

Iranian EFL Teachers' Oral/Aural Skills Language Assessment Literacy: Instrument Development and Validation

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Abstract

Despite widespread studies on language assessment literacy (LAL), there are still many unexplored areas about LAL (Gan & Lam, 2022). One of these areas is identifying various aspects of LAL regarding different language skills and scrutinizing the English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' involvement with these aspects. Accordingly, this study attempted to (a) explore Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions, preferences, and difficulties of oral/aural skills LAL and (b) develop a scale to measure these teachers' oral/aural skills LAL. The study was carried out in two phases. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Iranian EFL teachers to identify their perceptions, preferences, and difficulties of oral/aural skills LAL. Second, the researchers developed a questionnaire based on a review of the literature on assessing oral/aural skills and the results of interviews. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts, revised accordingly, and administered to 150 Iranian EFL teachers who were selected through convenience sampling. The reliability of the questionnaire and its construct validity were then checked. The results of both phases of the study were compatible. The outcomes showed that almost all teachers represented dissatisfaction about their oral/aural skills LAL and they were enthusiastic to participate in assessment training courses. Furthermore, it was found that due to their lack of knowledge about oral/aural skills assessment, traditional techniques of assessment were widely used by Iranian EFL teachers.

Keywords: assessment literacy; EFL teachers; language assessment literacy; oral/aural skills assessment; questionnaire development

1. Introduction

Language assessment is used around the world for making decisions about individuals, programs, institutions, organizations, or even societies and these decisions have some inevitable consequences for different stakeholders (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). In many contexts, language assessment is mainly carried out by language teachers who are expected to possess the fundamental knowledge of language assessment to make acceptable decisions about language learners' performance. However, teachers' knowledge of assessment is not satisfactory around the world (Popham, 2009). Thus, the required and suitable level of teachers' language assessment literacy (LAL) needs to be nurtured and developed (Taylor, 2009). The motivation for conducting the current study comes from this need as well as Popham's (2009) idea that teachers should improve their LAL to be optimally effective in

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their profession. LAL has been defined by various scholars in the field of language assessment. According to Inbar-Lourie (2012), some authors centered their attention on a technical know-how approach or an in-depth understanding of the scope of LAL, while some oriented their attention to either a testing or an assessment culture by focusing on language-specific versus general assessment dimensions. Yet, others focused on a broader definition by encompassing multiple issues such as test impact, ethics, and professionalism.

Determining what components should be incorporated into the definition of LAL has become the subject of heated debates. Davies (2008) proposed that skills, knowledge, and principles would be the main components of LAL. He defined skills as a set of abilities (e.g., writing test items, using statistics, doing test analysis, and developing assessment rubrics) to conduct tests/assessments, analyze the data, and report the results to other groups. Also, the knowledge component was referred to as the relevant background knowledge of language measurement, measurement methodologies, and knowledge of the assessment context. Finally, the principle was defined as the awareness of issues including ethics, fairness, and consequences of assessments. In another broad definition, Inbar-Lourie (2008) considered the components of LAL as the why (the reason), the what (the construct to assess), and the how (the method) of assessment. Further, Taylor (2013) has taken a micro-analytical approach to define LAL and identified eight components, including knowledge of theory, technical skills, principles and concepts, language pedagogy, sociocultural values, local practices, personal beliefs/attitudes, and scores and decision-making.

The common attributes in all definitions of LAL are (1) their major focus on the epistemology and general ingredients of LAL, (2) little specificity to address the needs of various stakeholders such as EFL teachers, and (3) lack of fine-grained analysis of EFL teachers' assessment literacy of macro language skills. More specifically, EFL teachers' perceptions and preferences in classroom assessment of oral-aural skills are unexplored avenues in the LAL literature (Stabler-Havener, 2018). Since LAL is a complex and ever-changing concept in the field of language education, further research on EFL teachers' LAL seems warranted (Coombe et al., 2012; Taylor, 2013).

