’ confidence and consistence in interpretation and application of the ACSF to rating actual SEE learners’ performance.

Rooted under the teachers’ struggle with technical terms or confusion with normative terms and their partial coverage or avoidance of multiple-part descriptors was their unfamiliarity to the theoretical underpinnings of the LLN constructs in the ACSF. It was their insufficient theoretical understandings that hindered them from making sense of terminology like the ones used to describe learning skills, more newly-constituted concepts compared to the more traditional ones like reading, writing and oral communication. Their unfamiliarity with new LLN concepts also drove them to selection of certain familiar parts in a multiple-part descriptor to comment on rather than taking the descriptor as a whole concept or applying their existing understanding of the concept instead of taking the new meaning as intended by the descriptor.

Apart from the above two major constraints with the teachers as assessors, the research findings highlighted the vital role and illuminated the employment of teachers’ professional judgment in the application of the ACSF to assessment of actual learners’ performances. The teachers reported their experience of adding further clarification in application of the ACSF to better discriminate levels of performance for learning skills. They also resorted to peer discussions as a major solution to confusion and discrepancy in interpretation of terminology and assigning levels to learners’ performances. In their rating processes, the teachers were found to rely on their professional judgments to reach conclusion on the ACSF level for a learner’s mixed-level performance.

Cautions, however, should be exercised to the reliance on professional judgment in the application of the ACSF. While professional judgment resulted in rather consistent ratings for learner 2, similar practice led to bipolar ratings in the case of learner 3. Professional judgment could only ensure rating consistency where the teachers shared the same
understandings of the LLN concepts being applied and the weight given to different LLN elements. Where teachers’ understandings and weighing differed, so did their ratings. The teachers’ bipolar ratings in the case of learner 3 highlighted the need for peer discussions within the community of practice to reach a common ground and achieve rating consistency.

In short, the research has made several major findings on the LLN constructs in the ACSF and the extent to which the SEE learners and the SEE teachers as assessors are accounted for in the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program. Focusing on a single case of one SEE training organisation with the participation of a small number of teachers, the research did not aim to generalise the research findings to the wider population of SEE training organisations and teachers in Australia. The research, instead, offered enriched insight into the phenomenon through in-depth investigation of a single case with guidance from and reference to the literature review of studies on LLN framework assessment application in a wide range of LLN education contexts. The research findings, though supported by different sources of data from different perspectives, should be interpreted with reference to the specific contextual factors of the case under study regarding the teachers, the learners, the working contexts and the early stage of the ACSF implementation. Bearing this in mind, the research draws the following recommendations to both the application of the ACSF in the SEE program and further research on the assessment application of the ACSF in Australian government-funded adult LLN education sector.

8.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

The adoption of the ACSF in replacement of the NRS (Coates, et al., 1995) seems to be a positive move given the SEE teachers’ general positive feedback and overall adherence to the framework in assessment at this very early stage as shown in the present research. The ACSF seems to have realised its primary aim of providing “a rich, detailed picture of real-life performance in adult learning English language, literacy and numeracy” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2). However, in order to ascertain the framework’s realisation of its expanded assessment application and provision of ‘a consistent national approach to the identification of the core skills requirements in diverse personal, community, work and
training contexts” (DEEWR, 2008, p. 2), further improvement to both the framework and the application process is necessary.

First and foremost, any further revision of the ACSF should include a revisit of current theoretical LLN models and feedback from teachers’ application of the framework on actual learner cohorts. Reference to current LLN theoretical models can help to not only reinforce the existing strength of the ACSF in providing comprehensive LLN constructs but also resolve issues with consistency in coverage of LLN elements across levels and coherent hierarchical interrelationships among LLN elements. Feedback from LLN practitioners who have actually applied the framework to assessment of their learners offers three essential benefits. This first helps to identify and improve areas of ambiguity such as the use of terminology, normative terms, synonyomic expressions and multiple-part descriptors as identified in this research. Trials on actual learners can also help to identify and eliminate LLN elements with limited contribution to performance description and level discrimination. The inclusion of different learner cohorts in the trial process can determine and improve the representativeness of the ACSF to the targeted learner population and enhance the framework’s accommodation of the learners’ different age ranges and linguistic, education and employment experiences.

