Features of Language Assessment Literacy in Iranian English Language Teachers' Perceptions and Practices

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Abstract

Language assessment literacy (LAL), mainly defined as knowledge and skills of language assessment, in the last two decades, has started to receive the attention it deserves. As one of the significant findings, based on a plethora of research, many second language (L2) teachers have been indicated to be professionally incompetent in terms of LAL. To investigate the status of LAL among Iranian English teachers, the present study was conducted. Three hundred and nine English teachers participated in answering a questionnaire. Besides, 24 teachers were interviewed based on a semi-structured interview. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis and interpretation techniques were employed to find answers to the research questions which sought to investigate the features of language assessment literacy in language teachers' perceptions. The findings indicated that, overall, LAL is of concern to Iranian L2 (English) teachers. However, they also agree that their current level of both knowledge and practice in terms of LAL is not ideal. Furthermore, it was found that, as the teachers perceive it, assessment promotes learning and teaching; the nature of teacher-learner relationships affects evaluation; and, testing and assessment are seen as challenging notions due to their mathematical concepts and statistics. The findings will contribute to a more profound perception of LAL and better planning and executing the programs for L2 teachers regarding the issue.

Keywords: Assessment literacy, Language assessment literacy, EFL teachers

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Among many privileges a language teacher (LT), who is assessment literate, enjoys is that, according to Coombe, Al-Hamly and Troudi (2012), an LT can gather reliable data about students' achievement, exchange the results efficiently, and figure out how to employ assessment to enhance student motivation and learning. Therefore, one of the significant challenges EFL teachers face worldwide is that whether or not they possess optimal assessment literacy. Nevertheless, contrary to the all-agreed-upon importance of language teacher assessment literacy (LTAL), based on a plethora of research (Bachman, 2000; Brown and Bailey, 2008, Jeong (2013), to name only a few), L2 teachers have been indicated to be professionally incompetent in terms of LAL. As Popham (2004) claimed, many instructors and other test users have a limited perception of the basics of assessment. The status of assessment literacy appears to be more or less the same throughout the world (Taylor, 2013).

The Iranian context of EFL education is not an exception in this regard. Typically, when being recruited, teachers demonstrate both their mastery over language skills and their teaching abilities, while not being inquired about their LAL. Consequently, the teacher's LAL and its vital role in meeting the objectives of teaching and learning (Malone, 2013) are neglected, leaving us in a state of uncertainty about English teachers' degree of competency over LAL. Accordingly, many fundamental questions regarding LTAL remain unanswered, i.e., issues such as teachers' beliefs about LAL and their subsequent practices thereof.

Literature Review

The role of the assessment itself, generally in education, is not unknown to educators. The goal of assessment literacy is also, above all, improving learning and teaching. It helps educators both at micro as well as macro levels. American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (1990) defines assessment as a process to obtain information to 'make educational decisions about students ... give feedback ... judge instructional

effectiveness ... and to inform policy' (p. 30). As the literature on teachers' LAL reveals, teacher's assessment illiteracy brings about negative impacts on many educational aspects, including learning: " Indeed, assessment is no longer used for merely measuring learning outcomes but also for creating more learning opportunities", (Djoube, 2017, p. 9). There seems to have been some kind of underrepresentation of the concept of assessment, though. As Herrera and Macías (2015) put it, assessment, continually, is mainly regarded as the summative evaluation informing teachers of students' achievement or lack of it in their learning process based on a scale of numbers. However, within the field of foreign language testing and assessment, the concept of LAL is, to a large degree, recent (Boyles, 2005). Furthermore, as pointed out by Fulcher (2012), studies on assessment literacy are just in their early development.

Jing and Zonghui (2016), in a rather meta-analysis review over the studies done on LTAL, contend that there is an urgent need for assessment practices. In another study, surveying 100 foreign language teaching professionals, Guerin (2010) concluded that foreign LTs admitted that they felt "definite needs for professional development in the area of language testing and assessment" (p.1). Furthermore, Vogt and Tsagari (2014), surveying 853 and interviewing 63 ELT teachers across Europe, found that the given teachers' LAL was not well-developed, and as well, most of them contended that their training (at either pre- or in-service level) had not equipped them sufficiently for their job. Fulcher (2012) conducted an internet survey asking 278 English teachers on their LAL. The findings indicated that LTs are well-versed about assessment needs, the vital role of testing in society, and " a desire to understand more of the 'principles' as well as the 'how-to' (Davies, 2008, p.13)". In a more recent study, Djoub (2017) concluded that LTs suffered from LA illiteracy.

Within the Iranian context, however, one can find very few studies conducted on LAL. Jannati (2015) found that LTs were assessment literate, but this literacy was not reflected in their practices. Another study,

which is a review done by Bayat & Rezaei (2105), concluded that "it is necessary for teachers to develop language assessment literacy to prevent serious consequences for teachers and students" (p. 139). In a third study in which 52 EFL teachers answered a questionnaire, Rezaei Fard and Tabatabaei (2018) found that Iranian EFL teachers were at low levels of LAL.