To fill this major gap in the LAL literature, the present study aimed to (a) investigate Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions, preferences, and difficulties with oral/aural skills LAL and (b) develop a questionnaire for assessing oral/aural skills LAL of Iranian EFL teachers. The findings of the current study can help EFL teachers and teacher educators in Iran to identify the challenges in assessing the students' oral/aural skills and to provide strategic plans to solve these problems in the Iranian EFL context. Both novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers can benefit from the researcher-made LAL questionnaire to self-assess their oral/aural skills when they engage in the act of teaching.

2. Review of the Literature

The term language assessment literacy (LAL) emerged from the concept of assessment literacy (AL) proposed by Stiggins (1991) in general education. AL refers to the knowledge of what to assess, why to assess, how to assess performance, the problems in assessment, and how to prevent those problems (Stiggins, 1995). Over the years, the concept of LAL has been defined and redefined in the language assessment field. Inbar-Lourie (2008)

defined it as the ability to deal with issues related to the purpose of assessment, the appropriateness of the used instruments, the testing conditions, and what will happen using test results. Further, Fulcher (2012) provided an elaborate definition of LAL as the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed to develop and evaluate both standardized and teacher-made tests, an awareness of the major concepts and principles underlying the assessment practice, and to put all these within a broad social and political context to evaluate the role of assessment on societies, organizations, and individuals.

Although the concept of LAL looks more associated with language testers (Malone, 2013), language teachers are another significant group of stakeholders whose level of LAL should be improved (Popham, 2009; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). By the same token, Scarino (2013) who worked with teachers at schools noticed that they struggled with assessment on both theoretical and practical levels. She strongly recommended that the teachers' LAL should be improved in the in-service training courses to diagnose their potential problems. Tsagari and Vogt (2017) also investigated the LAL of EFL teachers around Europe and found that the teachers' LAL levels are not enough for the assessment activities they should implement in their careers.

Even though there have been various models of LAL in the literature to conceptualize LAL and to deal with its complexity and different aspects (e.g., Brindley, 2001; Davies, 2008; Farhady, 2019; Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo, 2018; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Pill & Harding, 2013; Taylor, 2013), the major problem with these models is lack of specificity for different stakeholders, such as teachers, in various contexts (Stabler-Havener, 2018). For instance, teachers' LAL of language skills in general and oral/aural skills, in particular, is ignored in these models.

A review of the LAL literature indicates that the teachers' perceptions, knowledge, needs, and various measures to determine their LAL levels have recently received growing interest (Ahmadi et al., 2022; Coombe et al., 2020; Deygers & Malone, 2019; Farhady & Tavassoli, 2015, 2018, 2021; Firoozi et al., 2019; Fulcher, 2012; Jeong, 2013; Kremmel & Harding, 2020; Lee & Butler, 2020; Malone, 2013; Mohammadkhah et al., 2022; Rezagah, 2022; Sobouti et al., 2023; Tajeddin et al., 2022; Taylor, 2013). Though many of these studies on EFL teachers' LAL were in the classroom context, they adopted a general perspective. Since an important responsibility of EFL teachers is to assess the students' language skills (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018), more research is required in this area. The issue becomes even more urgent in terms of assessing oral/aural skills due to the shortage of resources for effective assessment and EFL teachers' inadequate knowledge and skills to assess oral/aural skills appropriately (Tajeddin et al., 2018). Accordingly, the present study attempted to investigate EFL teachers' oral/aural skills LAL in more detail.

Due to the important role of LAL, there were various lines of research on LAL in recent years. One of these popular lines of research is related to language teachers' needs. In a seminal article, Fulcher (2012) developed a survey instrument to elicit language teachers' assessment training needs. The findings helped to design new teaching materials and online resources to maintain program delivery. Adapting Fulcher's needs questionnaire, Tavassoli and Farhady (2018) examined the LAL needs of Iranian EFL teachers and they found that the major topics in language assessment were critical to be covered in professional training

courses. Most of the EFL teachers in their research believed that they were aware of the essential topics of language assessment even though they did not know enough about them. The authors suggested providing regular assessment courses to promote EFL teachers' LAL. The LAL needs of EFL teachers were also explored by Firoozi et al. (2019). By holding in-depth interviews with 15 EFL head teachers, the authors concluded that one of the fundamental needs of teachers was receiving training on both the subject matter and assessment techniques. Further, Vogt et al. (2020) assessed EFL teachers' LAL levels and their training needs by utilizing both questionnaires and interviews. They found that the teachers' needs were different based on their diverse educational settings. They recommended having contextually situated teacher education programs to improve teachers' LAL.