At the moment, an ACSF pre-level 1 supplement (DIISRTE, 2012) document which describes performance by low literacy levels has been developed and released but for reasons unknown to the researcher, the document has not been implemented to assessment and reporting of progress by low literacy SEE learners. It is advisable for the document to be examined for validity in describing low literacy learners and applied in the SEE program. This might help to resolve the current undesirable teaching practices of classroom drilling and repetition to claim achievement for low level learners, who account for more than half of the SEE learner population.

In order to facilitate teachers’ application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program, the provision of assessment guidance and training for teachers is vital. Firstly, it is necessary for the ACSF to include guidance for assessment, especially with regard to interpretation of the LLN constructs and judgment of learners’ performance. The type of support required also includes definition or explanation of terminology, examples of texts, tasks and learners’ performance across levels and examples of best assessment practices for teachers to consult. In addition, the teachers also need systematic training in assessment
rather than just random peer and self-learning at work. Assessment training needs to address issues with both teachers’ understanding of the LLN constructs in the ACSF and their execution of professional judgment in rating learners’ performance. Equipping teachers with understandings of the LLN constructs is vital given the ever expanding and evolving LLN theoretical models. Without such underpinning knowledge, it is difficult for teachers to tackle areas of ambiguity like terminology for new LLN concepts, normative terms and multiple-part descriptors. Equally important is the employment of professional judgment in unavoidable cases of performance not well covered by the ACSF. Opportunities for teachers to work on performance not matching or not consistently demonstrating the ACSF levels as in this research can help teachers to exercise professional judgment and weighing of evidence to determine the best fit level for commonly found mismatching performances.

Last but not least, it is important to ensure the availability of community of practice for teachers’ sharing and discussions in the application of the ACSF to assessment. Different interpretations of the LLN constructs and the requirements for different levels are more often than not common in teachers’ assessment practices. Peer discussions and consultations within the community of practice, either in immediate workplaces or in national and regional moderation workshops, provide the best chances for teachers to reach agreements on interpretation of the ACSF and maximise rating consistency. They also enable teachers to examine, critique, articulate, fill the gaps and provide feedback for improvement of the ACSF in application.

To conclude, the application of the ACSF to assessment in the SEE program presents great challenges given the complexity of the LLN constructs, the heterogeneity of the SEE learner population and the constraints of the SEE teachers as assessors. Further improvements are required to both the ACSF document and the implementation process. The ACSF needs further refinement through consultation with LLN theoretical models and teachers’ trials on actual learner cohorts for better description and discrimination of learners’ LLN performance and guidance to teachers’ assessment. The teachers’ application processes require support from assessment training, especially on understanding of LLN conceptualisation and exercising of professional judgment, and the availability of community of practices for peer discussions and consultations. With improvement in the above major areas in place, the ACSF can fulfill its extended assessment application,
providing valid descriptions and a consistent national approach to measuring adult LLN performance.

The findings and limitations of the present research also suggest the need and some directions for further research on the application of the ACSF. Firstly, further studies are needed on the application of the ACSF to assessment of different learner cohorts representing the diversity SEE learners’ linguistic, cultural, education and employment backgrounds. Secondly, the participation of different SEE training providers with different training contexts is advisable to ensure statistic generalisation of the research findings to the wider community of the ACSF application. Thirdly, further research should examine teachers’ ratings of learners’ performance in the other core skills in the ACSF, learning, reading, oral communication and numeracy and higher levels of LLN performance, which have not been done in this present research. As the application of the ACSF to assessment has been heading toward LLN training in the vocational training sector, similar studies of the ACSF in this sector are also necessary to ensure the soundness of the LLN constructs and the framework’s accommodation of the targeted learner cohorts and vocational trainers as assessors.
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Appendices

Appendix A Questionnaire

MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Questionnaire

Project: The Application of the ACSF as an Assessment Framework

If you wish to participate in this project, please complete the questionnaire below.

Section 1 About You. Please tick.

