IN CONVERSATION AALA Newsletter



Asian Association for Language Assessment Student Committee

Issue 9 (2024)

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Editors' Note:

Warm greetings to all!

The year 2024 was a special milestone for the Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA), marking its 10th anniversary. In light of this meaningful occasion, the AALA Student Committee (AALA SC) is delighted to present the 9th issue of our In Conversation AALA newsletter series.

In this issue, we begin by summarizing and reflecting on two webinars successfully held over the past year. In collaboration with ALTAANZ, our first webinar offered valuable insights into academic publishing, featuring the perspectives of esteemed journal editors in the field of language assessment. The second webinar focused mixed-methods research. thoughtful contributions from a recent graduate and a current Ph.D. candidate. We also report on highlights from the 2024 AALA Annual Conference, including a conference overview and a recap of the AALA SC's annual networking session. In addition, two recipients of the AALA Best Student Paper and Poster Awards generously share their experiences and reflections from their Ph.D. journeys. To commemorate AALA's 10th anniversary, this issue includes a brief retrospective on the growth and activities of the AALA SC over the past decade. We conclude with a snapshot of current student membership statistics, offering insights into the composition of the AALA student community.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to our mission of building a vibrant, inclusive space that supports and inspires student members and early-career researchers across Asia and beyond.

Best

Sao Bui & Chenyang Zhang (Co-editors)

AALA SC Webinars

Bridging the Path to Successful Publishing: Submission Strategies and Editorial Insights for Language Testing Research

Report by Ryuhei Mizoguchi

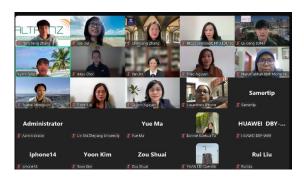


The webinar titled "Bridging the Path to Publishing: Successful Submission and Editorial Insights for Strategies Research," Language Testing organized by the Student Committees of AALA and ALTAANZ, was held on December 12, 2024. It featured two experienced journal editors in the field of language testing, Prof. Yan Jin and Dr. Ikkyu Choi, who provided valuable insights into the academic publishing process. First, Prof. Yan Jin, Co-Editor-in-Chief of Language Testing in Asia, offered practical advice on each stage of the publishing journey, from manuscript submission to acceptance, drawing on both author and

reviewer perspectives. She also highlighted the benefits of open-access publishing, particularly in terms of visibility and publication speed. The second speaker, Dr. Ikkyu Choi, Associate Editor of Language Assessment Quarterly, outlined three key practices for successful publishing: (1) Draft, emphasizing the effectiveness of breaking works down; (2) Revise, which is valuable to improve the draft; and (3) Review, as good opportunities to see others' works and self-reflect our writing.



During the Q&A session, participants questions raised about selecting appropriate journals, handling manuscript rejections, and the importance of revising and resubmitting. Both speakers emphasized that receiving a revision request is common and should be seen as an opportunity to develop a stronger manuscript. Overall, the webinar offered more than 50 attendees an excellent opportunity to learn practical strategies and an encouraging approach to navigating the journal review process, indicating a path to successful publishing.



Mixed-Methods Research Seminar

Report by Meng-Hsun (Hunter) Lee





Dr. Ping-Lin Chuang Language Assessment Scientist, Duolingo

Methodological considerations in researching raters' cognitive processes

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to investigate the cognitive processes involved in rating second language (I.2) integrated argumentative writing. Forty-cight raters scored argumentative writing. Forty-cight raters scored simulated test responses while their eye movements, scores, and verbal comments were collected. Verbal comments were transcribed and qualitatively coded into thematic categories. The quantitative analysis involved fitting separate generalized linear mixed models, using eye movement metrics as dependent variables and the proportion of comment topics and assigned scores as independent variables. By triangulating eye-tracking data, scores, and comments, the study examines how raters' attention is linked to their evaluative decisions and demonstrates how integrating qualitative and quantitative data can offer deeper insights into rater cognition in L2 writing assessment.



Xiaoxiao Kong Ph.D. Candidate, University of Melbourne

Investigating teachers' workplace language demands: Reflections on a (largely) qualitative PhD journey

In this presentation, I outline my PhD research project, which investigates the workplace language and communication demands of teachers in Australia, and the appropriateness of the current practice of using the IELTS Academic for teacher registration purposes. I adopted a sequential exploratory research design comprising five research methods conducted in three stages. While the design is predominantly qualitative—drawing on document analysis, focus groups, and interviews—it also incorporates a survey to quantify teachers' perceptions of domain task frequency and importance. I present this research design in detail and share selected findings to illustrate the affordances of the predominantly qualitative research methods used. Finally, I reflect on the advantages and limitations of conducting PhD research using mainly qualitative methods from a personal perspective.