Determining teachers' LAL levels has been the next important line of investigation (Campbell et al., 2002; Mertler, 2003; Mertler & Campbell, 2004; O'Sullivan & Johnson, 1993). Measuring teachers' LAL, Plake et al. (1993), Sultana (2019), and Shah Ahmadi and Ketabi (2020) determined the inadequacies of EFL teachers' knowledge of language assessment as they had basic problems in interpreting and communicating assessment results. Likewise, using a data-driven approach, Farhady and Tavassoli (2018) developed a test to measure EFL teachers' LAL levels and they identified that the majority of the teachers had low levels of LAL even though they were willing to improve their LAL levels. In another study, Zulaiha et al. (2020) found that EFL teachers had acceptable knowledge about the principles of assessment and they were capable to apply their knowledge in their classroom practices, yet some factors such as the school policy, students' attitudes, and parental involvements substantially impacted the teachers' application of their LAL. Although LAL researchers revealed the unsatisfactory levels of teachers' LAL, no particular practice has been denoted to overcome the inadequacies, except Koh et al. (2018) who promoted an authentic assessment professional development program. They focused on task design assessment literacy based on the premise that ongoing programs of teacher professional development would be more effective than one-shot workshops.

Addressing various stakeholders' LAL is the most recent line of research on LAL (e.g., Bøhn & Tsagari, 2021; Butler et al., 2021; Deygers & Malone, 2019; Lee & Butler, 2020). In their comprehensive reviews, Lee and Butler (2020) and Butler et al. (2021) found that the existing research on LAL has particularly addressed the teachers, while the learners' perspectives and voices are largely ignored in LAL conceptualizations. Additionally, Bøhn and Tsagari (2021) pointed at the critical role of teacher educators in shaping language teachers' future assessment practices. Finally, Deygers and Malone (2019) argued that policymakers in education are not well-versed and their ideas and concerns would hardly match those of language assessment scholars.

In sum, reviewing the LAL literature illuminated that EFL teachers' oral/aural language skills LAL have received limited attention (Gan & Lam, 2022). To fill the gap, this study aimed to (1) explore the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and preferences of oral/aural language skills LAL, and (2) develop a local LAL questionnaire to measure Iranian EFL teachers' level of oral/aural language skills. To address these objectives, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of, preferences, and impediments in oral/aural skills LAL?

RQ2. What are the psychometric characteristics (reliability and construct validity) of the oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire?

RQ3. To what extent are Iranian EFL teachers aware of the required oral/aural skills LAL?

3. Method

The current study was performed in two phases following an exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.1. Context and Participants

This study was conducted in Iran. Although the Iranian national curriculum for teaching English has focused on the integration of teaching and assessing the four language skills, an analysis of the textbooks showed that their main focus is on the reading skill and grammar knowledge (Mahboudi & Javdani, 2012). This inadequacy of the public sector and the students' limited exposure to English as a foreign language has resulted in the growth in the number of private language institutes in Iran. Since the private sector is more responsible for the teaching of English in the country, this study was set in the context of private language institutes.

Two groups of EFL teachers were selected for this study. The first group consisted of five male and five female teachers ($N=10$), with the age range of 23-30 ($M=26$), all of whom held a BA degree in English translation studies, English literature, or teaching English. Their teaching experience ranged between 2-4 years and they were teaching at two different language institutes in Tehran, Iran. They participated in a semi-structured interview to express their perceptions, preferences, and impediments regarding oral/aural skills LAL.