1. Gender:   Male ( ) Female ( )

2. Age Range: 20s ( ) 30s ( ) 40s ( ) 50s ( ) 60s ( )

3. I have been teaching in the LLNP for:
   1 year or less ( ) between 1 to 5 year ( )
   between 5 to 10 years ( ) more than 10 years ( )

4. I have been teaching in the LLNP in:
   TAFE sector ( ) Community-based sector ( ) Non-profit organisation sector ( )
   Others (specify): _____________________________________________

5. I have conducted the LLNP:
   Pre-training or placement assessment ( ) Block Exit or achievement assessment ( )

6. I have been using the ACSF for:
   6 months or less ( ) between 6 months and 1 year ( ) more than 1 year ( )

7. I have been assessing learners for the following levels and skills of the ACSF:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Oral</th>
<th>Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Section 2 Evaluation of the ACSF as an Assessment Framework

1. **LLN Constructs and Language and Terminology**

In this section, the terminologies “core skill”, “indicator” and “performance feature” are taken from the ACSF. Please refer to the diagram below for their meanings when answering this questionnaire section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Skill</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Performance Features</th>
<th>Performance Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ORAL COMMUNICATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.07 Use everyday language to provide information or maintain a conversation in familiar spoken contexts</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.08 Lists for relevant information in oral texts across familiar contexts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Features</td>
<td>Performance Features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range and Context: - description</td>
<td>Range and Context: - description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience and Purpose: - description</td>
<td>Audience and Purpose: - description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register: - description</td>
<td>Structure and Grammar: - description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements. Please respond with: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. *(Circle one response for each item)*

1.1 The ACSF has appropriate division of 5 core skills (learning, reading, writing, oral and numeracy).

1.2 The ACSF has appropriate division of indicators for each skill (2 indicators for learning, 2 for reading, 2 for writing and oral and 3 indicators for numeracy).

1.3 The ACSF has appropriate specification of performance features for each indicator in each core skill.

1.4 The ACSF has appropriate descriptors for the performance features in each indicator.

1.5 The ACSF has appropriate language and terminology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments: As an assessor, what comments do you want to make about

- the 5 core skills specified in the ACSF?

- the indicators for each skill?

- the specification of performance features for each indicator?

- the descriptors for each performance feature?

- the language and terminology used in the ACSF?

- Other comments
2. Accounting for LLNP Learners and Teachers as Assessors

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements. Please respond with (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree; (5) strongly agree. (Circle one response for each item)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The ACSF well classifies learners’ levels.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The ACSF well reflects learners’ progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3 The ACSF well matches with learners’ learning needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.4 The ACSF provides appropriate guidance for assessment administration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5 The ACSF provides appropriate guidance for judgment of learners’ performance</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments: As an assessor, what comments do you want to make about the effectiveness of the ACSF in

- classifying learners’ levels?

- reflecting learners’ progress?

- matching with learners’ learning needs?
• guiding assessors to conduct assessment?
  ____________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________

• guiding assessors’ judgment of learners’ performance?
  ____________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________

• Other comments
  ____________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________

Thank you for answering the questionnaire.
If you are interested in a 30 minute interview of your experience using the ACSF and 30 minute verbalised judgment of 3 learners’ writing samples against the ACSF, please provide your email address below.

Your email address:
  ____________________________________________________________
Appendix B Interview Guiding Questions

MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Interview

Project: The Application of the ACSF as an Assessment Framework

Guiding Questions

1. Can you tell me about your experience of using the ACSF for assessment?

2. What do you think about the ACSF as an assessment framework?

3. Do you find the ACSF easy or difficult to use for assessment of the specific LLN learners that you have?

4. Do you think the ACSF has provided you with clear and sufficient guidance for your assessment practice? Why? Why not?

5. Can you recall any specific situations or cases that the ACSF facilitated and/or hindered your assessment practice?

6. Are there any specific components or features of the ACSF that you, as an assessor, want to comment on? What are they and what your comments are?

7. In the questionnaire, you agree/disagree that … (quote participants statements in their questionnaire replies). What make you think so? Can you clarify you points?

8. Are there any changes you want to make to the ACSF? What are they?
Appendix C Learner 1 Writing Samples: Mind Map and Text about “My Day”

Write a text about your day!

When do you get up?
When do you go to school?
When do you get home?
What do you do in the afternoon?
What do you do in the evening?
When do you go to bed?

Usually finish school at 1 pm.
Come to school at 7:30 am.
Leave home at 8 am.
Prepare my kids’ lunchbox.

Get up at 6 am.
Have a shower and get dressed.
Make breakfast.
Wake up the children.
Sometimes calling my family overseas.

Pick up the children.

Afternoon
Watch TV
With the homework
Have lunch
Watch TV news

Go to the Shopping
Cook dinner
Go to bed at about 9:30 pm.

Evening
Talk with my wife
My day

In the morning I get up at 6 am.
Then I have a shower and get dressed.
Before I prepare kid's lunch box, my children wake
up at 7:20 am and I make breakfast at 7:30 am.
I leave home and take the bus to school
at 8:15 am. I usually finish school at 3 pm.