In light of what went above, this study investigated English teachers' knowledge of the core essentials of LAL and the features of its practical implementation. More precisely, the study strived to answer the following primary and secondary research questions:

The main question this research intends to respond is:

1. What features characterize Iranian English teachers' perceptions of LAL?

And four secondary research questions are:

1. Is there any statistically significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of their LAL?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference between teachers' teaching experience and their LAL?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between teachers' educational degrees and their LAL?
4. Is there any statistically significant difference between teachers' working place and their LAL?

Method

Participants

The participants who completed the questionnaires included 106 males (34.3 %) and 203 females (65.7 %), whose overall ages ranged from below 20 to more than 40 years. Teachers had various years of teaching experience from below three years to more than ten years. In terms of their academic qualification, 26 held a Ph.D. (8.4 %); 103 held a Master's

degree (33.3 %), and 180 held a Bachelor's degree (58.3 %). Eighteen out of 309 participants (5.8 %) had fields of study other than language teaching, English translation, and English literature. One hundred and fifty participants worked as school teachers (48.5 %); 106 teachers worked in language institutes (34.3 %), and 53 of them were university instructors (17.2 %). Information concerning the participants is presented in the appendix in tables 1 to 6.

For the interview section, twenty-four L2 teachers were selected from among the three contexts of school, college, and university, based on a stratified sampling procedure. Their range of degree was from BA holders to Ph.D. They had taught English for more than five years. Except for one phone interview, all of the interviews were conducted face to face. About half the interviews, i.e., 14, were recorded by a recorder while the second half was conducted by taking notes, due to the interviewees' preferences. Each interview took from fifteen to twenty-one minutes to complete.
Instruments

Questionnaire. A questionnaire and interview were employed to gather data. The questionnaire was adapted from Fulcher's Survey Instrument (2012) and Mertler's Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory (1993). It contained 32 closed-ended questions that were classified thematically based on the research questions. A thematic grouping was conducted based on Taylor's model (2013), which includes: "knowledge of theory, technical skills, principles and concepts, language pedagogy, sociocultural values, local practices, personal beliefs/attitudes, and, scoring and decision making" (p. 410). Embedding knowledge of theory with principle and concepts, we made the thematic grouping into 7, for either of which, we made some related questions based on our comprehensive study of the literature. After revising the format and wordings for a couple of times, to ensure validity and reliability issues, we had it critically reviewed by five university professors and researchers, all being experienced in doing survey research. Having considered their

insightful suggestions and constructive feedback, to ensure the psychometric quality of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was piloted. It was given to twenty similar teachers, and, after being completed, it was analyzed in terms of the internal consistency of the items, employing Cronbach Alpha formula, which proved to be .88, which is reasonably fine.

Interview. A semi-structured interview was used as an eliciting medium for the second part of the data collection. The model of the questions was taken from Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students (1997). In one part of that protocol, seven standards are enumerated for teachers to be competent in the knowledge of assessment. They were adopted and adapted by the researchers as the basis for interview questions. In fact, these questions were employed by the researchers as pretexts, or better to say prompts, based on which to elicit what the teachers contend about Language assessment. Therefore, any possible answer to them was considered to add to our understanding of their LAL. Besides, one open-ended question was added so that the interviewees could express their opinions on LAL freely. After having it revised as well as reviewed by two interview experts, we ensured it was ready to conduct. The final version, after modification, is as follows:

1. Is there any relationship between assessment and instruction?
2. Is there any relationship between assessment and institution improvement?
3. How do you rate your knowledge about theoretical aspects of assessment and testing concepts?
4. What do you know about scoring and decision making based on scores?
5. What do you know about interpreting the results of the tests?
6. Do you have any knowledge about the relevant legal regulations for assessment in your local area?

7. Can the teacher's collaboration with learners affect learners' performances?
8. You can make any final points about the assessment.

Of course, some ad hoc questions were also asked in the middle of the main questions to help the interviewees express themselves more freely.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire participants were all English language teachers. They all were selected based on convenient sampling selection. Some of them were accessed via social networks or their email address. And some of them were handed the print copy of the questionnaire in person. Afterward, the completed questionnaires were collected and underwent the procedure of sorting, coding, and being entered into the SPSS software application to be analyzed.

And in terms of the interview, teachers and university professors were selected and interviewed in their offices and workplaces. The interviews were recorded by a voice recorder, each lasting from 15 to 21 minutes. Later on, they were transcribed, sorted and coded.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire from among 379 questionnaires that had been answered, only 309 had appropriately been completed. Those with mistakes or deficiencies were discarded. Then the questionnaires were numbered and sorted out. Afterward, naming and coding were done for the Likert scales to make them ready to be entered into the SPSS Software. Then, all the data from the questionnaires was loaded on the SPPS Software sheets for preliminary data sorting and analysis to be conducted.

Interview After semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded; they were all transcribed and written into the Microsoft word 2013. Then, for data reduction and clustering, the basic coding, or open

coding process was done. Having read up through the complete transcripts, the researchers singled out similar language and content, and put them into the same categories, forming the initial thematic grouping. This primary classification was further subjected to scrutiny to establish more inter-relevance among the categories, with the irrelevant inputs being eliminated. Thereby, the initial themes were discovered. They were about 60 themes, which were further studied and categorized to identify and label similar units of meaning. This led to the identification of thematic patterns and, finally, to the emergence of 19 inter-related themes. This classification, further, underwent more meticulous scrutiny to narrow the themes down, which ultimately led to a general two-fold categorization. They include (1) the role of assessment with eight subcategories, and (2) assessment-related knowledge and expertise, with eight subcategories.