The second group of participants were 150 EFL teachers (Male=65, 43.5%; Female=85, 56.5%) holding a BA degree in English translation studies, English literature, or teaching English, who were teaching at different institutes in Tehran, Iran. Their age range was 24-46 years old ($M=28.5$; $SD=5.33$), and their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 15 years ($M=5$). Both groups of teachers were selected based on convenience sampling and they signed a consent form before participating in the study.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

In the first phase of data collection, 10 Iranian EFL teachers took part in a semi-structured interview individually. The interviews were conducted by one of the researchers and each interview lasted between 30-40 minutes. The interview questions were developed based on the LAL literature (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018; Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo, 2018; Inbar-Lourie, 2012) and reviewed for their content by five language assessment specialists. The final draft of the interview questions included the following items:

1. What is your idea about language assessment literacy?
2. What is your idea about oral/aural skills language assessment literacy?
3. What techniques or methods do you prefer to use to assess language learners' oral/aural skills? Why?

4. What barriers do you often face in the process of oral/aural skills language assessment?
How do you manage to overcome these problems?

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in NVivo 11 by both researchers collaboratively. This process was done to reach a full agreement between the researchers on encoding the extracted themes.

In the second phase of the study, inspired by the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and a comprehensive review of the LAL literature (Brindley, 2001; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018; Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Giraldo, 2018; Inbar-Lourie, 2008, 2012; Malone, 2013; Pill & Harding, 2013; Taylor, 2013), a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*) oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire consisting of 28 items was designed to measure the Iranian EFL teachers' oral/aural skills LAL. The questionnaire was reviewed by the same five language assessment specialists and revised based on their comments on the format, language, and content of the items. Then, the revised questionnaire was administered to 150 Iranian EFL teachers in Tehran, Iran, who were selected based on convenience sampling and their willingness to participate in the study. The collected responses were analyzed with SPSS 22 to measure the reliability and construct validity of the researcher-made oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire. The results indicated that only 19 items were satisfactory and remained in the final version of the oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire (presented in the Appendix).

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of the Semi-Structured Interviews

The first phase of the study was qualitative in nature, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 EFL teachers to answer the first research question of the study. Four major themes were extracted from the transcriptions (Table 1). They included the teachers' 'perceptions of oral/aural skills LAL', 'preferred techniques', 'impediments in oral/aural skills LAL', and 'remedies'.

Table 1
Extracted Themes from Responses to Semi-Structured Interviews

Theme	Frequency
Perceptions of Oral/Aural Skills LAL	
Beliefs	13
Suggestions	11
Preferred Techniques	
Techniques to assess speaking	18
Techniques to assess listening	16
Impediments in Oral/Aural Skills LAL	
Problems	33
Needs	15
Remedies	9

According to Table 1, the most frequent theme in the participants' responses was their account of impediments in assessing oral/oral skills ($f=48$) and the least frequent theme was the remedies or resolutions to their problems ($f=9$). To have a better understanding of the themes and their sub-categories, some extracts from the teachers' interviews are presented in the following. To observe the authenticity of the interviews, they are not rectified in terms of language problems.

The first extracted theme was '*perceptions of oral/aural skills LAL*' with two sub-categories of 'beliefs' ($f =13$) and 'suggestions' ($f=11$) of the participants about oral/aural skills LAL.

Respondent 8:

I believe the institute should tell us, should teach us, tell the teachers how to assess listening and speaking. Assessing is very important and mostly, it shows how much students learned the lessons. The institute should give us the criteria.

Respondent 7:

If we have some questions and ready-made tests for speaking and listening in each book, that would be good.

The second theme was '*preferred techniques*', which referred to effective techniques that Iranian EFL teachers employed in their classes to assess the learners' oral and aural skills. The two sub-categories of this theme were identified as 'techniques to assess speaking' ($f =18$) (e.g., question and answer) and 'techniques to assess listening' ($f=16$) (e.g., transcription). To assess the speaking skill, some of the teachers said they used question and answer, while most of them stated that discussion about a topic mentioned in the book or introduced by the teacher would be their dominant technique. What most of the EFL teachers claimed was to score the learners' speaking based on their accuracy of grammar and pronunciation. To assess the learners' listening, some of the EFL teachers said they would ask their students to transcribe the listening. However, the most commonly used listening technique among teachers was asking the students to repeat the words or phrases they heard in the listening. Moreover, asking some comprehension questions about a listening text was another commonly used technique.

Respondent 1:

For speaking, most of the time, I have a lot of questions that are related to the lesson that I taught and then I ask about those, I check their answers to see how much they understood.