In the afternoon I pick up my children.
From school at 4 pm and sometimes
watch TV news and homework. After
I have lunch at 5 pm. I sometimes go to
the super market. I need buy
meat and vegetables?
Sometimes I call my family overseas.

In the evening, I cook dinner at 7 pm. Then,
I have dinner and talk with my wife and children.
I go to bed about at 9:30 pm.
Writing about a Picture

Choose one of the pictures shown and write as much as you can.

Here are some important points to remember:
- Use capital letters, full stops and appropriate punctuation
- Write one or more paragraphs

This picture was taken on one of many trips to the north of Asia. It shows a lovely farm girl who lived in the town we were passing through at the time, planting seeds for the next harvest.

The most beautiful thing about this picture is what you can't see; if you were able to see past the rocks at the back you would see a large and most impressive temple, in which I've stayed the last two nights.
Write Instructions

Write a set of instructions to complete ONE of the following tasks:

1. Changing the oil in your car
2. Making your favourite recipe
3. Withdrawing cash from an ATM
4. Changing the battery in a smoke detector
5. Changing a flat tyre
6. Choose a topic of your own

Here are some important points to remember:-

- Use dot points
- Put the instructions in the correct order
- When you finish check your work, e.g. check your spelling

- changing the battery in a smoke detector-

1. first of all you must unclip the detector at the side
2. check all wires are intact
3. insert a new battery
4. clip detector back up
5. check green light on detector
6. to see if it's working
Appendix E Learner 3 Writing Samples: Picture Description & Cooking Instruction

Writing about a Picture

Choose one of the pictures shown and write as much as you can.

Here are some important points to remember:

- Use capital letters, full stops and appropriate punctuation
- Write one or more paragraphs

This picture is about fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are very important for our health. Some of fruits gives us iron and vitamins. And some vegetables gives us protein and vitamins. Specialy green food is the best food.
Write Instructions

Write a set of instructions to complete ONE of the following tasks:

1. Changing the oil in your car
2. Making your favourite recipe
3. Withdrawing cash from an ATM
4. Changing the battery in a smoke detector
5. Changing a flat tyre
6. Choose a topic of your own

Here are some important points to remember:-

- Use dot points
- Put the instructions in the correct order
- When you finish check your work, e.g. check your spelling