Results

The questionnaire results in Table 7, indexed in appendix 2, reveal teachers' perceptions of LAL in terms of the frequency and percentage. Generally, the results of the table show that Iranian teachers, with different educational degrees and with various teaching experiences, advocated the notion of assessment in their classroom theoretically. In other words, LAL is of concern to Iranian L2 (English) teachers. To be more precise, over half of the respondents agreed that, generally, assessment concepts and principles are essential to be known by L2 teachers. Besides, more specifically, knowledge about 'language assessment' was considered to be necessary for language teachers.

Moreover, a slim majority agreed that 'technical assessment skills' should be possessed by language teachers. Additionally, being well-versed in local practices of assessment as well as in decision making based on assessment results was reiterated by half of the respondents. Finally, socio-cultural values such as the role of collaboration between teachers and

students in assessment received the agreement of a vast majority of the participants.

To answer the secondary research questions, statistical procedures were employed. The first one in order was to investigate any possible differences between male and female teachers in terms of their LAL. Table 8 represents the data in this regard.

Table 8.

Descriptive Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
LAL	Male	106	28.2207	3.74560	.36380
	Female	203	29.1523	3.58685	.25175

As the results in Table 8 show, the mean and standard deviation of the two groups are (M= 28.2207, SD=3.74560) for males and (M= 29.1523, SD= 3.58685) for females respectively. The results do not show a considerable difference among the two groups in their values in the LAL questionnaire. However, an Independent sample T-Test was conducted to investigate the exact difference between the two groups (see Table 9).

Table 9.

The Difference between Males and Females in LAL

	Levine's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
LAL Equal variances assumed	.175	.676	-2.135	307	.034	-.93166	.43642	-1.79042	-.07290
Equal variances not assumed			-2.106	205.178	.036	-.93166	.44241	-1.80392	-.05940

As Table 9 shows, there is a statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of their values in LAL questionnaire, (M= 28.2207, SD=3.74560) for male and (M= 29.1523, SD= 3.58685), t (307) = -2.135, $p <.034$ (two-tailed). This means that females are better in terms of LAL.

A series of One-Way between-groups Analysis of Variance was conducted to explore the differences among age, educational degree, teaching experience, and workplace, and LAL, as measured by the LAL questionnaire. The results of this appear in Table ten below.

Table 10.

The results of ANOVA for age, degree, experience, and workplace

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age	Between Groups	205.243	213	.964	13.731	.000
	Within Groups	6.667	95	.070		
	Total	211.909	308			
Degree	Between Groups	106.249	213	.499	2.060	.000
	Within Groups	23.000	95	.242		
	Total	129.249	308			
Experience	Between Groups	390.327	213	1.833	13.391	.000
	Within Groups	13.000	95	.137		
	Total	403.327	308			
Work Place	Between Groups	138.133	213	.649	1.790	.001
	Within Groups	34.417	95	.362		
	Total	172.550	308			

There was a statistically significant difference at the $p< .05$ level in LAL values of participants with different ages: $F (4, 305) = 13.731$, $p =$

.000. Besides, there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in LAL values of participants with different educational degrees: F (3, 306) = 2.060, p = .000. Furthermore, a statistically significant difference was observed at the $p < .05$ level in LAL values of participants with different teaching experiences: F (3, 306) = 13.391, p = .000. Finally, there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in LAL values of participants with different workplace: F (3, 306) = 1.790, p = .000.

Interview

The classification of interview data led to the emergence of the themes in two general categorizations. They include the role of assessment with eight subcategories and assessment-related knowledge and expertise, with eight subcategories.

Starting with the first central theme that is the "role of assessment", the first subcategory is "assessment as the determinant of learners' weakness". Here, the majority (20 teachers, 83 %) of teachers believed that assessment has as its primary mission tapping into the weakness of the learners, for instance:

● " … assessment shows learners' weakness".

Some contended that assessment could also show teachers' weakness:

● … The assessment shows teacher's weakness in teaching".

The second subcategory, "monitoring role of assessment", as well, was proposed by almost the majority (20 teachers, 80 %) of teachers. Here, the respondents unanimously held the view that assessment has the role of monitoring the teachers, programs, goals, and on the whole, the system. According to them:

● " … Assessment monitors what goes on in classes", and, "… it controls the system quality…"

The third subcategory was " retrospective outlook vs. prospective outlook on assessment". From among 15 teachers pointing to this

dichotomy, six thought that assessment is of retrospective value, while the other nine assumed that assessment is prospective. The first group mentioned that:

● " … The assessment provides feedback to teachers and learners, showing what has been learned".

However, those with a prospective outlook contended that:

● " …If an assessment is done well, it can help plan for the next phases of instruction".

About half of the teachers spoke of "emphasis on oral tests", that is the fourth subcategory. They believed:

● " … The oral assessment is more important than the written one".

Some also made a distinction between oral and written test, suggesting that:

● " …In the oral exams, I am subjective; I have some personal criteria for myself, such as fluency, accuracy."

