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EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Alternative Assessment Strategies and Their Relationship with Teacher Reflection

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Abstract

Formative Assessment plays a significant role in classrooms in understanding how students progress in their learning activities. The attitudes of teachers towards application of Alternative Assessment (AA) strategies in English language classroom are considered important as they can affect the teachers' overall performance in the classroom. The aim of the current study was to examine EFL teachers' perceptions regarding alternative assessment strategies and their relationship while correlated with teacher reflections and perceptions. In order to conduct this study, a mixed-methods design was adopted. The participants who attended the quantitative and qualitative phases were 81 students and 30 EFL teachers, respectively. In order to collect the research data, two research instruments were used: the teacher reflection questionnaire (Akbari et al., 2010) and the teachers' perceptions of alternative assessment questionnaire (Elharrar, 2006). The Pearson correlation coefficient statistical test was run for the quantitative data, and the data of the qualitative nature was processed through content-analysis procedure. The findings from the qualitative data were presented using frequency and percentage. Further discussions were provided using the findings from the quantitative data analysis. The results from this phase of analysis illustrated that there was a significant positive relationship between EFL teachers' reflection and their experience of implementing alternative assessment strategies. The findings of this study may render implications for EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and the assessment administrates.

Keywords: assessment, reflection, alternative assessment, formative assessment, traditional assessment

Introduction

Since the pedagogy of English as a Foreign / Second Language (EFL / ESL) has experienced a transition to a more learner - centered communication approach, the evaluation of the EFL/ ESL classroom in recent years has also shifted its focus from traditional ways of testing to the use of alternative methods of evaluating and recording student achievement (Diep et al., 2019). Alternative assessment claim that conventional assessment approaches often do not adhere to actual EFL/ESL experience because training is not related to evaluation (Monib et al., 2020). Therefore, alternative tests are suggested to compliment the standard methods using numerous real, false and blank objects as well as to capture the effects of learning and knowledge about learners' communication skills in their second language (Brindley, 2001).

In Iran, over many years, a chain of instructional guidelines has driven schoolteachers to implement a communicative learner-centered approach to teaching English in the classroom (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006; Zohrabi et al., 2012). Colby-Kelly and Turner (2007) have described an evaluation as the process of looking for evidence to make substantially based decisions or judgements as a result of a learning task" (p. 11). Some experiments have indicated that evaluation is a learning mechanism that can boost the ability to learn English as a foreign language and thereby improve the skills of the target language (Cho et al., 2020; Mazloomi & Khabiri, 2018; Shohamy et al., 2017).

A community of scholars called for a shift of language evaluation from standardized testing to *alternative evaluation* or *authentic assessment* (Zaim, 2020). Hancock (1994) notes that alternative evaluation is an ongoing process in which the student and the teacher judge the success of the student in language using non-conventional methods" (p. 2). It also applies to evaluation tasks related to real-world and school reading and writing (Barnard Bachelor, 2017; Moqbel, 2020). The purpose of the alternative evaluation is to test several different types of literacy skills in circumstances similar to real situations where such skills are applied. For example, alternative evaluation invites learners to engage with real texts, to write on specific topics for authentic purposes and audiences, and to engage

with authentic literature work such as book discussion, journal keeping and write letters. The materials and activities are built to be as natural as possible. Hence, an alternative test is conceived to match the goals, teaching and curriculum of the classroom.

Considering the role of alternative assessment (AA) in language classes, EFL teachers have the main role to practice them in classroom. Studies have shown that language assessment is not an easy task (Atjonen, 2014; Dockrell & Marshall, 2015). Numerous instructive frameworks are endeavoring to reengineer and upgrade their assessment and testing strategies to fuse new methodologies and systems. Along these lines, instructors' knowledge of assessment or evaluation proficiency greatly affects the quality of education. For that reason, the notion of assessment literacy has introduced a nascent line of research in literature on assessment in Iran context. The concept of *assessment literacy* (Stiggins, 1991, 1994) has grown to be regularly occurring to refer to the variety of abilities and knowledge that a number of stakeholders need so as to address the brand new international assessment. Assessment literacy is "the possession of knowledge about the basic principles of sound assessment practice, including terminology, the development and use of assessment methodologies and techniques, familiarity with standards of quality in assessment, and familiarity with alternative to traditional measurements of learning" (Paterno, 2001, n.d).