• Sindhi Biriyani
  First of all wash the chicken and rice.
  Then give oil put in a pot let them
  warm and put salt and lemon juice on
  chicken and put in the warm oil when
  its become brown then put onion ginger
  garlic and fry for 3 minute and cut some
  tomato and put in it and some green chilli
## Appendix F Indicator .05 - Levels 1, 2, 3 ACSF Writing Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Features</th>
<th>LEVEL 1 Descriptors</th>
<th>LEVEL 2 Descriptors</th>
<th>LEVEL 3 Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range and Context</strong></td>
<td>Writes 2 short simple text types, e.g. fills in the form with basic person details, produces 1 or 2 simple sentences</td>
<td>Creates at least 2 text types, e.g. personal history, recipe, email message</td>
<td>Produces a range of familiar text types with appropriate structures across a range of Aspects of Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focuses on topics relevant to personal needs and interests</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Writes at least 1 paragraph (prose text)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Writes factual or personal information using notes or dot points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience and Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Shows some recognition that texts have different purposes</td>
<td>Recognises that words and grammatical choices may vary to meet the requirements of the audience and purpose</td>
<td>Demonstrates the need to vary written language to meet requirements of the audience and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Makes some connections between own knowledge and experience and the ideas, events and information in written texts</td>
<td>Chooses appropriate text type to communicate relevant information and/or ideas effectively, e.g. memo, dialogue, poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Begins to use writing as a tool for identifying issues and generating new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure and cohesion</strong></td>
<td>Writes short texts with simple structure, approximating teacher/mentor model and with teacher/mentor support. Demonstrates a very limited understanding of sequence</td>
<td>Recognises that texts have a structure, e.g. a beginning, middle and end. Begins to sequence writing with some attention to organising principles of time, importance</td>
<td>Sequences writing to produce cohesive text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interrelates ideas, information and some support material when writing about familiar topics</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Uses layout consistent with text type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Register</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognises some differences between the formal and informal registers of familiar written texts</td>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of a range of formal and informal register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan, proof, draft, review</strong></td>
<td>Begins to check writing by re-reading</td>
<td>Begins to plan writing, using strategies such as listing to organise information Begins to review writing, incorporating teacher/mentor comments into drafting process</td>
<td>Uses basic models to produce a range of text types, although may handle some more easily than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Uses the process of planning, drafting and proof reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-corrects own writing to check for consistency and accuracy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix G Indicator .06 - Levels 1, 2, 3 ACSF Writing Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Features</th>
<th>LEVEL 1 Descriptors</th>
<th>LEVEL 2 Descriptors</th>
<th>LEVEL 3 Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Uses a small bank of individual words and phrases or word list related to giving personal details or meeting survival needs, May be memorised, transcribed, formulaic</td>
<td>Extends key vocabulary to include personal details of self, family and relevant others, most aspects of everyday life and other vocabulary of personal significance</td>
<td>Draws on a vocabulary which is sufficiently broad so that a relevant word is usually available Uses vocabulary with increasing precision to show how words carry particular shades of meaning Can use English dictionary or thesaurus (hard copy or online) to extend vocabulary bank Begins to use acronyms Recognises and uses common idioms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
<td>Begins to use basic structures and limited verb tenses</td>
<td>Uses action words and simple verb tenses in sentences of 1 or 2 clauses Uses adjectives, pronouns and prepositions to describe people, places, things and events Uses simple cohesive devices, such as <em>and, but, then</em> Uses time/location markers such as <em>first, then, yesterday, in, at.</em></td>
<td>Uses introductory phrases which indicate that an opinion, or a fact, is being offered Uses some complex and compound sentences Uses grammatical forms and vocabulary to give instructions, give explanations, ask questions, and express viewpoints Uses dependent clauses introduced by words such as <em>although, when, if and while</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punctuation</strong></td>
<td>Begins to use basic punctuation, but this may be inconsistent, e.g. capital letters, full stops</td>
<td>Uses basic punctuation, e.g. capital letters, full stops, commas</td>
<td>Uses punctuation as an aid to understanding, e.g. capitalisation, full stops, commas, apostrophes, exclamation marks, quotation marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spelling</strong></td>
<td>Approximates spelling, with inconsistencies and variations apparent</td>
<td>Attempts spelling by using familiar letter patterns including phonetic letter patterns, common stems, suffixes and prefixes Uses a spellchecker with support Refers to dictionary to check spelling or vocabulary choices Shows some variation in spelling and grammar that does not interfere with overall meaning</td>
<td>Uses a spellchecker with increasing understanding and independence and awareness of its limitations Spells with reasonable accuracy Attempts to spell unfamiliar words, using a range of strategies including phonics and visual letter patterns, syllabification, word origins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legibility</strong></td>
<td>Writes mostly legible script. May prefer to print rather than write cursive script, with lack of consistency likely between printed and cursive letter Uses approximate orientation of text, e.g. left to right, top to bottom</td>
<td>Writes legible script</td>
<td>Uses legible handwriting style and computer font appropriate to audience and purposes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H Plain Language Statement – Questionnaire

MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE

PROJECT TITLE: *How well does the Australian Core Skills Framework function as an assessment framework in Australia’s adult Language Literacy and Numeracy Program?*

Dear LLNP teacher,

I write this letter to invite you to participate in a D.Ed. research project by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, which is conducted by D.Ed. researcher Anh Le and supervised by Dr. Alan Williams and Dr Simone Senisin.

This research project aims to evaluate the assessment application of the ACSF in the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), an issue that I believe is of great interest to LLNP teachers.

The project involves two phases of data collection: a questionnaire survey, and interviews and verbal protocols. In this first phase of the project, I seek LLNP teachers to complete a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire has two parts. Part one asks for your demographic information concerning age, gender and teaching and assessment experience. Part two asks for your judgment of the ACSF against given statements on five-point scales and your answers to some open-ended evaluation questions. This questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete and you will have four weeks to respond at your convenience.

Your details and responses from the survey will be kept confidential. Your name and details will be stored in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data you supply. All data will be stored in a private and secure location at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education for a period of five years and will then be destroyed.

The research finding will be published in a thesis and may be presented in seminars, conferences and published in other forms. No individual will be identified in any of these presentations and publications. We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your response to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of law.

