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## **Probing into EFL Teachers' Assessment Literacy and Teaching Experience: The Case of Native ESL and Non-native EFL Teachers\***

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### **Abstract**

The present study was an attempt to extend our knowledge on the perspectives of English language native and non-native teachers about assessment literacy. Furthermore, it was intended to find if there was any significant relationship between native and non-native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their experience. To achieve such goals, a mixed methods design was utilized. In the quantitative phase, Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory developed by Campbell and Mertler (2004) was utilized which consisted of five scenarios. Through a combination of availability sampling and snowball sampling procedures, the researcher either distributed the questionnaire among 100 native and non-native English teachers or sent it by E-mail to them. In the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview was selected as a qualitative tool for collecting data. To this end, 10 teachers volunteered to take part. Based on the quantitative findings, there was a positive relationship between native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their experience. However, there was not any significant relationship between non-native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their experience. Based on the qualitative results, seven codes were classified according to three themes, namely, assessment assumptions, assessment targets, and professional development. These seven codes were classroom observations, assessment consistency, formative assessments, summative assessment, higher-order thinking skills, lack of assessment literacy of coursework, and lack of technology assessment literacy. Thus, it is concluded that teachers should assume the role of classroom observation and consistency of the assessment as two major assumptions of assessment.

**Keywords:** assessment literacy, native teachers, non- native teachers, teaching experience.

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### **Introduction**

Assessment literacy is an important part of language assessment which enables teachers to evaluate teaching and learning. As stated by Popham (2004) and Stiggins (1991), numerous particular ideas have been proposed concerning what educators need to know to be known as assessment literate. Many researchers paid much more attention to and discussed the importance of assessment literacy for teachers. Newfields (2006) claimed that first of all, educators should recognize why language assessment literacy is significant because of three captivating reasons which are elaborated below.

The first suggestion was proposed by MacBeath and Galton (2004) as they believed that assessment is a well-known characteristic of many educational systems. They added that educators are expected to devote from ten percent to fifty percent of their work time on assessment-related activities. In the majority of educational centers, a considerable percentage of the budget was dedicated to formal testing. Considering this issue, it is essential to know how assessment decisions are made.

The second reason is the need for understanding of educational literature regarding assessment literacy. Truthfully, knowing the essential assessment conceptions is remarkably considered as a prerequisite for reading critically both specialized journals and numerous general articles in academic publications. Ignoring this radical point leads to the difficulty of assessing the evidences which supports or rejects any point described in an article.

The final suggestion which should be taken into account is that assessment literacy provides a situation in which educators can communicate their own classroom results with others. According to Hopkins (1985), in order to improve a community that fosters learning, teachers should share their inquiries with peers. In fact, teachers should become proficient at the fundamental basics of qualitative and quantitative inquiry in order to make classroom research more understandable for a wider audience. In addition, assessment literate specialists should spend time criticizing and analyzing their own

readings and sharing the consequences in ways that are theoretically conclusive.

Generally, the concept of “assessment literacy” has not been meticulously scrutinized in the context of Iran, and many teachers are not completely familiar with this concept and its related forms. One of the facets of assessment literacy that is largely, if not completely, ignored is the question of what skills and knowledge do language teachers need to be regarded as competent and qualified assessment practitioners? To put it another way, it goes without saying that classroom assessment is often regarded as a professional requirement analogous to other probable professional skills including content knowledge or classroom management. In fact, assessment literacy is a new concept which is dealt with in the language assessment domain and needs much more research studies to reach a better understanding of the issue since it might indicate the success or failure of a teacher, instructor, or tester on his/her career.

In addition, teachers are required to be adequately competent and knowledgeable in order to assess their learners and students. However, it is not completely clear and there is no comprehensive agreement on what these knowledge and competence are and how and to what extent they should be acquired. Furthermore, there is no agreement on the point that if native and non-native teachers should be equally competent in assessment literacy or not.

Consequently, the present study was an attempt to fill such a gap by seeking the perceptions of both English native and non-native teachers with respect to the assessment literacy while considering the experience of the teachers. In fact, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience?

2. Is there any significant relationship between non-native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience?
3. What are the perceptions of native and non-native English language teachers towards assessment literacy?