There have been many studies that have focused on the importance of use of alternative assessment in language classes (Burkšaitienė & Teresevičienė, 2008; Chirimbu, 2013). There are also some studies in Iran regarding the effectiveness of alternative assessment in relation to different language learning skills (Charvade et al., 2012; Jalilzadeh & Dastgoshadeh, 2011; Nezakatgoo, 2011; Price et al., 2012). Furthermore, it has been widely argued that as teachers engage in teaching different skills, assessment, and other professional aspects, they enhance different aspects of their professional practice, especially their reflectivity (Akbari et al., 2010). In this vein, it has been argued that reflection is one of the key features of effective teachers (e.g., Seban, 2009; Rogers, 2002; York-Barr et al., 2006) and enables them to develop their cognitions about different educational issues in greater depth (e.g., Akbari et al., 2010; Chang, 2019). However,

the way AA and reflection are connected demands more empirical attention as assessment is an inseprable constituent of teachers' professional and reflection helps them developmentally contribute to their own professional and institutional growth.

According to Farhady and Tavassoli (2018), assessment is a method used to describe the achievement or potential level of an individual. Moreover, Lee et al. (2016) describes assessment as an assessment[assessment for the sake of assessment] or assessment to judge. He assumes that an assessment recognizes strengths and weaknesses, good and poor, and in some cases right and wrong. He thinks that assessments are more than just marks or ratings although this may definitely be part of this. Assessment is "related to the collection of learning evidence over a period using a variety of evaluation approaches". In addition, the instructor takes the burden of assessment, which relegates the student to a passive role (Chen & Wang, 2019; Renau Renau, 2016).

Traditional assessment applies to many test methods, such as multi-choice, true/false, correspondence and completion queries. The assessment scene for the past five decades has been dominated possibly by those conventional assessment tests because they were simple to administer in several different situations (McCallum, 2020a). These tests allow for the identification of a great number of individuals under similar conditions at the same time. It is quite simple to build, handle, reuse and mark, as it is typically key-computer or machine-scored. Traditional assessments have been given great weight in the past, considering that they are more accurate and true ones than teacher evaluations (Holzinger et al., 2020). Teacher evaluation involves all the teacher processes used daily to monitor the success of their pupils, such as: Questioning, homework supervision, lessons and reports labeling and conversations.

Teachers were considered necessarily arbitrary in their evaluations of the results, and scientific evaluation was unreliable. Although tests may be standardized, evaluations by teachers could be vulnerable to prejudice, favoritism and other factors (Wiggins, 1993). In addition, educators were satisfied with direct simple reactions that could be reasonably answered and marked. They found it easy to respond to tests that loyally followed the

international historical traditional data to produce test results. If required, these numerical scores can easily be transcribed with verbal meaning that is clearly understandable.

Alternative assessment, also known as the performance evaluation, direct assessment and authentic evaluation, tests what students can do instead of what they know. Worthen (1993) applies to those who support alternative evaluations who do not look at a broader picture of a student's work, but only at "smaller snippets of student behavior" (p.448).

Alternative perspectives regarding divergent opinions on assessment agree that real assessment relies on a collaborative partnership between the evaluator and the assessor (Barnard Bachelor, 2017; Ziafar, 2017). They describe assessment as the joint relationship of evaluators and students working together to improve the learning ability of students. Although no single concept exists, there is consensus on its key purpose, that is "to compile evidence of how learners approach, process and execute real-life tasks in a given area" (Huerta-Macıas, 1995, p.8). Likewise, Pierce and O'Malley (1992) describe AA as any method of discovering what an individual learn or can do to show development and inform educaction, and is not a standard or a traditional test. In particular, they note that alternative methods of evaluating students include variations in student needs, preferences and styles of learning; and they are seeking to combine evaluation and learning. They also designate good results, stress positive characteristics and offer formative and not summative evaluations. A further review (Stiggins, 2002) gives students a lot of advantages of AA, for instance, students recognize the sense of being responsible for their own learning and making choices that impact their learning.