The fifth subcategory was " the attitudinal difference between the classroom and final exams". A bit less than half the respondents, 9, maintained that they look at and act upon the classroom and final exams differently. Considering final exams' being crucial, they reiterated:

● " …For quizzes and mid-term evaluation, I develop tests. But, for final exams, I adopt".

However, some considered classroom assessment more critical, for instance:

● "…If we do formative assessment, it will be more useful for the learners because it will be the continuation of learning ".

The sixth subcategory centers on "assessment and motivation". About one-third of the teachers, 7, emphasized that assessment enhances learners' motivation. They stated that:

● " … Assessment increases learner motivation".

"Assessment and learning", pointed out by six teachers, was the seventh subcategory. They held the idea that learning can benefit from assessment by saying:

● " … Assessment should be a tool to improve learner's learning, not judging them".

According to the eighth subcategory, "assessment and teaching", assessment can have both positive and negative influences on teaching and teaching methodology. The respondents contended that:

● " … Washback effects still exist".

The second central theme was " Assessment-related knowledge and expertise", under which eight subcategories fall. There, the first subcategory was " Statistical knowledge and expertise". Almost all the interview respondents (22 teachers, 91 %) reiterated that assessment and testing need being well-versed in statistics on the part of an LT saying:

● " … to interpret the results of tests, especially in terms of objective tests, and LT needs to have statistical knowledge".

The next subcategory deals with the "importance of knowing assessment's theoretical aspects", on which 19 teachers (79 %) expressed their agreement. They thought that familiarity with theoretical aspects of assessments and testing concepts, along with psychometric aspects of language assessment is necessary for an LT, which they admitted they lack, stating:

● " … Knowing them is important, but I have partial familiarity with them as a result of having passed a course in TEFL MA studies".

Based on the third subcategory, "scoring (subjectivity vs. objectivity)", more than half of the interviewees, 15 (62.5 %), believed that " an acceptable level of familiarity with scoring norms is needed", reporting that:

● " …Due to their subjective nature, productive skills need more knowledge of scoring norms, than do receptive skills".

" Need for extra attention to assessment " was the fourth subcategory 14 teachers, 58 %, pointed out. According to them:

● " … There is an urgent need for extra attention to assessment", and for an "assessment department in any institution".

"Non-application of assessment theoretical knowledge", the fifth subcategory, was pointed to by six (one fourth) teachers, saying that they did not use their theoretical knowledge practically. The reasons they presented were:

● " … this is (merely) theoretical knowledge, and is not applicable".

The sixth subcategory was "Impossibility of assessment". Three teachers believed that valid assessment, due to its being subjective, more or less, is not possible, arguing that:

● " … Knowledge evaluation is a subjective issue, not an objective one; therefore, assessment is not possible in its true sense".

The next subcategory, the seventh one, was " Teacher's needlessness of assessment knowledge and practice" mentioned by two teachers (8 %). They considered assessment as separated from teaching and so nonessential for the teacher. They said:

● " … If the institution gives you merely the role of a teacher, and not that of an assessor, then, it is not needed for the teacher to know and practice assessment''.

The eighth subcategory refers to the "Different nature of assessment L2", pointed out to by two teachers (8 %), that is one-twelfth of the respondents. They assumed that an L2 differs from other subjects in term of assessment, reporting that:

● " … Language assessment is different from other subjects' assessment; it is because here, both the content and the medium of assessing are unfamiliar to the learners".

Discussion

Questionnaire

Generally, the results reveal that Iranian teachers with different educational degrees and various teaching experiences agree that assessment is quite critical in their classrooms. Their tendency in choosing the items *agree* and *strongly agree* for most of the questions of the questionnaire indicates that the significance of assessment and its implications are established in the Iranian EFL context. This perception of assessment-related issues has been reiterated in the literature too. For instance, Munoz, Palacio, and Escobar (2012) found out that the majority of EFL teachers believed that assessment contributes to teaching and learning.

Regarding the present questionnaire, which was based on Taylor's model, seven main categories were extracted.

For the first category, which comprised the first five questions, the majority of teachers agreed that the theoretical knowledge of the language, language learning, and teaching is essential for all L2 teachers. This conforms to Taylor's model (2013, p. 410) because she embeds knowledge of language theory and pedagogy as the main components of teachers' LAL. However, she considers this kind of expertise in the second and fourth-degrees of priority for an L1 teacher, whereas in this research, teachers believed it is more important.

Regarding the second category, the majority, that is, up to 96% percent of the responses, chose either 'agree' or 'strongly agree.' This shows that the majority of teachers believed that an LT must have general knowledge about assessment. This knowledge encompasses the second level and an important one in Taylor's model.

As for the third category, generally, up to 87 % of the responses pointed to the fact that assessment specific knowledge is vital for an L2 teacher. Likewise, this kind of knowledge is critical, and in the second level of importance in Taylor's model.

Within the next category, up to 90% of the responses indicated that an L2 teacher should enjoy specialized knowledge of assessment. This again somewhat conforms to Taylor's model since she considers technical skills in the third level of priority.

The fifth category encompassed four questions. For only one question, the majority of responses, that is, 85 %, indicated that an L2 teacher should have knowledge about and expertise in rating scales, correction methods, and scoring procedures. However, regarding the other three questions, there was less agreement among them. This one somehow becomes a bit distanced from Taylor's claim since she says scoring and decision making is at the first level of importance for an L2 teacher.