### **Literature Review**

Several researchers have conducted some studies on assessment literacy. For instance, in 1998, Bol, Stephenson, O'Connell, and Nunnery (1998) examined teachers' frequent uses of traditional and alternative assessment methods while considering their teaching experience. The sample of the study was 893 teachers in 34 schools. Following the analyses of the data, Bol, et al. (1998, p.11) found that "the most experienced teachers specified the use of alternative assessment more often than the least experienced teachers".

In the same year, Mertler (1998) led a study in order to scrutinize the current assessment practices of teachers in Ohio. To achieve this goal, 625 teachers from kindergarten through grade 12 were considered to take part in this study. Succeeding the analyses of the data, Mertler (1998) found that teachers did not pay attention to the statistical analyses of their assessment data. In addition, there were significant differences among teachers' teaching experience and their assessment practices.

In 2000, Alsarimi led a study in order to discover the classroom assessment practices of teachers in Oman. To accomplish this objective, 246 teachers from 112 schools in Oman took part in this study. By running the needed statistical analyses, Alsarimi (2000) found that there were not any significant differences between teacher's years of teaching experience and their classroom assessment practices.

King (2010) inspected the assessment literacy of teachers and administrators concerning the criterion-referenced tests. The sample consisted of 380 teachers and administrators (310 female and 70 male educators) practicing in the states of Alabama and Mississippi. The sampling method was stratified sampling. The researcher made use of

the Criterion-Referenced Assessment Questionnaire as the instrument of the study. By running the needed statistical analyses, King (2010) found that years of experience did not have a significant impact on a participants' performance of the criterion-referenced questionnaire.

Alkharusi (2011) explored teachers' self-perceived assessment skills while considering their demographic features. The population of this study was 213 Omani teachers from Muscat public schools. The researcher made use of a 25-item Self-Perceived Assessment Skills Scale as the instruments of the study. Following the analyses of the data, Alkharusi (2011, P.13) found that "there were significant differences on the self-perceived assessment skills pertaining to above-mentioned teachers' demographic characteristics".

Hailaya (2014) scrutinized teachers' assessment literacy and its possible effect on learner achievement and aptitude through the intervening variables at the teacher and learner levels. Besides, it was intended to check the influences of demographic variables as well. The sample of the study consisted of 582 teachers and 2,077 learners from the province of Tawi-Tawi, Philippines. Both quantitative method and qualitative method design were utilized in this study. Following the analyses of the data, Hailaya (2014) found that the elementary and secondary school instructors had moderately low assessment literacy. Additionally, learners largely demonstrated positive "perceptions of assessment" and positive "attitude towards assessment".

Additionally, Zolfaghari and Ashraf (2015) inspected the association between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment literacy and their teaching experience. The population of this study was 658 EFL teachers. By running the needed statistical analyses, Zolfaghari and Ashraf (2015) found that Iranian EFL teachers' assessment literacy and teaching experience were significantly correlated.

Xu and Brown (2017) scrutinized the assessment literacy level of English teachers and the effects of their demographic characteristics on assessment literacy performance. To accomplish these goals, 160 Chinese university English teachers took part in this study. By running

the needed statistical analyses, Xu and Brown (2017) found a basic level of assessment literacy in certain dimensions. Moreover, demographic characteristic did not have any substantial effect on teachers' assessment literacy performance.

All in all, the study attempted to investigate the assessment literacy among native and non-native English teachers while considering the experience of them, and the literature introduced some studies that have been conducted on teachers' assessment literacy during the last years. In fact, through presenting the previous studies and their results, the researcher intended to make the readers aware of the outcomes of the previous studies. Besides, the researcher could benefit from the provided information and got familiar with the design and procedure of the previous studies and benefited from them in developing the study. On the other hand, through studying the previous study, the researcher could be able to notice the gap in the literature and attempted to fill this gap.

## Method

### Participants

In order to gather the required data, 100 native and non-native English teachers from ESL (Brigham Young University, Seattle University, University of Pittsburgh, Maastricht University, Stockholm University, National University of Singapore, and University of Sydney) and EFL (Allameh Tabataba'i University, Safir Language Institute, and Islamic Azad University, branches of Shiraz, Marvdasht, and Tehran) contexts were picked out on the basis of a combination of availability sampling and snowball sampling procedures (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** Frequency of Native and Non-Native English Language Teachers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Native	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Non-Native	50	50.0	50.0	100.0

Total	100	100.0	100.0
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Moreover, the sample consisted of both male and female participants with at least about 5 years of teaching and assessment experience (see Tables 2 & 3). The main reason for the five-years teaching experience precondition was that the researcher ensured that they were adequately familiar with different assessment procedures so that the gathered data and results would be approached more reliably. Furthermore, the teachers were selected from different proficiency levels, that is, beginning, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels (in terms of their teaching experience and also a proficiency test).