Dewey (1933) defined reflection as an act of active, continuous and careful consideration of any beliefs or supposed forms of information in the light of the grounds on which it is founded and the effect to which it leads. Dewey (1933) believed that reflective thought requires a series of attitudes, openness of mind, wholeheartedness and obligation. Rodgers (2002) sets out a description of each of those features. Open-mindedness demonstrates the ability to consider different viewpoints and take chances by recognizing the "possibility of error even in the values which are most valuable to us" (Dewey, 1933, p.175). This mentality prevents the instructor from getting

"stuck on the stage of self," because it enables the transition from "self-absorption" to "self-awareness" (Rodgers, 2002, p.860). First, Dewey believed that reflective thought requires completeness of heart which prevents the teacher from being indifferent. Whole-heartedness includes the personal motivation and enthusiasm to grow. Dewey believed obligation to represent and make sense is important because it allows the instructor to understand the real-world ramifications of behavior and consequences (Rodgers, 2002).

The second reflective principle referred to in the literature is the evaluative framework of Van Manen (1977). In this framework implemented incremental stages of reflection that are scientific, interpretive and critical (Chang, 2019; Gorski & Dalton, 2020). Technical reflection is the principal degree of reflection. The things like institutional education are overlooked at this point. The second stage, interpretive reflection, handles the interpretation and explanation of instructive procedures in order to achieve a deep understanding of them (Seban, 2009). The primary responsibility for the teacher is to explain and present the basic assumptions of instruction while looking at the instructive outcomes of the demonstration. The third stage, reflective reflection, takes the ethical and moral problems into account when handling practice. Consideration of the patriarchal topics such as equality, uniformity, autonomy, and the empowerment of women when instructing is imperative.

Another explanation was that Schön (1983) expanded Dewey 's concept of reflection by introducing new points of view on reflective practice expectations and classroom teaching procedures. He understood two kinds of reflections: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Schön postulates that the reflective practitioner engages in reflection-on-action after the difficult situation in order to further assess the difficult situation and to initiate a solution. Reflection-in - action takes place when the practitioner discovers and chooses realistic solutions in the midst of a crisis situation. York-Barr et al. (2006) define reflection-in-action as "the process of analyzing our thought and behavior as it happens, to make changes in the moment" (p. 6).

AA and teacher reflection are conceptually resonant due to two reasons. First, at the heart of reflection lies a critical analysis of the surroundings, including educational contextualities (York-Barr et al., 2006). Similarly, AA has the principle that assessment should embrace a critical stance toward the role of high-stakes and small-scale testing policies and ideologies in the educational context (Ziafar, 2017). Second, reflectivity has been consistently argued to emerge from the teachers' accumulated experiential knowledge to guide their spontaneous and retrospective evaluation of phenomena (Schon, 1983). In the same vein, AA draws on teachers' trialed and practical knowledge of assessment based on which teachers choose to step toward adopting novel and alternative ways of practicing assessment (Stiggins, 2002). These two reasons show that reflection and AA are associated in important terms, yet how they are empirically connected is open to exploration, which is the purpose of the current study.

To the best knowledge of the researchers, there has not been any studies exploring EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of alternative assessments in language classes in Iran. Moreover, the role of reflection in this regard is not noticed. Hence, the main purpose of this study is in- depth exploration of EFL teachers' perceptions regarding alternative assessment types and their use in language classrooms and finding if there is relationship between EFL teacher' reflection and their alternative assessment perceptions.

RQ1: Is there any statistically significant relationship between EFL teachers' reflection and their practices of alternative assessment strategies?

RQ2: How do EFL teachers who participated in this research perceive alternative assessment as a formative assessment tool and a learning facilitating and monitoring instrument?

RQ3: What challenges and concerns are reported by EFL teachers when using alternative assessment in their language classes?