Respondent 3:

About the speaking, I ask them to discuss about the topic in the book, and their pronunciation and grammar will be checked.

Respondent 2:

I tell them to transcribe the listening they should listen and write the text, transcribe it. Transcribing is very important for them, they should listen at home, and then bring the transcription of the listening to class.

Respondent 5:

To assess my students' listening, I ask them some comprehension questions about the script they listened to.

The third theme was '*impediments in oral/aural skills LAL*'. It included two sub-categories of 'problems' (f =33) and 'needs' (f =15) of EFL teachers regarding their oral/aural skills LAL.

Respondent 6:

I think the students' stress is one of the difficulties I might face because, if he/she doesn't provide the answer, I don't know that's because he/she doesn't have the knowledge or it is because of the stress he/she might have.

Respondent 4:

I need some help to assess my students' speaking and listening. I don't know what I am supposed to do for this.

The last theme was '*remedies*' (f=9), which referred to possible strategies to overcome the problems teachers had in assessing oral/aural skills (including participating in training classes or workshops, and getting help from experienced colleagues or professors).

Respondent 9:

Attending workshops or training courses might be useful.

Respondent 10:

Sometimes I ask my colleagues, sometimes I ask my professors, to get help, since I don't have any specific criteria for testing and evaluating students' speaking and listening.

Overall, based on the data collected in the semi-structured interviews, lack of rubrics for assessing speaking and listening, not being familiar with various techniques to assess speaking and listening, and lack of ready-made tasks for classroom assessment were the most mentioned problems the teachers faced when dealing with assessing oral/aural skills. Regarding their needs, the most frequently cited need was their need to participate in some oral/aural skills assessment workshops or training courses. Moreover, they mainly believed that they needed to become familiar with scoring rubrics to reduce the subjectivity of their assessment. The teachers also claimed that they wanted to be more knowledgeable about the assessment of language skills specifically speaking and listening.

4.2. Analysis of the Oral/Aural Skills LAL Questionnaire

The second phase of the study was collecting and analyzing the data on the oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire which was developed for the purpose of this study to answer the second and third research questions. The collected data from the 150 Iranian EFL teachers who responded to the 28 items of the researcher-made questionnaire were fed into SPSS version 22. The reliability index of the questionnaire was checked through Cronbach's Alpha, $\alpha=.76$, which was at an acceptable level (Hinton et al., 2014). To examine the construct validity of the developed questionnaire, it was subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA). As a prerequisite to the plausibility of the data set for EFA, the normality assumption was tested through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) Test. This value was .87 ($p=.43 >.05$); therefore, the normality assumption of the data was retained. Next, the researchers checked the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sample adequacy ($KMO=.53 >.5$) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p=.00 <.05$). According to Hinton et al. (2014), both obtained values were promising and appropriate for conducting EFA. Next, the correlation matrix of all items was

checked. The correlation between several items was .3 and above which ensured the suitability of the data for factor analysis (Pallant, 2020).

An initial 13-component solution emerged with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 71.62% of the total variance. Nevertheless, the examination of the scree plot in Figure 1 revealed that there was a break after the third component. According to Hinton et al. (2014), only the components up to the point where the eigenvalues stop fluctuation can be considered significant. Therefore, only three components had significant eigenvalues. Table 2 shows the 3-component solution explaining 24.43% of the total variance.