**Table 2.** Frequency of Male and Female English Language Teachers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	54	54.0	54.0	54.0
Valid Female	46	46.0	46.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 demonstrated that 54 percent of the participants (54 persons) were male and 46 percent of them (46 persons) were female.

**Table 3.** Frequency of English Language Teachers and Their Years of Teaching

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1-5 Years	7	7.0	7.0	7.0
Valid 6-10 Years	19	19.0	19.0	26.0
Valid 11-15 Years	27	27.0	27.0	53.0
Valid 16-20 Years	20	20.0	20.0	73.0
Valid 21-25 Years	13	13.0	13.0	86.0
Valid 26-30 Years	9	9.0	9.0	95.0
Valid More than 30 Years	5	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 3, most of the teachers (27 teachers) had the experience between 11 to 15 years while only 5 teachers have taught English more than 30 years. Besides, 20 teachers had the experience between 16 to 20 years, 19 percent of them between 6 to 10 years, 13 percent between 21 to 25 years, 9 percent between 26 to 30 years, and 5 percent between 1 to 5 years.

### **Instruments**

In order to collect the data, two approaches were utilized in the collection of data. The first instrument of the present study was the Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory developed by Campbell and Mertler (2004) which consisted of five scenarios, each followed by seven questions. In other words, it consisted of 35 multiple-choice items that are given under the five classroom-based scenarios. Each scenario has seven items which are aligned to the used standards. Each item has four options containing one correct answer and three distractors.

Additionally, as the assessment literacy inventory was being applied to a new group of samples and in a different context, it was necessary to modify some of the scenarios and items to make it appropriate and useful. Henceforth, in modifying the scenarios and the items, some names and irrelevant situations were changed or rephrased to contextualize the Assessment Literacy Inventory. Besides, in rephrasing the inappropriate situations, the researcher ensured that the rephrased situations were parallel to the original scenarios to preserve the integrity of the instrument.

Moreover, to validate the instrument, the researcher consulted with three specialists in TEFL regarding the questions formulated in the questionnaire and the overall content validity. They unanimously agreed that the questionnaire is reasonably valid. Then, to check the internal reliability of the questionnaire concerning classroom assessment literacy, the questionnaire was piloted on fifty participants. The estimated reliability which was based on Cronbach's Alpha Level formula turned out to be  $\alpha = .79$  which shows a good level of conceptual relatedness among items. Also, according to Campbell and Mertler (2004), the reliability of the original instrument was (KR20).74.



Then, the researcher either distributed the questionnaire among the teachers or sent it by E-mail to them. A person's score on the scale is calculated by summing the number of responses the person gave, which was widely used in survey research. No time limit was set for taking this instrument so that the participants could take it carefully and without any negative feeling such as anxiety.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview to know about the perceptions of the participants on the classroom assessment literacy. 10 teachers volunteered (5 Native and 5 Non-native) to participate. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Interview times were offered to participants during working days only, before, during teacher planning time, or after student school hours.

In order to analyze the gathered data for the quantitative part, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were used by running the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). As for the qualitative part of the study, the perceptions of the participants were qualitatively interpreted and examined. Data were transcribed from the interview audiotape to a personal computer. The interview transcript was carefully read and sorted using an organized system in which thematic content analysis was utilized. Coding of data was performed in order to identify selected themes. (Creswell, 1998).

### Results

In order to answer research questions, the researcher at first explored the descriptive statistics of the two groups. Table 4 demonstrates the results, and descriptions related to the results are presented below.

**Table 4.** Group Statistics of Native and Non-Native Teachers' Perceptions of Assessment Literacy and Their Teaching Experience

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Native group	Total	50	.6554	.14721
	Experience	50	3.56	1.473
Non-Native group	Total	50	.5606	.17093
	Experience	50	3.64	1.675
Both groups	Total	100	.6080	.16571
	Experience	100	3.60	1.570

The analysis of data revealed that the mean score of native teachers was  $M=.65$  and the mean scores of non-native teachers was  $M=.56$ . Table 1 also revealed the standard deviation of each group which was  $SD= .14$  for native teachers and  $SD=.17$  for non-native teachers. Moreover, the mean of teaching experience in native group was  $M= 3.56$  while it was  $M=3.64$  in the non-native group.