RQ4: What are the EFL learners' quality of perception and recognition regarding the use of alternative assessment in an in-depth enquiry into their current practices in their classroom while managing and monitoring their learning activities?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study for quantitative and qualitative parts were 81 and 30 EFL teachers respectively. In order to invite teachers and students to this research project, the researchers decided to progress with convenient sampling (Ary et al, 2010). The samples consist of teachers who taught English in institutes, schools, or universities. Both male and female teachers were included in order to increase the generalizability of the data. Their age range was between 23-48. Their major was English literature, English translations, and TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). They had M.A. or Ph.D. in the field and had at least 3 years of teaching experience. The selected participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants of the Study

Demographics			
Gender	male (70%)	female (30%)	
Age	24-30 (10%)	30-40 (55%)	40-50 (35%)
Teaching experience	3-10 (30%)	10-15 (35%)	15 and above (35%)
Degree	M.A. (10%)	Ph.D. (90%)	

Instruments

In order to conduct this study, two instruments were used.

Teacher assessment practices and perceptions questionnaire

This questionnaire is developed by Elharrar (2006). It is designed to measure the classroom evaluative practices and perception of teachers with particular emphasis on the theme of AA. The format is like a semi-structured interview. Furthermore, there are some questions that teachers are asked to complete by checking the most appropriate answer. It has three parts: introduction (demographic information), students assessment perceptions, and teachers' perceptions regarding AA. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire were checked and approved by previous researchers (Ahmad et al., 2020; Demir et al., 2019; Elharrar, 2006). Moreover, the questionnaire was expert checked by a university professor of

TEFL to ensure its validity for the purposes of the present study. Regarding reliability, the collected data were fed into SPSS and a coefficient of r = 88 was obtained, which is acceptably high, according to Ary et al. (2010).

Teacher Reflection Questionnaire

In order to assess teacher reflection, the "reflective teaching instrument" developed by Akbari et al. (2010) was used. This instrument contains 29 items which assesses teacher's reflection through a 5- point Likert scale (Never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always). It has 29 items and five components: a. *Practical reflection*, b. *Cognitive reflection*, c. *Affective reflection*, d. *Metacognitive reflection*, and e. *Critical reflection*. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire have been established by previous studies, which reported that this questionnaire is both reliable and valid in order to assess EFL teachers' reflection (Akbari et al., 2010). The reliability of this questionnaire was checked and reported to be 0.95.

Data Collection Procedures

To conduct this study, in the quantitative part of the study, 81 teachers using convenience sampling and in the qualitative part, 30 EFL teachers were selected using purposive sampling. Both male and female teachers who met the criteria are included. The researcher put all the questions online using google forms and emailed it to the participants. After sample selection, they answered interview questions in the form of an open-ended questionnaire. Finally, after data collection, the data was analyzed content-wisely to answer the research questions.

Design

This study followed a mixed- methods research. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures were used. According to Ary et al. (2018), this research is quantitative because questionnaires and numerical data were used and it is qualitative because an open-ended questionnaire (semi-structured interview) was used. A mostly qualitative study was run because the researcher wanted to understand in detail the beliefs that EFL teachers had about the AA practices in EFL classrooms.

Data analysis

In order to answer the research questions, after data collection, the quantitative data was analyzed using Pearson correlation in order to find the relationship between EFL teachers' practices of AA and their reflection.

Moreover, the qualitative data extracted from the open-ended questionnaire was analyzed content- wisely. The recurrent themes and patterns were extracted and represented in frequency and percentage formats.

Results
The Results Related to the First Research Question

In order to answer the first research question, a Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationships between EFL teachers' practices of AA and their reflection. The results in Table 2 indicated a positive significant relationship between the two variables, r (81) = .60, P<.01.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation, Teacher Reflection and Their practices of alternative assessment

		Teacher Reflection
Teacher practices of alternative assessment	Pearson Correlation	.23**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	81