Time: May 8 (Thursday) 10–11pm: Pittsburgh; Toronto
May 9 (Friday) 9–10am: Rangkok: Vietnam

May 9 (Friday) 9–10am: Bangkok; Vietnam May 9 (Friday) 10–11am: Beijing; Singapore

May 9 (Friday) 11am: Beijing; Singapore Zoom Meeting May 9 (Friday) 11am–12pm: Japan; Korea 779 727 4438

May 9 (Friday) 12–1pm: Melbourne

Passcode: 931050

This mixed-methods seminar, held on May 9 (2025) by the AALA Student Committee and attended by approximately 45 featured participants, two in-depth presentations that illustrated the power of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in language assessment research. The first presenter shared findings from dissertation а examining the cognitive processes of raters an integrated argumentative writing task. Using eye-tracking, verbal protocol analysis, and rater scores from 48 participants, the study found that raters spent more time fixating on essays that received lower scores and on text features they later commented on, revealing meaningful links between visual attention, interpretive processes, and evaluation. During the Q&A, the presenter addressed questions about rating time and languagerelated comments, noting that while such comments were collected, they weren't

analyzed due to the study's focus. Practical tips for eye-tracking research were also shared, highlighting data quality, coding rigor, and clear planning.

The second presentation explored the language and communication demands of early childhood, primary, and secondary teachers in Australia, and how well these align with the IELTS Academic test used for teacher registration. Adopting a sequential mixed-methods design, the speaker began with qualitative methods—document analysis, focus groups, and interviews—to identify workplace language followed by a national survey to rank task frequency and importance, and concluded with interviews for in-depth descriptions. Findings showed that while speaking and listening tasks dominated across all education levels, reading and writing tasks became more prominent in secondary education. The study also highlighted mismatches between IELTS tasks and workplace realities—such as the lack of children's voices in IELTS listening tasks based on data triangulated across all methods. In the Q&A, the presenter explained that only top-ranked tasks were shown for brevity and confirmed strong alignment across methods, especially in highlighting language demand differences between early childhood and school session contexts. The ended reflections on mixed methods research. offering useful insights for graduate students.



AALA 2024 Conference Coverage

AALA 2024 in Shanghai, China

Report by Ryuhei Mizoguchi



The 10th Annual International Conference of the Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA) took place from August 19 to 21, 2024, in Shanghai, China, hosted by Shanghai International Studies University, China. The conference brought together researchers, educators, and practitioners to explore the theme "Enhancing professionalism in language testing and assessment."



The pre-conference day consisted of workshops on two insightful topics: (1) Enhancing and digitizing professional and scholarly publications for greater social impact at the Al-area: Theoretical basis, Altools and hands-on practices, delivered by Dr. Qin Xie; and (2) Applying general linear model and linear mixed-effects model in language assessment research, presented by Dr. Vahid Aryadoust.



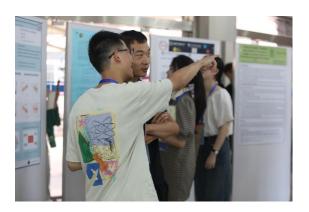
The main conference began on August 20th with an opening ceremony, followed by a keynote speech by Prof. Barry O'Sullivan titled "Artificial intelligence and language assessment: An ethics and accessibility perspective." The following parallel sessions included more than 30 research presentations, fostering engaging discussions on a wide array of assessmentrelated topics. During the lunch break, the AALA Student Networking Session was held, offering participants a dedicated space for connection and exchange. In the afternoon, the second keynote speech was given by Dr. Xiaoming Xi on "Construct advances in relation to technology - Why are they stagnant in large-scale testing?" Two symposia closed the day: one on "Washback, impact, and consequences" moderated by Prof. Liying Cheng, and another titled "Engaging test-takers with Al-supported assessment design" by Dr. Richard Spiby.







The final day of the conference featured around 30 paper presentations and over 20 poster presentations, along with the third keynote and a closing symposium. The keynote speech was delivered by Prof. Micheline Chalhoub-Deville, which was "Enhancing professionalism language testing and assessment: A focus on guiding theories, key documents, and established practices." The conference concluded with a thought-provoking symposium on China's standards of English language ability, which offered regional insights into ongoing efforts to systematize and benchmark English proficiency in the Chinese context.