With the aim of checking the statistically significant relationship between native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience, the researcher calculated the Pearson correlation coefficient. Table 5 exhibits the results, and descriptions related to the results below.

**Table 5.** Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Native Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Assessment Literacy and Their Teaching Experience

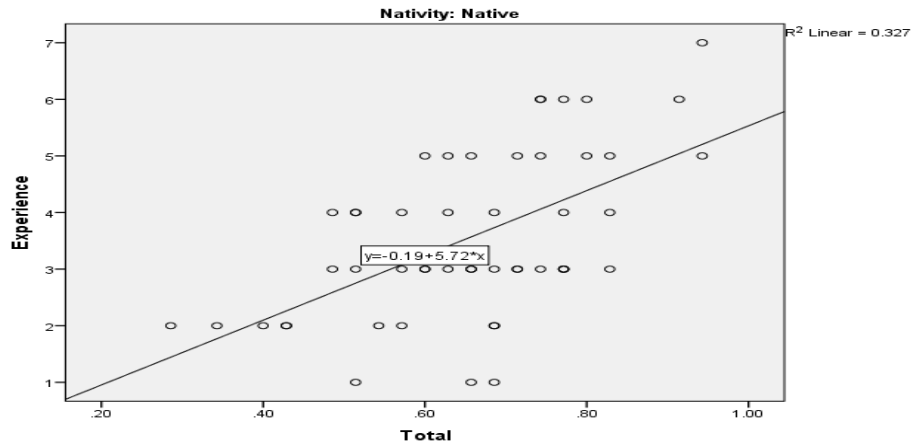
		Total	Experience
Total	Pearson Correlation	1	.572**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	50	50
Experience	Pearson Correlation	.572**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Nativity = Native

Based on the results of Table 5, there was a positive relationship between native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience. In fact, the correlation coefficient was  $.57$  and the significant value was less than  $0.01$ . Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a positive relationship between native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience,  $r = .57$ ,  $n = 50$ ,  $P < 0.0001$  with an effect size of  $.32$ , indicating 32 percent of shared variances between native teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experiences.

Then, to demonstrated the relation graphically, scatterplot was used to display the nature of the relationship between native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience. Figure 1 presented the results of scatterplot.



**Figure 1.** The Relationship Between Native English Language Teachers' Perspectives Regarding Assessment Literacy and Their Teaching Experience

The second research question specified to see if there is any statistically significant relationship between non-native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience. To analyze this question, the researcher employed Pearson correlation coefficient. Table 6 unveiled the results, and descriptions related to the results are offered below.

**Table 6.** Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Non-Native Teachers' Perspectives Regarding. Assessment Literacy and Their Teaching Experience

		Total	Experience
Total	Pearson Correlation	1	.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.876
	N	50	50
Experience	Pearson Correlation	.023	1