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

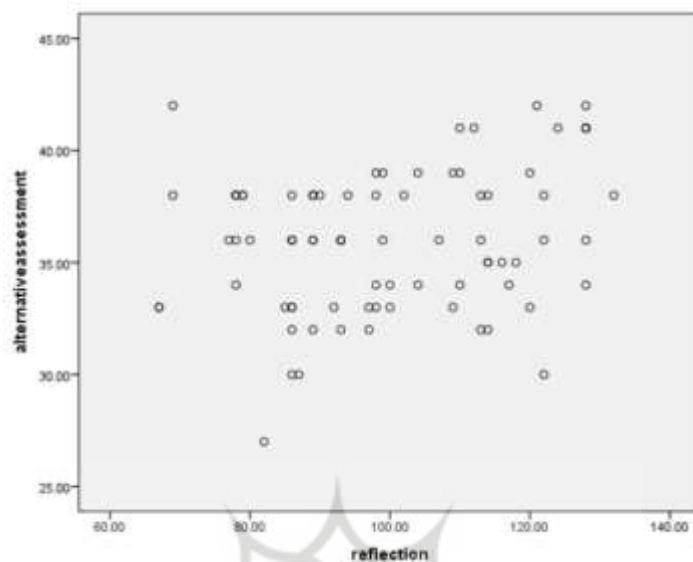The results are presented in the figure below vividly.

Figure. The Spread of Scores in Teacher Reflection Questionnaire and the Relationship between Teacher Reflection and their Perception of AA

The Results Regarding the Second, Third and Fourth Research Questions

Thirty EFL teachers participated in this part of the study and answered a number of questions regarding AA in the open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire bore questions like the definition of traditional and alternative assessment, different types of AA, advantages and disadvantages of AA, etc. The collected data were analyzed through careful content- analysis and the results are presented in frequencies and percentages. Notably the multiple number of themes were derived from the analysis. This influx of themes needed further probe. However, due to the scope of the research and the limitations set by the research objectives, many of these themes were not included in the analysis presented here.

Question 1 investigated the frequency of assessment use in the school to measure students' general academic progress.

Thirty teachers answered this question. The frequencies may vary and it is because of the fact that some of the participants mentioned more than one theme for each category. Most of the teachers (19 teachers, 47.5%) stated

that they assess their learners' language progress weekly because it is more convenient and it provides feedback both for learners and teachers to examine their learning and teaching. This weekly assessment can be considered as formative assessment.

There are researchers who assert formative assessment is a type of assessment which happens during the semester and its aim is to provide feedback for teaching and learning According to them (e.g., Bennett, 2011; Black & Jones, 2006; Widiastuti et al., 2020), weekly assessment helps teachers to get feedback both for their teaching and students' learning. The second most frequently stated theme was bi-monthly (8 teachers, 20%) assessment. The other categories were monthly (5, 12.5%) and daily (4, 10%) assessments, which depended on the situation and purpose of the assessment (4, 10%). It can be inferred that teachers have different perceptions regarding the frequency of assessment which is related to many factors (Deygers & Malone, 2019; Guzman-Orth et al., 2017).

Question 2 examined different types of evaluation for different reasons or purposes and teachers' perception regarding that.

Considering the purpose of assessment, 11 EFL teachers (18.33%) mentioned that they assess learners in their final and midterm exams using both alternative and standard methods. Moreover, it was found that the second most frequent category was using alternative types of assessment (9, 15%). Finally, it was revealed that EFL teachers mentioned factors like placement (8, 13.33%) and formative assessment (8, 13.33%) as the purposes of assessment. Summative assessment (7, 11.6%), assessment based on the course content, the goals of the course, and learners' learning styles (5, 8.33%), diagnostic (4, 6.66%) assessment, assessment depending on the students' language proficiency (4, 6.66%), dynamic assessment (2, 3.33%), and portfolio assessment (2., 3.33%) were the other categories teachers indicated as practices of assessment. Many researchers have conducted studies on the various purposes of assessment (Barnes et al., 2017; Black, 2004; Hamp-Lyons, 2016; Khan, 2018; Liljedahl, 2010). As indicated by the teachers and the related studies, assessment has different purposes like placement, diagnosis, achievement, etc.

In question 3, EFL teachers' conceptions regarding traditional assessment and AA was extracted.