Questions 27 and 28 elicited the data for the sixth category. With 55 % 'agree' and 17 % 'strongly agree' indicating that nearly two-thirds of the majority believed that L2 teachers should have familiarity with the local norms of assessment. This conforms to Taylor's model because she considers familiarity with the local norms as the third level of importance.

Finally, the last category covered socio-cultural values. Questions 29 to 32 included this category. A vast majority, more than 80 %, agreed that socio-cultural values are essential in language assessment. Correctly, item 30 received the most 'Strongly Agree' choices, showing that teachers care about the role of collaboration between teachers and students in assessment. However, in Taylor's model, this category comes in the third level of importance.

Interview

The interview's thematic coding and classification underwent an in-depth analysis to find commonalities and differences among the respondents' ideas; to see whether the findings agree or disagree with the findings in the literature, as well as to find some new lines of thinking contributing to the field of LAL.

Role of Assessment

Assessment as the determinant of learners' weakness. What was unanimously mentioned by 21 teachers, i.e., more than 87 %, was that assessment is done to reveal the weakness of the learners. Other studies also have shown that assessment tries to tap into both learners' strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Jones (2009) contends that the assessment seeks to find both strengths and weaknesses. However, narrowing down the role of the assessment to merely discovering learners' weakness seems to make teachers inclined more towards giving diagnostic tests. The reason, according to Zhao (2013), might be the fact that *" diagnostic tests are more likely to focus on weaknesses than on strengths*" (p. 365).

The monitoring role of assessment. Twenty respondents, 83 %, contended that assessment fulfills a monitoring role. Within the literature as well, the same idea has been proposed. In the pamphlet prepared by Nuffield Foundation (2018), seeking to investigate the role of teachers in assessment, we read: " In the context of education, "monitoring" refers to changes in levels of pupil achievement, in the provision or teaching " (p. 11). Furthermore, in terms of system monitoring, also we read:" the purpose of …assessment …is to inform policy and practice decisions" (p. 11). We prefer to call this, dichotomously, retrospective outlook versus prospective outlook on assessment. When an assessment is a retrospective, it provides feedback to both teacher and student, whereas, being of retrospective nature, it contributes to programming the following courses of action. Both of these views have been emphasized in the literature by the experts as the two main functions of assessment. For instance, White, Eddy (2009) point out seven parameters based on one of which " (assessment helps) to provide appropriate feedback to students (p. 7)", that is, retrospective outlook. Moreover, in terms of prospective outlook, they say assessment helps teachers "… make appropriate instructional modifications to help students improve" (p. 7).

Emphasis on oral tests. Half of the respondents, i.e., 12 teachers, expressed some kind of emphasis over oral tests. They said it might be due to their knowing the students in advance. Ahmed et al. (1999) suggested that in oral tests since the teachers already know their students, they know what they are expecting from their students, and even they can give them prompts if the learners need help (p. 4). Furthermore, since some of our interviewees said that they act upon their intuition in oral tests and scoring procedures, we might conclude that this reliance on intuition might relieve them of following meticulous processes in written exams.

Attitudinal difference between the classroom and final exams. From among the respondents, 37 percent made a sharp distinction between the classroom and final exams. The distinction between what is technically called formative versus summative assessment has been proposed since the 1960s (Shavelson et al., 2008). However, no apparent priority has been set for either of them. Instead, they are related to each other. In fact, as Lia Plakans and Atta Gebril (2015) put it, "summative and formative assessments that inform each other are the most effective and expedient" (p. 4). Therefore, that kind of underestimating formative and classroom assessment in terms of teacher's knowledge and expertise might be a severe threat to the totality of learners' assessment.

Assessment and motivation. Thirty percent reiterated that when the learner knows his/her areas of weakness and strength, they will become motivated to continue. This is confirmed in some studies. For instance, Eddy White (2009), an assessment literate teacher, is the one who can engineer an active classroom assessment environment, which leads to reinforcing student motivation to learn (p. 3). Similarly, on a grounder scale, Fulcher holds that one of the main reasons for an increasing emphasis on assessment in the 21st century is that it "(can)increase learners' motivation through the establishment of a culture of success" (p.2).

Assessment and learning. One-fourth believed that assessment has positive effects on learning if the teachers can create a positive picture of the assessment. In the first place, assessment is said to be the index of learning. As Berry (2008) puts it, "because learning depends on assessment, it cannot occur in the absence of the feedback which assessment provides" (p.1). Furthermore, Stiggins (1999) questions the idea that intimidation by assessment will bring about more success. He casts doubt on the conventional wisdom that the best way to create more considerable effort on the part of the learners is to intimidate them from getting low scores on tests. Besides, Brindley (2001, p. 127) suggests that "teachers see assessment as an activity which is integrated into the curriculum to improve learning, rather than a 'one-off' summative event."

Assessment and teaching. Around 25 percent believed that assessment and teaching could be both positively and negatively related, namely positive and negative washback. Many studies report the same. As one example, Bass (1993) reported studies of the effects of assessment on classroom teaching. In these studies, it was found that when teachers used alternative approaches to assessment, they also changed their teaching. To be more precise, about positive washback, one can refer to what Turner (2014) says "the ideal situation in an education system is when the curriculum, teaching, and testing are synchronized, and teachers (and other stakeholders) work for 'positive washback'" (p. 105). Our respondents also referred to the negative washback as being detrimental to teaching. In fact, according to Brown (2004), many language educators believe that tests have adverse washback effects on the learning and teaching of languages. Besides, according to Loumbourdi (2014), " negative washback is usually observed when inevitable disorientation of the objectives of a course takes place" (p23).