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.876	
	N	50	50

Nativity = Non-Native

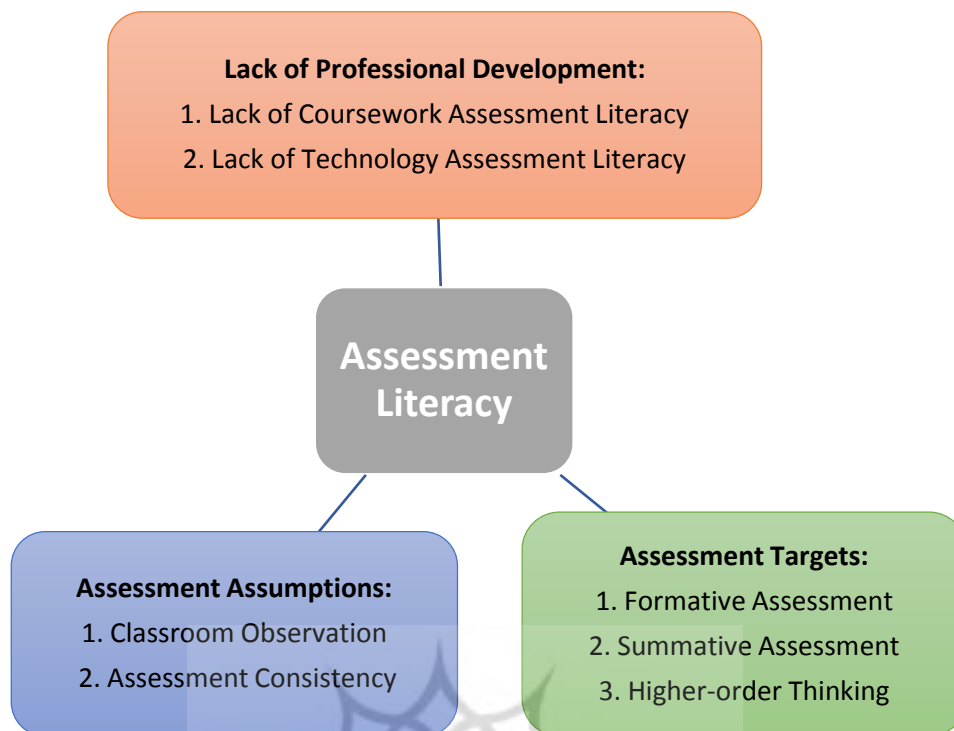
As demonstrated in Table 6, the correlation coefficient was 0.023 and the  $p$ -value (0.87) which was far above .01 indicating that there was not any significant relationship between non-native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience.

In order to assess the perceptions of native and non-native English language teachers concerning assessment literacy, the researcher evaluated the results of the interview. By analyzing the participants' responses to questions of the interview, the researcher extracted seven codes:

Classroom Observations,  
 Assessment Consistency,  
 Formative Assessments,  
 Summative Assessment,  
 Higher-Order Thinking Skills,  
 Lack of assessment literacy of coursework, and  
 Lack of Technology Assessment Literacy.

Furthermore, these codes are classified based on three main themes (see Figure 2):

Assessment Assumptions,  
 Assessment Targets, and  
 Lack of Professional Development.



**Figure 2.** Extracted Themes Regarding Assessment Literacy

With respect to the assumptions of assessment, there was considerable diversity in the perspectives of teachers concerning assessment. Two common codes which were extracted from teachers' perspectives were the *observation of the classroom* and *consistency of the assessment*. In fact, a majority of teachers believed that a teacher's observation of the classroom would typically be more precise than formal assessment. The following excerpt specified how the interviewee justified this idea:

*...to measure the students accurately, the teachers should not merely focus on formal assessments. They should be more dependent on reflections in improving a true assessment representation of a learners' capability.*

Moreover, most of the teachers maintained that assessment should be consistent and comprises the attainment of analogous consequences.

Indeed, an assessment process would be reflected to convey reliable consequences if evaluators measuring candidates against the same unit of proficiency in diverse contexts made analogous assessment decisions:

*...if a learner could not pass or cope with an assessment, then that assessment must be inherently imperfect.*

As for assessment targets, teachers often assessed basic knowledge and skills and typically did not consider and evaluate higher-order thinking practices. In addition, teachers claimed that they consider several valued educational consequences which are more important than assessing and they attempt to measure all of them and to even form a final grade:

*...I usually consider the scores of formative and summative assessments and also the students' willing to have cooperation and other non-achievement aspects such as being present in class and his or her determination as respected factors in determining a final grade.*

The third theme found in the subjects' interview data was the lack of professional development on matters of assessment. According to teachers' perspectives, lack of coursework assessment literacy and lack of technology assessment literacy were two main factors which hinder their professional development on matter of assessment. With respect to the lack of coursework assessment literacy, an interviewee claimed that:

*... In numerous pre-administration programs, the inclusion of evaluation proficiency in course work is inadequate and shallow, leaving graduates ill-equipped to successfully satisfy the needs of the present instructive condition.*

Furthermore, as for lack of technology assessment literacy, many teachers asserted that technology can be utilized in order to support actions including peer review to assist improve assessment literacy:

*...Offering online information concerning evaluation standards and marking rubrics and so on makes the data promptly available to learners.*

### **Discussion**

There was a strong positive relationship between native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience. Besides, there was 32 percent of shared variances between native teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experiences. In fact, native English language teachers' perceptions towards assessment literacy could be affected by their years of teaching experience since teachers' prior language teaching experience could be recognized as a factor which influences teachers' beliefs about assessment literacy. In other words, it could be claimed that by the increase of teaching experience of native English language teachers, their knowledge of assessment literacy increases, too.