In this study, considering the definition of traditional assessment, it was found that EFL teachers perceived it as something like other test format such as multiple choice, short answer, true/false (5, 16.66%) which are out of context and have a primary focus on form. Traditional assessment deals with product of learning (3, 10%); it is mainly summative and static in nature, not assessing pragmatic information, focusing on students' memorization (3, 10%), like standard tests (3, 10%). Moreover, EFL teachers indicated that traditional assessment can be summative (2, 6.66%), involving some procedures which are static and do not examine abilities of the students in depth (2, 6.66%), is associated with old paper and pencil methods using multiple choice tests (2, 6.66%), is concerned with the theoretical knowledge that ignores different abilities and capacities of learners (2, 6.6%), which focuses on "what" and developing body of knowledge (2, 6.66%), and measures the final output of students after classes (2, 6.6%). Finally the least frequent categories for definition of traditional assessment were reported to be those paper and pen exam without taking individual differences and real-life situations into account and without assessing pragmatics and illocutionary forces (1, 3.33%), more atomistic (1, 3.33%), focusing on lower-level cognitive abilities such as memorization and information recall (1, 3.33%), which are being used frequently nowadays (1, 3.33%). These findings are in line with the findings of the previously done studies in field of language assessment (McCallum, 2020b; Pirtsiou & Rousoulioti, 2020; Shrestha & Roffey, 2018).

Considering EFL teachers' perceptions of AA definition, it was stated that AA deals with the process of learning (6, 20%), includes modern assessment techniques like dynamic assessment, formative assessment, portfolio assessment, and cognitive diagnostic assessment (5, 16.66%), an authentic and holistic assessment which takes different factors into consideration (4, 13.3%), a type of assessment which can be written or spoken and may happen during the class time (4, 13.33%). It places no boundaries to the imagination of teacher in writing the test item and/or student possible right answers (2, 6.66%), focuses on demonstrating meaningful application of what has been learned (2, 6.66%), emphasizing on higher-level cognitive

abilities such as concept learning, critical thinking, and problem solving (2, 6.66%), and assessment for learning (1, 3.33%).. In the case of DA, teachers viewed assessment more like teaching than assessing (1, 3.33%), that focuses on ensuring developing learners' competencies to deal with real world tasks (1, 3.33%).

Question 4 extracted the reasons and ways teachers adapt their assessment methods and how they do it.

According to the participant teachers, the reasons for adapting methods of evaluation based on students' diversity were related to the differences in student' proficiency level (10, 30.33%), students' needs and capabilities as well as the teaching context (6, 20%), homogeneity of the classrooms, teachers indentations to use both simple and difficult questions while giving priority to questions with medium difficulty level (4, 13.33%), one size does not fit all assumption (3, 10%), ethnic diversity (2, 6.66%), and as an attempt in adapting classes to fully online format, so many in-class collaborative assessment methods have been transformed into individual forms (1, 3.33%). Four teachers (13.33%) said that they follow their own strategies for assessment.

Question 5 investigated the ways teachers involve students in assessment process.

With regard to the way teachers involve students in the assessment process, they mentioned the following categories: (1) asking students to make sample questions for discussion and then honing them for final exam (9, 30%), (2) taking individual differences into consideration to help students assess themselves regularly (8, 26.66 %), (3) requiring students to do class projects (4, 13.33%), (4) asking students to do self or peer assessment (3, 10%), (5) asking some students questions each session and asking the others to pass their judgement (2, 6.66%), (6) dynamic assessment (2, 6.66%), (7) giving students choices on what to be involved in their final evaluation (1, 3.33%) and (8) asking more competent students to carry out assessment for weaker students and assist them as well (1, 3.33%).

Question 6 measured teachers' reasons and justifications for changing or modifying their evaluation practices and what inspired them.

Teachers' reasons for changing the evaluation practices were gaining knowledge about alternative and reflective assessment (12, 40%), needs analysis and individual differences (5, 16.66%), taking a variety of workshops (4, 13.33%), Covid 19 (4, 13.33%), the theoretical paradigms (3, 10%), and based on the results of classes (2, 6.66%).

Question 7 explored teachers' perceptions regarding the advantages of practicing AA in their classroom.