Figure 1

Scree Plot of the Items in the Oral/Aural Skills LAL Questionnaire

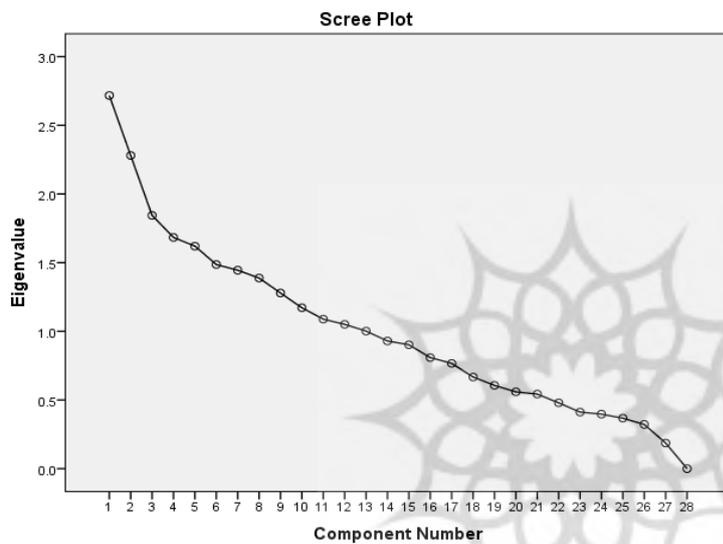


Table 2

Total Variance Explained for the Three-Component Solution

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.71	9.70	9.70	2.71	9.70	9.70	2.38	8.52	8.52
2	2.28	8.14	17.84	2.28	8.14	17.84	2.28	8.14	16.67
3	1.84	6.58	24.43	1.84	6.58	24.43	2.17	7.76	24.43

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 3 enlisted the loadings on each of the three components after rotating the items of the developed questionnaire. The loadings above .3 were retained since it is assumed that they contribute to measuring the construct under investigation (Hinton et al., 2014). Accordingly, three items were loaded on the first component, seven on the second component, and nine on the third component. As a result of the rotated EFA, nine items were deleted from the initial 28-item questionnaire since they did not load on any of the three

components or their loadings were below .3. Consequently, the final version of the oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire contained 19 items.

Table 3

Rotated Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Items in the Teachers' Oral/Aural Skills LAL Questionnaire

	Components		
	1	2	3
	Oral/Aural Skills Assessment Types and Needs	Knowledge of Oral/Aural Skills Assessment	Oral/Aural Skills Assessment in the Classroom
I need to take part in speaking and listening assessment training workshops or classes.	.449		
I know the basic listening assessment types.	.901		
I'm aware of the basic types of speaking assessment.	.901		
Knowing the history of oral/aural skills testing and assessment is a need.		.307	
Teachers should be provided with scoring rubrics for oral/aural skills assessment practices.		.354	
I know how to use technology in the processes of listening and speaking assessment.		.461	
I'm able to use the internet resources for oral/aural skills assessment.		.380	
Oral/aural skills assessment is a burden for me.		.515	
I know the macro and micro listening skills.		.703	
I know what the macro and micro speaking skills are.		.723	
I can develop oral and aural tasks.			.323
I can distinguish summative from formative oral/aural skills assessment.			.429
I use alternative oral/aural skills assessment techniques.			.374
I can realize the kind of washback oral/aural skills assessment usually has on my teaching.			.394
Using technology to assess listening and speaking is useful.			.360
Teachers should know how to interpret the learners' speaking and listening assessment scores.			.379
Using authentic listening and speaking tasks is difficult for teachers.			.318

I'm aware of the components of oral/aural skills assessment in the classroom.	.441
I use different forms of oral/aural skills in classroom assessment.	.559

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
 a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

The results of the rotated EFA indicated that the developed oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire had three underlying components: ‘*oral/aural skills assessment types and needs*’ (including three items that accounted for 8.52% of the total variance), ‘*knowledge of oral/aural skills assessment*’ (including seven items that accounted for 8.14% of the total variance), and ‘*oral/aural skills assessment in the classroom*’ (including nine items that accounted for 7.76% of the total variance).

Next, the participants’ mean scores on all the items on the three components of the questionnaire are reported in Tables 4-6.

Table 4.
Items Corresponding to the Oral/Aural Skills Assessment Types and Needs

Item	Mean	SD
1. I need to take part in speaking and listening assessment training workshops or classes.	4.47	.79
2. I know the basic listening assessment types.	3.26	.88
3. I'm aware of the basic types of speaking assessment.	3.26	.88

As Table 4 shows, the responses to Item 1 which clustered under ‘*oral/aural skills assessment types and needs*’ had a very large mean score ($M=4.47$) which showed the participants’ agreement over their need to attend workshops to improve their oral/aural skills LAL. This was also a confirmation of the findings from the semi-structured interviews where the majority of the teachers stated that they needed more assessment workshops and classes. The medium-size mean scores of Items 2 and 3 ($M=3.26$) implied that the participants were not much aware of the assessment types, which indirectly corresponded to their need to attend workshops and training courses to improve their oral/aural skills LAL.