Assessment-related knowledge

Out of the interview data, the second extracted central theme was 'assessment-related knowledge and expertise,' out of which nine sub-themes were derived. The sub-themes will be discussed below.

Statistical knowledge and expertise. In fact, in terms of statistical knowledge, 91 % believed in the necessity of this knowledge for LTs, although mostly, they did not know or did not express why and how statistics can be of help in language testing. Their reiteration, i.e., statistical knowledge, is necessary, conforms to many previous studies, one of which is what Vivien Berry and Barry O'Sullivan (2016) reported in the British Council teachers' survey. In their research, among the ten topics requested most for further training, using basic statistics to analyze the tests was referred to. In terms of statistics, our respondents also said that testing and assessment are difficult due to the mathematical and statistical concepts and terms. Many teachers around the world have witnessed such difficulty. Concerning statistics, Vogt & Dina Tsagari (2014) did a survey, questioning 853 teachers via a questionnaire and 63 teachers by interview. According to them, "using statistics" seemed to be a much neglected LAL aspect because the majority of the respondents (60.9 %) said they had no training in this area (p. 383).

Importance of knowing the theoretical assessment aspects: This theme came up with two primary expressions by the respondents, who comprised 91 percent or 22 teachers. In the first place, they all asserted that enjoying this knowledge is essential. Literature also supports this notion. For instance, Vogt & Tsagari (2014) emphasize that for a majority of LAL's related proficiency, " a basis of theoretical knowledge" is needed (p. 377). The second point the interviewees reported was that although theoretical knowledge is essential for L2 teachers, the majority of them are destitute of it completely, having only partial familiarity with it. This also is confirmed by a host of previous studies (Vogt and Tsagari, 2014; Tsagari

and Vogt, 2017) that English teachers mostly suffer from a sound perception of LAL.

Scoring (subjectivity vs. objectivity): Around 62 % of the respondents talked about scoring, referring to the subjectivity and objectivity. Most of them believed that due to their subjective nature, productive skills (speaking and writing) require more knowledge and expertise in terms of scoring. According to Armes and Popal (2016), " Some skills must be assessed qualitatively. Writing, speaking, and listening tests rely on subjective judgments to determine Performance. Teachers need to make sure that their subjective judgments are reliable and fair" (p. 5). Our respondents also reiterated that avoiding being biased and opinionated in scoring subjective tests is a challenge for them.

Need for extra attention to assessment. Fifty-eight percent of those who were interviewed indicated that assessment and its related issues are not given the due attention they deserve, which is confirmed by the prior studies. A teacher's assessment literacy and its vital role in meeting the objectives of teaching and learning (Malone, 2013) are neglected. Within the Chinese context, Jin (2010) also reiterates that measurement procedures suffer due to attention throughout the country. Furthermore, the interviewees also expressed a need for a uniform system of assessment. This, of course, somehow, goes against what the literature tells us. Many believe that the aim of the assessment is tightly related to its context. The context determines the purpose. As O'Loughlin (2006) puts it, different contexts require different assessment-related concerns and measures.

Impossibility of assessment. Three interviewees mentioned that they were not optimistic about the feasibility of assessment knowledge. They thought that evaluating L2 knowledge is a subjective issue, not an objective one, which could not be measured. As Tedick (2003) Says, "language is by its very nature subjective" (p. 24). In fact, some aspects of L2 assessment are really subjective; for example, he asserts: "performance measures that involve quality judgments of students' ability to use

language are admittedly difficult, subjective, and time-consuming" (p. 25). However, what is confirmed in the literature is that due to subjectivity, assessment is demanding and challenging, not, as the respondents asserted, impossible.

Teacher's needlessness of assessment knowledge and practice: Eight percent of the teachers believed the LTs do not necessarily need assessment knowledge and practice. The reason they proposed to support their claim was that there should be an assessor assisting the teacher with the assessment procedure, in which case there is no need for the teacher to bother to know anything about the assessment and how to practice it. Of course, this is not supported by the literature. Conversely, as Sheehan and Munro (2017) put it: " It is not appropriate to consider assessment as divorced from other types of knowledge which teachers need to have to be good teachers" (p. 8). Contrary to our respondents' opinion, the whole story of LAL centers on equipping LTs with high competence in assessment.

Different natures of assessment in L2. The last theme was that of the difference between non-language subjects and L2 in terms of assessment. This idea, having been pointed out to by eight percent of the respondents, was backed up by one reason: in L2 contexts, both the content and the medium of assessment are unfamiliar. The basis of LAL is the very fact that, besides knowing general information about educational assessment, an LT should be well-versed about the language-specific tenets in terms of assessment. This vital role of LTs has been emphasized in the literature. For instance, Vogt and Tsagari (2014) mention that: "… Teachers' language testing (literacy) and assessment practice have taken on new importance in educational systems on a global scale" (p. 385).