The advantages of AA practices were illustrated to be realizing students' weaknesses and strengths to help them become self-regulated and critical thinkers (9, 18%), assessing both progress and achievement (9, 18%), increasing learning (6, 12%), tapping into the potential of students (5, 10%), dynamic and process-oriented methods of assessment (4, 8%), receiving feedback (3, 6%), assessment for learning and improvement (3, 6%), feedback for teaching based on them (3, 6%), alternative assessments are less stressful methods of assessments than traditional methods (2, 4%), forcing students to study more (2, 4%), capturing a more holistic and all-embracing view of the abilities and competencies of the students (2, 4%), focusing aural skills development (1, 2%), and involving learners (1, 2%).

The disadvantages of alternative assessment practices were reported to be practicality issues (14, 35%), being a bit time consuming (12, 30%), subjective nature of alternative assessment strategies and the concept of fairness (5, 12.5%), limited resources (5, 12.5%), sometimes it hinders the syllabus (3, 7.5%), and leading to lack of confidence in students (1, 2.5%).

Question 9 explored the most satisfactory/ beneficial type of AA from EFL teachers' perspectives.

The most satisfactory type of assessment reported by EFL teachers were self and peer assessments (11, 21.15%), formative assessment (9, 17.33%), interactionist dynamic assessment (8, 15.38%), assessing students' progress frequently during the semester (6, 11.53%), task-based assessment (3, 5.76%), multiple choice (MC) tests with numerable test items (3, 5.76%), reflective assessment (3, 5,76%), regular assessment (2, 3.48%), essay type testing (2, 3.48%), project and presentation of project assessment (2, 3.48%), portfolios (2, 3.48%), and a collaborative projects (1, 1.92%).

Question 10 investigated the education reform and its impact on teachers' perception regarding students' assessment.

The impact of educational reform on assessment practices was found to be very effective in terms of AA. The participant teachers stated that in fact they should follow the policies of the school they work for, and they mostly reported using alternative, peer and reflective assessment rather than final exams (8, 26.6%). Some teachers regarded each session as a final exam (6, 20%), and believed that assessment practices have changed during years from traditional assessment to alternative and formative assessment types (6, 20%). Teachers were aware of paradigm shift from testing to assessment especially at university, however, they believed in the need for more improvement (3, 10%). Additionally, teachers reported trying to assess their learners in an authentic way and in real life semi-real life situations (3, 10%). Teachers also had not much concern about students' final test scores as they are evaluating them over the duration of the semester (2, 6.66%). Finally, teachers believed that the dominance of CLT in teaching, the new methods of assessments such as DA has also become prominent (1, 3.33%).

With respect to EFL teachers' training in alternative assessment, the results indicated that most of them did not receive any kinds of training options (15, 50%). Some teachers gained their understanding of the strategies through reading books and published articles (7, 23%). Some implemented peer and teacher assessment as well as portfolio assessment in their classes (4, 13.33%), and some teachers attended related workshops (4, 13.33%).   Best assessment trainings for familiarizing teachers with alternative assessments were found to be reading the related papers (12, 35%), taking part in teacher training workshops (11, 32%), doing peer observation followed by discussion (7, 20%), teacher reflection (3, 9%) and study groups (1, 3%).

Different types of teacher training were mentioned which can help teachers learn about AA and application of it in language classroom. It was found that reading related papers has the most influence on this topic (35%). Previous studies have shown identical findings that reading related papers can increase teachers' knowledge on assessment (Popova et al., 2018). The second mostly repeated factor was found to be teacher training workshops (32%). According to Tsui (2018), teacher training workshops have significant effects on their teaching and assessment methods. Hence, taking

these into consideration, EFL teachers can get acquainted with alternative assessment strategies and use them.

Discussion

This study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions and practices regarding AA and their relationship with their reflection. In the quantitative part of this study, it was found that there was a significant positive relationship between EFL teachers' reflection and their adoption of AA strategies in their classroom. This finding is logical because as teachers reflect and think about their assessment practices, they will be more eager to use them in the class.