Overall, AALA 2024 provided a valuable opportunity for researchers, practitioners, and relevant stakeholders in Asia to share their work and exchange ideas. Through a wide range of sessions and active participation, the conference highlighted current interests and developments in the field of language assessment and offered participants a chance to reflect on their own practices and research.

Student Networking Session

Report by Lugeng Sun



The AALA Student Committee hosted a lunchtime networking session on 20 August 2024 (the first day of the main conference) in Lecture Hall 1 at Shanghai International Studies University. Designed to foster a collegial and supportive space for student participants, the 60-minute program featured five main components: a welcome address, sharing by award-winning student presenters, an extended

Q&A segment, collaborative resource sharing via Padlet, and an interactive lucky draw.

Two distinguished student awardees— Niles Zhao, recipient of the AALA 2024 Best Student Paper Award, and Xiaozhu Wang, recipient of the AALA 2024 Best Student Poster Award—served as the session's speakers, offering insights on the theme Helpful Resources for Graduate Students in Language Assessment. Their reflections and practical advice sparked a lively Q&A segment, during which participants exchanged ideas on research design, publishing strategies, and interdisciplinary collaboration.



To further promote engagement and a sense of community, the session concluded with a lucky draw. All gifts were generously sponsored by members of the AALA Executive Board. The cozy and interactive atmosphere was warmly received by attendees, who welcomed the opportunity to connect with peers and researchers from diverse contexts.

Later that afternoon, the Student Committee also gave a brief report at the AALA General Members' Meeting, highlighting its 2023 activities and outlining the 2024 plan.

Together, these activities reflect the Student Committee's ongoing commitment to expand student engagement, facilitate scholarly exchange, and strengthen collaboration with the Executive Board and the broader AALA membership.







Words from the AALA 2024 Best Student Paper Award Winner – Dr. Niles Zhao

Dear AALA student members, greetings! I am Niles Zhao. I graduated from the University of Melbourne in applied linguistics and psychometrics in December 2024, four months after receiving this award. I am grateful to the AALA Awards Committee, as well as my PhD supervisors, Associate Professor Jason Fan and Dr Kellie Frost. It is a pleasure to share my research and some tips with you.



The paper that won me this award is titled: Investigating the impact of the National Matriculation English Test: An agency perspective. In China, the formidable National Matriculation Test (also known as Gaokao) wields the power to shape countless destinies. It serves as a pivotal gateway to social mobility. Sixteen years ago, this test was both my burden and my beacon, guiding me to a coveted place at a highly regarded university. Years later, I found myself on the opposite side of the desk—as a high school teacher, waging the same battle alongside my students. Having succeeded on the test to secure a "better future", I benefited again from the soaring demand for tutoring. This journey—from test taker to educator—became an odyssey through the intricacies of the testing regime. Over the years, I assumed many roles: test taker, teacher, rater, invigilator and test preparation material developer. These experiences led me to conduct research on test impact. I adopted a two-stage sequential mixed-methods design to explore the impact of the National Matriculation English Test in a context where high-stakes testing plays a prominent role in education. Findings of this study shed light on the temporal and relational nature of test taker agency and highlight the role of test takers in mediating test impact, which is dynamic, complex and socio-culturally situated. These findings challenge the practice of using testing as the driving force for curricular reform while underscoring the importance of context and the fostering of positive learning beliefs.

My advice to PhD students is to gradually develop your critical judgement regarding the quality of research and writing. As Sha, the 2022 Best Student Paper Award inner, noted, we tend to be perfectionists as researchers. One way to expectations is to learn how to evaluate our own work critically and realistically within the time constraints of a PhD. To build such judgement, in addition to working closely with our supervisors, we also volunteer to review for conferences and journals. Actively seeking collaboration with other researchers is also beneficial. Doing a PhD is no easy task, but I hope you can all make the most of the journey.

Words from the AALA 2024 Best Student Poster Award Winner – Xiaozhu Wang

Hi, dear AALA student members, I am Xiaozhu Wang, a Ph.D. candidate at Beijing Language and Culture University, China. The study I presented by poster at the 10th AALA conference is entitled "Investigating the Effect of Source Type on the Process of Integrated Speaking Assessment from Eye-Tracking Evidence", which is part of my doctoral research. I am deeply grateful to the 2024 AALA Conference Committee and

Student Committee for awarding me the Best Student Poster Award and giving me the opportunity to share my experiences as a graduate student.