Conclusion

Both the interview and questionnaire in the present research were intended to investigate the Iranian English teachers' attitudes to and perceptions of language assessment literacy (LAL). According to the

results from both instruments, the teachers, generally, reiterated the role of assessment and having adequate knowledge of it by L2 teacher.

Questionnaire findings reveal that Iranian teachers with different educational degrees, ages, genders, and various teaching experiences accepted the vital notion of assessment in their classroom. Their tendency to choose '*agree'* and '*strongly agree'* for most of the questions of the questionnaire indicates that the significance of assessment and its implications are established in Iranian EFL contexts. Most of the responses confirmed Taylor's model (2013) upon which the questionnaire had been developed.

Therefore, within the findings of both tools, many instances are confirmed by the literature. For instance, in terms of the role of assessment in promoting learning and teaching, both came up with the same notion of agreement. Muñoz et al. (2012) came up with the same results in their research. Besides, in terms of the effect of the teacher/ leaners relationship on assessment, both research methods came up with the same results; that is, the interviewees and questionnaire respondents reiterated that the better the relationship, the more fruitful the assessment. At last, in terms of scoring and interpretation of test results, in both methods, the participants believed that such knowledge and expertise is of great importance for an L2 teacher. Furthermore, they both reiterated the importance of knowing the theoretical assessment aspects. This is in line with what Scarino (2013) says when he says teachers' theoretical knowledge of LAL is required on their way towards professionalism.

The interview data additionally suggest that oral tests are considered more critical and challenging by the teachers, who try their best to avoid subjectivity as much as possible. Of course, oral tests' being challenging for L2 teachers has always been discussed within the literature (Sundqvist et al. 2017). The interview, moreover, yielded the data connoting that final exams are more challenging for teachers than classroom tests; therefore, they prefer to adopt the exams from available sources. However, we think

that whether this concern about the importance of final exams should be relieved by adopting the so-called available tests seems to be a validity threat.

However, there are some instances of in-conformity between what the teachers chose in the questionnaire and what they explained in the interview. One of them is the application of the assessment of theoretical knowledge. Although the majority of the teachers contended, in the questionnaire, that L2 teachers should know and act upon assessment theories, about 25% of the interviewees believed that theoretical knowledge is not applicable. This somewhat runs contrary to what Taylor depicts in his model since she considers knowledge of theory in the second level of importance for L2 teachers in the domain of assessment. Another point of departure, again based on the interview data, is that assessment, as such, is not possible. Some teachers believe that due to its subjective nature, assessing learners' learning is impossible. It could be somehow supported by what *Kriauzienė* (2011) believes when he says that objective evaluation is a hard task even with well-codified measurement systems. Another issue mentioned by the teachers was that testing and assessment are difficult due to their mathematical concepts and statistics. This is what has been reported by many researchers throughout the world. For instance, in the study done by Fulcher (2012), it was found that "developing a conceptual understanding of statistics" was what most teachers wanted to gain.

Overall, the evidence from the existing data in the study showed that LAL is of concern to Iranian L2 EFL teachers. Comparing the results gained via the two research tools, it can be seen that, although the teachers admit the importance of LAL within the framework of L2 education, they also agree that their current level of both knowledge and practice in terms of LAL is not ideal. A considerable amount of literature has been published on the same challenge that L2 teachers face (Tsagari et al., 2017). Although the number of interviewees (24) might now allow

generalization, the insights derived out of the interview, as well as the questionnaire, help us to think of some implications of the findings to future research into this area along with L2 teacher education. The broad implication of the present study is that assessment literacy needs to be considered more seriously in both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. Secondly, based on what the majority of teachers contented (66% in the interview and 90% in the questionnaire), the relationship between the teacher and the learners can have both positive and negative impacts on assessment. Therefore, this seemingly ignored part of the teaching profession should also be re-emphasized and taken care of.

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Appendix

1. Questionnaire

Dear respondent:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this vital survey investigating L2 teachers' assessment literacy. This survey should only take around 20 minutes to complete. Be assured that all answers you will provide will be kept in strict confidentiality.

1. An L2 teacher should know the content and substance of language.

2 An L2 teacher should know the underlying constructs of language skills as defined by the experts.

3. An L2 teacher should know learners' variables (like cognitive/affective…) as well as the relationship between learner variables and assessment.

4. An L2 teacher should know learning, learning mechanisms, information processing.

5. An L2 teacher should know the theories & methodologies of language teaching.

6. Assessment is one of the main factors to determine the quality of instruction.

7. An assessment provides information for teachers to determine the appropriateness of the content.

8. An assessment provides information for teachers to determine the pace of the lesson.

9. An assessment helps teachers monitor students' progress, achievement, strength, and weaknesses.

10. An assessment provides information on the effectiveness of particular teaching methods.

11. Assessment results can lead to institution improvement.

12. An assessment helps students monitor their progress and understanding.

13. An L2 teacher should know the theories, concepts, and principles of language testing and assessment.

14. An L2 teacher should know the concepts of - Reliability - Validity - Practicality – Washback...

15. An L2 teacher should know the different types of goals of language assessment (e.g., proficiency, achievement, diagnostic).

16. An L2 teacher should know alternative assessment techniques (e.g., portfolio assessment).

17. An L2 teacher should know how to select appropriate methods, items, tasks, or tests.

 18. An L2 teacher should know the ethical considerations in a testing (such as fairness, bias …) for a particular assessment goal.