According to Chang (2019), teaching is considered as a context-sensitive action grounded in intellectual thought where teachers are seen as problem solvers instead of transmitters of received knowledge. Hence, the role of reflection in teacher development and student achievement is highlighted in the related literature (Ghazalbash & Afghari, 2015; Hayden & Chiu, 2015; Soodmand Afshar & Farahani, 2018).This finding approved the other researchers' finding who stated that there is a positive relationship between teacher reflection and their use of AA strategies (Babaii & Asadnia, 2019; Bragg & Lang, 2018; Breda et al., 2017; Snead & Freiberg, 2019).

Moreover, most of the teachers stated that they use AA in their classes if there is enough time and training. This finding is in line with the findings of previous researchers (Cheng, 2006; López Mendoza & Bernal Arandia, 2009). A number of reasons could explain the obtained results.

First, as all the teachers had three and/or more years of teaching experience, it seems that their accrued knowledge of assessment has been reshaped over the years. Research (e.g., Akbari et al., 2010; Chang, 2019; Gorski & Dalton, 2020) has indicated that teachers' reflection is closely connected to the range of contextual parameters that define their professional practice. And from among such parameters, experience features as a significant element in teachers' accrued knowledge (Rogers, 2002). Thus, as the teachers of this study had practiced assessment over the years, they have reshaped their understanding of assesmsent and have adopted assessment practices that are better tailored to their pedagogical contexts.

That is, through persistent implementation and reconfiguration of their assessment-related cognitions, th teachers have reflectively come to view that AA provides better affordances for meeting students' needs.

Second, while the teachers' perceptions of AA and reflection correlated positively, they highlighted the significant role of training and time. Previous research has also shown that teachers need to constantly hone their professional skills in order to become more reflective practitioners (e.g., Akbari et al., 2010; Seban, 2009; York-Barr et al., 2006). The two components of training and time, however, are novel findings of the present study, which could be attributed to the contextual conditions of teaching in the Iran. That is, as most of the teachers may not have access to professional development courses and as they should make a living, they have to take more classes, which come to negatively influence their professional learning (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018). Such professional challenges collectively influence the teachers' reflection as well, which is a gradual and persistent process to grow in teachers (Rogers, 2002).

The reason that most of the teachers perceived the positive influences of AA may lie in the fact that traditional assessment is more strictly-laid than AA, which provides a more flexible instrument for teachers to gain a better understanding of students' competencies (see Atjonen, 2014; Dockrell & Marshall, 2015; Monib et al., 2020). This finding seems to intimately connect to the teachers' reflectivity as well. That is, as teachers reflect on their professional assessment practices, they opt for techniques that are more responsive to their professional needs and facilitate capturing students' proficiency in greater depth. This finding means that as teachers reflect on their assesmsent practices, they seek alternatives that best fit their purposes; and it seems that AA provides such affordances better than traditional assesmsent.

Additionally, the findings revealed that the teachers attributed advantages to AA that help them provide a more quality teaching environment. Characteristics such as more learner engagement, being more advanatgeous in rendering effective instruction, better needs analysis, enhancing peer assessment, and helping teachers update their knowledge by particiating in professional workshops and reading scholarly documents were among the

AA-related benefits (Chang, 2019; Seban, 2009). These findings indicate that firstly, the teachers have been able to extend their reflectivity potential to the context of assessment, which has enabled them to take a critical look at their practices in particular and professionalism in general. Second, the teachers need more training in AA as they find this technique helpful in their practices. This finding provides implications for teacher educators to run professional development courses in order to enhance teachers' assessment literacy. Such courses could posiitvely contribute to teachers' professional cognitions as they are more likely to experience a more positive institutional setting, particularly in relation to assessment.

This study can give EFL teachers an overview of how such an alternative method can complement traditional paper and pencil tests to capture the communication skills of learners. Understanding the perceptions of teachers about this alternative form of evaluation can help EFL teachers better plan curricula and evaluation in particular. Moreover, the role of teacher reflection and its relationship with their perceptions of AA is indicated which can pave the way for including teacher reflection in assessment trainings.

Future research can explore the teachers' AA-related practices. This was a limitation of the current study, which can provide a better means of how teachers practice AA in their instructional practices. Moreover, research in other contexts is required to obtain a better understanding of teachers' multicultural understandings of AA. These issues could be addressed in future studies so that the field comes to a better understanding of teachers' cognitions about assessment.

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