I think the most exciting part of the Ph.D. journey is the freedom to turn our ideas into reality, driven purely by interest. For example, after completing my master's dissertation on language assessment literacy, I realized that while large-scale surveys are necessary, they can sometimes be superficial. I became intrigued by the idea of diving deeper into how people develop their language assessment literacy. This led me to conduct field studies in two language assessment training courses, where I gained invaluable experience interacting with different pre-service teachers. Combining our interests or knowledge from different areas can also lead to brand new research topics. For instance, once I read about comparison studies on computer-based and paperbased tests, which highlighted the challenges in accurately studying the differences between them. Later, I came across handwriting tracing techniques that record the spatial and temporal information of handwriting. The connection between these ideas inspired me to conduct a study comparing the writing processes of L2 Chinese learners in different modes.

However, compromising between the planned destination and reality is also a

compulsory lesson to learn. We inevitably face obstacles, both expected and unexpected. It's natural to feel frustrated at times, but the key to success is perseverance, reflection, and problemsolving. When I encountered difficulties in recruiting suitable participants, conducting eye-tracking experiments under device limitations, or interpreting "weird" data results, these were challenging moments. Yet, they also taught me resilience and deepened my understanding of the research process.

Finally, despite the bittersweet nature of this often solitary journey, we are blessed with the support of supervisors, peers, family, and friends who brighten our everyday lives. I hope you all find joy in the process of graduate study and grow into the person you aspire to be.

AALA at 10: Student Committee Initiatives & Growth

By Qiyu Sun and Sao Bui

The Asian Association for Language Assessment (AALA) was founded in 2014, marking the beginning of a vibrant regional forum for language testing and assessment professionals. Since its inception, AALA has hosted annual conferences across Asia, starting with the inaugural gathering in Hangzhou, China (2014). Over the past decade, ten international conferences have been held, with venues spanning East, Southeast, and South Asia – from Bangkok (2015) and Bali (2016) to Taipei (2017), Shanghai (2018, 2024), Hanoi (2019), an online conference hosted in Seoul (2021), Chennai (hybrid, 2022), and Tokyo (2023), each contributing to the advancement of knowledge and collaboration in the field.



As part of its efforts to foster scholarly exchange and development, AALA has also demonstrated strong support for the professional growth of graduate students in language assessment. This commitment took concrete shape in 2015 with the establishment of the AALA Student Committee (AALA SC), which has since become an integral part of the association. With a special focus on language assessment in Asia, the AALA SC is dedicated to promoting the **3Cs** – **Competence**, **Communication**, and

Collaboration – among graduate students and the broader AALA community.

Over the years, the AALA SC has launched a number of successful initiatives:

- **Student Networking Sessions:** Starting with the first session at the 2016 AALA Conference in Bali, the AALA SC has hosted cozy and interactive studentfocused sessions at every annual conference. To date, eight such sessions have provided valuable opportunities for student researchers to share experiences and resources. These sessions often focus on practical topics, for examples, student award winners sharing tips on conferences, grants, and research skills, or scholars offering insights into their life and work. To add a bit of fun, lucky draws with small gifts have become a popular feature of the sessions. Overall, networking student events have become a yearly staple, fostering connections among students and senior scholars.
- **Scholar Interviews and Messages from** the Executive Board: From 2016 to 2019, the AALA SC conducted interviews with distinguished language assessment scholars and messages from the AALA Executive Board. Published in newsletters, these conversations gave students a window into scholars' backgrounds, career journeys, perspectives on emerging trends, and advice for early-career researchers—helping generations and inspire the next wave of language testing professionals.
- Webinars: Recently, the AALA SC expanded into virtual events, hosting two to three webinars annually (2022– 2024) to support student researchers. These sessions focus on practical skills

needed for early-career scholars, covering research methods, proposal writing, conference presenting, academic publishing, and job hunting. Speakers include doctoral students, recent graduates, reputable journal editors, and experienced researchers, allowing the AALA SC to engage students across the region and even internationally.

- Words from Student Award Winners: Since 2017, the AALA SC has invited recipients of the AALA Best Student Paper Award, Best Student Poster Award, and Outstanding Dissertation Award to share reflections and advice for fellow graduate students. Publishing these in the annual newsletters is a way to acknowledge the contributions of student researchers. celebrate their achievements, and encourage the broader student community.
- In Conversation Series: Another important initiative of the AALA SC is the annual In Conversation newsletter. Each issue recaps the annual conference, reports on AALA SC events, publishes interviews with scholars, messages from leaders, and reflections from student award winners, and provides updates on AALA student member membership. Nine issues to date have offered a channel for both AALA and SC activities.