19. An L2 teacher should know and apply the standards of assessment tasks so that students can demonstrate that they have reached the intended learning objectives.

20. An L2 teacher should know and consider the psychometric aspects of language assessment (such as standardization of test construction and design).

21. An L2 teacher should know the measurement challenges (such as measurement error) and try to minimize them.

22. An L2 teacher should know and apply the known procedures in language test design.

23. An L2 teacher should know the rating scales, correction methods, and scoring procedures.

24. An L2 teacher should know how to analyze test data (both qualitative and quantitative).

25. An L2 teacher should know how to make reasonable inferences from the data gathered.

26. An L2 teacher should know how to communicate assessment results and decisions to students and others.

27. An L2 teacher should know the relevant legal regulations for assessment in their local area.

28. An L2 teacher should know the assessment traditions in their local context.

29. The learning environment, as well as the interaction between the learners and teachers, affects the assessment.

30. Teacher's collaboration with learners affects learners' performances during their learning.

31. The teacher's position as a judge affects learners' final performances.

32. The assessment reflects the interconnection between the social and cultural environment of learners.

2. Tables

Table 1.
Participants' Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	106	34.3	34.3	34.3
Female	203	65.7	65.7	100.0
Total	309	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.
Participants' Age

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

-20	4	1.3	1.3	1.3
21-30	73	23.6	23.6	24.9
31-40	101	32.7	32.7	57.6
+40	131	42.4	42.4	100.0
Total	309	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.

Participants' Teaching Experience

Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
-3	45	14.6	14.6	14.6
4-5	41	13.3	13.3	27.8
6-10	27	8.7	8.7	36.6
+10	196	63.4	63.4	100.0
Total	309	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.

Participants' Qualification

Degree	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
B.A	180	58.3	58.3	58.3
M.A.	103	33.3	33.3	91.6
PhD	26	8.4	8.4	100.0
Total	309	100.0	100.0	

Table 5.

Participants' Field of Study

Major	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
English	291	94.2	94.2	94.2
Non-English	18	5.8	5.8	100.0
Total	309	100.0	100.0	

Table 6.

Participants' Working Place

Workplace	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
School	150	48.5	48.5	48.5
Language Institute	106	34.3	34.3	82.8
University	53	17.2	17.2	100.0
Total	309	100.0	100.0	

Table 7.

Teachers' Perceptions of LAL

	SD		D		UD		A		SA	
	Fre	Per	Fre	Per	Fre	Per	Fre	Per	Fre	Per
Q1	6	1.9	3	1.0	9	2.9	118	38.2	173	56.0
Q2	2	.6	3	1.0	28	9.1	164	53.1	112	36.2
Q3	3	1.0	6	1.9	28	9.1	126	40.8	146	47.2
Q4	5	1.6	2	.6	18	5.8	119	38.5	165	53.4
Q5	2	.6	2	.6	40	12.9	126	40.8	139	45.0
Q6	3	1.0	2	.6	21	6.8	182	58.9	101	32.7
Q7	0	0	7	2.3	21	6.8	167	54.0	114	36.9
Q8	3	1.0	2	.6	33	10.7	177	57.3	94	30.4
Q9	3	1.0	6	1.9	10	3.2	124	40.1	166	53.7
Q10	4	1.3	9	2.9	38	12.3	186	60.2	71	23.0
Q11	6	1.9	11	3.6	44	14.2	182	58.9	65	21.0
Q12	4	1.3	2	.6	29	9.4	162	52.4	111	35.9
Q13	10	3.2	3	1.0	29	9.4	147	47.6	119	38.5
Q14	6	1.9	2	.6	42	13.6	159	51.5	100	32.4
Q15	4	1.3	6	1.9	28	9.1	164	53.1	107	34.6
Q16	4	1.3	14	4.5	47	15.2	170	55.0	74	23.9
Q17	6	1.9	2	.6	10	3.2	129	41.7	162	52.4
Q18	4	1.3	3	1.0	38	12.3	140	45.3	124	40.1
Q19	8	2.6	5	1.6	21	6.8	172	55.7	103	33.3
Q20	8	2.6	8	2.6	42	13.6	176	57.0	75	24.3
Q21	9	2.9	5	1.6	28	9.1	176	57.0	91	29.4
Q22	4	1.3	2	.6	47	15.2	177	57.3	79	25.6
Q23	10	3.2	2	.6	26	8.4	161	52.1	110	35.6
Q24	4	1.3	5	1.6	69	22.3	143	46.3	88	28.5
Q25	7	2.3	4	1.3	52	16.8	145	46.9	101	32.7
Q26	7	2.3	6	1.9	37	12.0	150	48.5	109	35.3
Q27	4	1.3	2	.6	78	25.2	171	55.3	54	17.5
Q28	4	1.3	13	4.2	84	27.2	153	49.5	55	17.8
Q29	4	1.3	7	2.3	13	4.2	127	41.1	158	51.1
Q30	7	2.3	2	.6	13	4.2	97	31.4	190	61.5
Q31	4	1.3	12	3.9	43	13.9	143	46.3	107	34.6
Q32	9	2.9	31	10.0	69	22.3	143	46.3	57	18.4