The results are in line with Alkharusi (2011) who inspected teachers' self-perceived assessment skills while considering their demographic features. He found that "there was a statistically significant difference in the self-perceived assessment skills pertaining to teachers' teaching experience" (p.13). Similarly, Hailaya (2014) scrutinized teachers' assessment literacy and its possible effect on learner achievement and aptitude through the intervening variables at the teacher and learner levels. He found that longer teaching service/experience as determined by the number of years positively influenced teaching practices, including those related to structuring and student-oriented activities and assessments.

Additionally, in keeping with the findings, there was not any significant relationship between non-native English language teachers' perceptions regarding assessment literacy and their teaching experience. In fact, the results also showed that teaching experience could not correlate with the non-native teachers' viewpoint on assessment literacy. Indeed, the level of non-native teachers' years of teaching experience was not an indicator of their perceptions towards assessment literacy. In fact, it was expected that older teachers, who had

more experiences than younger teachers, had some different perceptions toward assessment literacy; however, they had the same perceptions.

The findings of this study are not in an agreement with Zolfaghari and Ashraf (2015) who scrutinized the association between Iranian (Non-native) EFL teachers' assessment literacy and their teaching experience. They found that "there was a highly significant positive relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment literacy and teaching experience" (p. 9). Likewise, Xu and Brown (2017) investigated the assessment literacy level of Chinese university English instructors and the impacts of their demographic features on assessment literacy presentation. They found that teaching experience did not have any effect on assessment literacy performance of Chinese university English teachers.

Furthermore, the purpose of the qualitative research question was to assess the perceptions of native and non-native English language teachers concerning assessment literacy. To accomplish this goal, 10 teachers volunteered to participate in the interview. Based on the results of the interview, seven codes were categorized based on three themes, namely, assessment assumptions, assessment targets, and professional development.

Based on the findings, teachers should assume the role of classroom observation and consistency of the assessment as two major assumptions of assessment. Besides, valid assessment should be designed in order to activate the higher-order thinking skills of the students. Moreover, Davidheiser (2013, p.7) claimed that "a lack of professional development within preparatory undergraduate and school-wide planning staff development seemed to limit the amount of collaboration needed for successful assessment literacy among teachers". The findings of this study were consistent with Davidheiser (2013) who examining high school instructors' level of assessment literacy with respect to the improvement and application of beneficial classroom assessments.



### Conclusion

On the basis of the findings, three conclusions can be drawn. First, native English language teachers' perceptions towards assessment literacy could be affected by their years of teaching experience since teachers' prior language teaching experience could be recognized as a factor which influences teachers' beliefs about assessment literacy. In other words, it could be claimed that by the increase of teaching experience of native English language teachers, their knowledge of assessment literacy increases, too. Second, teaching experience could not correlate with the non-native teachers' point of view on assessment literacy. Indeed, the level of non-native teachers' years of teaching experience was not an indicator of their perceptions towards assessment literacy. Third, teachers should assume the role of classroom observation and consistency of the assessment as two major assumptions of assessment. Besides, valid assessment should be designed in order to activate the higher-order thinking skills of the students.

The findings of this study have some implications. First, the importance of this study is doubled in EFL contexts including the present study (Iran) in that in most of these contexts the dominant approach of assessment is still in keeping with the traditional assessment in which assessment literacy of teachers is not drastically taken into consideration. However, to keep up with other developed countries (at least developed in the sense of education) the need to modify traditional assessment procedures and considering assessment literacy is strongly felt.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can immensely help stakeholders such as students, teachers, and policy makers as Stiggins (1995) claimed that being assessment literate is very fundamental for them in order to recognize the difference between reliable and unreliable assessment and to execute activities consistent with suitable assessment knowledge. Moreover, novice teachers can make use of the findings of this study to promote their understanding concerning how their assessment literacy can be improved.

In addition, teachers' knowledge about assessment types, procedures, and precepts might be a great help for them to achieve and complete their teaching mission successfully. Additionally, through being aware of effective assessment procedures, instructors would be able to recognize and document, owing to gathered learner data, whether or not suitable progress has been revealed by learners in the classroom. If restricted progress is verified by the learners, then the gathered data can provide the justification to dispense required instructional and learning changes in order that the planned learning consequences and objectives can be accomplished.



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