Your participation in the project is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any stage, to withdraw any unprocessed data you supplied, or to have any identifying information irreversibly removed from processed data. If you have any questions about the research project, please do not hesitate to contact either Principal Supervisor Dr. Alan Williams (8347 8377), or my self Anh Le (0432 294 068). Please note that the project has been approved by the University of Melbourne’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Kind Regards,

Dr. Alan Williams (Principal Supervisor)
Dr Simone Senisin (Co-supervisor)
Mrs. Anh Le (D.Ed. Candidate)
Appendix I Participant Consent Form – Questionnaire

THE MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Questionnaire

PROJECT TITLE: How well does the Australian Core Skills Framework function as an assessment framework in Australia’s adult Language Literacy and Numeracy Program?

Name of participant: ______________________________________________

Name of investigator(s): Dr. Alan Williams, Dr Simone Senisin, Mrs. Anh Le

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.

2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.

3. I understand that my participation will involve a questionnaire survey and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.

4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) the possible effects of participating in the questionnaire survey have been explained to my satisfaction;
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
   (c) the project is for the purpose of research;
   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
   (e) my name will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research

Participant Signature: _____________________ Date: _____________________
Appendix J Plain Language Statement – Interview and Verbal Protocol

MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

INTERVIEW and VERBAL PROTOCOL

PROJECT TITLE: How well does the Australian Core Skills Framework function as an assessment framework in Australia’s adult Language Literacy and Numeracy Program?

Dear LLNP teacher,

I write this letter to invite you to participate in a D.Ed. research project by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, which is conducted by D.Ed. researcher Anh Le and supervised by Dr. Alan Williams and Dr Simone Senisin.

This research project aims to evaluate the assessment application of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) in the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), an issue that I believe is of great interest to LLNP teachers.

Earlier in the first phase of the project, you have participated in a questionnaire survey. In this second phase of the project, I seek LLNP teachers to participate in a semi-structured interview and a verbal protocol. In the interview you will answer some questions about your experience and reflection of using the ACSF for assessment. In the verbal protocol, you will judge six writing samples by three learners against the ACSF and verbalise your judgment of each learner’s writing performance. The interview will take about 30 minutes and the verbal protocol 30 minutes. Both the interview and the verbal protocol will be audio-taped.

Please note that although the tapes will be transcribed, your identity will be kept confidential. Your name and details will be stored in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data you supply. All data will be stored in a private and secure location at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education for a period of five years and will then be destroyed. However, as the interview and the verbal protocol will be conducted in your centre, your coordinator and other teachers may know that you participate in the project.

The research findings will be published in a thesis and may be presented in seminars, conferences and published in other forms. A summary of the research findings will be provided to you upon request. No individual will be identified in any of these presentations and publications. We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your response to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of law.

Your participation in the project is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any stage, to withdraw any unprocessed data you supplied, or to have any identifying information irreversibly removed from processed data. If you have any questions about the research project, please do not hesitate to contact either Principal Supervisor Dr Alan Williams (8347 8377), or myself Anh Le (0432 294 068). Please note that the project has been approved by the University of Melbourne’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

Kind Regards,

Dr. Alan Williams (Principal Supervisor)
Dr Simone Senisin (Co-supervisor)
Mrs. Anh Le (D.Ed. Candidate)
THE MELBOURNE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
INTERVIEW and VERBAL PROTOCOL

PROJECT TITLE: How well does the Australian Core Skills Framework function as an assessment framework in Australia’s adult Language Literacy and Numeracy Program?

Name of participant: ______________________________________________

Name of investigator(s): Dr. Alan Williams, Dr Simone Senisin, Mrs. Anh Le

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.

2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.

3. I understand that my participation will involve an interview and a verbal protocol and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.

4. I acknowledge that:

(a) the possible effects of participating in the interview and the verbal protocol have been explained to my satisfaction;

(b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;

(c) the project is for the purpose of research;

(d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

(e) I have been informed that with my consent the interview and the verbal protocol will be audio-taped and I understand that audio-tapes will be stored at University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after five years;

(f) my name will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;

(g) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I agree to this.

I consent to the interview and the verbal protocol being audio-taped □ yes □ no
(please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings □ yes □ no
(please tick)

Your email address for a summary of the research findings: ________________________________

Participant Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________________________
Author/s: 
Le, Anh Quynh Thi

Title: 
The application of the Australian Core Skills Framework to assessment in the skills for education and employment program: a case study of teachers' perspectives and practices

Date: 
2015

Persistent Link: 
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/55292

File Description: 
Assessment application of the Australian Core Skills Framework