Alongside its initiatives, the AALA SC has grown in both membership and leadership. By April 2025, 263 students from 30 countries across five continents had joined as AALA student members. This diversity is also reflected in the Student Committee, the core team behind the AALA SC's work, led over the years by dedicated co-chairs including Rongchan Lin, Sha Liu, Ivy Chen, Don Yao, Tatsuro Tahara, Phuong Cao,

Niles Zhao, Jincheng Wu, Chang Zhang, Sao Bui, and Chenyang Zhang. Together, the broad-based membership and committed leadership have helped sustain the AALA SC's vibrant work and expand its impact.

Of course, none of this progress would have been possible without the ongoing support and guidance of the AALA Executive Board, the substantial contributions of scholars, researchers, and students, the effective collaboration with ALTAANZ (the student arm of the Assessment Association in Australia and New Zealand), and the enthusiastic participation of AALA student members and event attendees.

Ten years into AALA's journey, the AALA SC has grown into a vibrant community that supports and inspires student members across Asia and beyond. Through its meaningful initiatives, the AALA SC has created a space where students and earlyresearchers feel connected, career supported, and encouraged. Looking ahead, the AALA SC remains committed to bridging gaps between students and experts, across regions and generations and to empowering the next generation of researchers in language assessment.

Membership Statistics

Report by Feiya Xiao

Table 1. Student Membership by Year (Updated on April 30th, 2025)

Year	New Student Members
2014	17
2015	24
2016	21
2017	13
2018	26
2019	15
2020	34
2021	27
2022	47
2023	26
2024	13
Total	263

Table 2. Current Student Membership by Country/Region (Updated on December 31th, 2023)

Country/Region	2023	2024
India	56	57
China's Mainland	37	41
UK	19	20
Australia	17	17
Thailand	17	17
USA	17	17
Japan	15	16
Vietnam	12	12
South Korea	9	9

Country/Region	2023	2024
Hong Kong SAR	8	8
Macao SAR	7	8
Canada	6	6
Indonesia	5	5
Singapore	4	5
Malaysia	3	5
Iran	2	2
Nepal	2	2
Philippines	2	2
Algeria	1	1
Bangladesh	1	1
Finland	1	1
Hungary	1	1
Ireland	1	1
New Zealand	1	1
Pakistan	1	1
Portugal	1	1
Sri Lanka	1	2
Taiwan	1	2
Turkey	1	1
Uzbekistan	1	1
Total	250	263

AALA Founding Members (in alphabetical order)

He, Lianzhen (Zhejiang University)
Imao, Yasu (Osaka University)
Jin, Yan (Shanghai Jiao Tong University)
Kunnan, Antony John (University of Macau)
Lee, Yong-Won (Seoul National University)
Lee, Young-Shik (Hannam University)

Qian, David (Hong Kong Polytechnic University)

Sawaki, Yasuyo (Waseda University) Wu, Jessica Row-Whei (Language Training and Testing Center)

AALA Executive Board (2024-2025)

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Thi Ngoc Quynh Nguyen (VNU University of Languages and International Studies)

Co-President

Yasuyo Sawaki (Waseda University)

1st Vice President

Jason Fan (The University of Melbourne)

2nd Vice President

Yong-Won Lee (Seoul National University)

Immediate Past President

Jirada Wudthayagorn (Chulalongkorn University)

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Communications Officer

Yasuhiro Imao (Osaka University)

Members at Large

Vahid Aryadoust (Nanyang Technological University)

Matthew Wallace (University of Macau)
Heng-Tsung Danny Huang (National Taiwan
University)

AALA Student Committee (2024)

Advisors

Yong-Won Lee (Seoul National University) Vahid Aryadoust (Nanyang Technological University)

Co-chairs

Sao Bui (The University of Melbourne) Chenyang Zhang (The University of Melbourne)

Immediate Past Co-chairs

Jason Jincheng Wu (University of Macau)
Annie Chang Zhang (Education University of Hong Kong)

Secretary

Feiya Xiao (University of Macau)

Public Relations Officer

Qiyu Sun (Shanghai Jiao Tong University)

Committee Members

Teaka Sowaprux (Chulalongkorn University) Meng-Hsun (Hunter) Lee (University of Toronto)

Ryuhei Mizoguchi (Waseda University)
Yuxin Peng (University of Macau)
Lu Geng Sun (Chulalongkorn University)
Hetian Yu (Education University of Hong
Kong)

Committee Contact Information

AALA Website:

http://www.aalawebsite.com/

AALA SC Email: aalastudent@hotmail.com

Register to be a member:

https://www.aalawebsite.com/contact

In Conversation AALA Newsletters

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