Table 5.
Items Corresponding to the Knowledge of Oral/Aural Skills Assessment

Item	Mean	SD
4. Knowing the history of oral/aural skills testing and assessment is a need.	3.18	.82
5. Teachers should be provided with scoring rubrics for oral/aural skills assessment practices.	4.44	.66
6. I know how to use technology in the processes of listening and speaking assessment.	2.37	.63
7. I'm able to use the internet resources for oral/aural skills assessment.	2.40	.70
8. Oral/aural skills assessment is a burden for me.	3.23	.86
9. I know the macro and micro listening skills.	2.15	.84
10. I know what the macro and micro speaking skills are.	2.36	.95

Table 5 summarizes the mean scores of the items corresponding to the ‘knowledge of oral/aural skills assessment’. They ranged from the small size of $M=2.15$ (i.e., the weakest agreement) to the medium size of $M=3.23$, with only one exception (Item 5, $M=4.44$), which represented a very large mean score. Such a large mean score implied the participants’ consensus over their need for the oral/aural skills scoring rubric in their classroom assessment practices. The respondents were divided over their need to consider the historical knowledge as a LAL requirement (Item 4, $M=3.18$) and the recognition of oral/aural skills assessment as a burden on their shoulders (Item 8, $M=3.23$). Regarding their knowledge of using technology in oral/aural skills assessment (Item 6, $M=2.37$), their actual ability to use technology in oral/aural skills assessment (Item 7, $M=2.40$), their knowledge of macro and micro listening skills (Item 9, $M=2.15$), and their knowledge of macro and micro speaking skills (Item 10, $M=2.36$), the participants had the weakest amount of agreement.

Table 6.

Items Corresponding to the Oral/Aural Skills Assessment in the Classroom

Item	Mean	SD
11. I can develop oral and aural tasks.	2.55	.89
12. I can distinguish summative from formative oral/aural skills assessment.	2.76	.98
13. I use alternative oral/aural skills assessment techniques.	2.68	.67
14. I can realize the kind of washback oral/aural skills assessment usually has on my teaching.	2.10	.91
15. Using technology to assess listening and speaking is useful.	3.68	.81
16. Teachers should know how to interpret the learners’ speaking and listening assessment scores.	4.33	.66
17. Using authentic listening and speaking tasks is difficult for teachers.	3.56	.83
18. I’m aware of the components of oral/aural skills assessment in the classroom.	2.27	.74
19. I use different forms of oral/aural skills in classroom assessment.	2.56	1.00

Table 6 represents the mean scores of the items corresponding to the ‘oral/aural skills assessment in the classroom’. The mean scores ranged from a very high value of $M=4.33$ to a low value of $M=2.10$. The highest mean belonged to the teachers’ interpretation of oral/aural skills assessment in the classroom (Item 16, $M=4.33$), showing their awareness of this interpretation. The teachers’ medium mean scores on the usefulness of technology (Item 15, $M=3.68$) and difficulty of using authentic tasks for oral/aural skills assessment (Item 17, $M=3.56$) showed their slight agreement toward the usefulness of technology and the difficulty of using authentic tasks in the classroom. On the other hand, the respondents had low mean scores on developing oral/aural tasks (Item 11, $M=2.55$), distinguishing summative and formative oral/aural skills assessment (Item 12, $M=2.76$), using alternative oral/aural skills assessment (Item 13, $M=2.68$), realizing the washback of oral/aural skills assessment in their classes (Item 14, $M=2.10$), being aware of the components of oral/aural skills assessment in the classroom (Item 18, $M=2.27$), and using different forms of oral/aural skills assessment in

the classroom (Item 19, $M=2.56$), all showing the teachers' inability to do oral/aural skills assessment effectively in the classroom.

Overall, the analysis of the teachers' responses to the questionnaire items as reported in Tables 4-6 showed that they had average to low awareness and literacy of oral/aural skills LAL, even though they were aware that it was necessary for them to have further training on the issue.

5. Discussion

In sum, the researchers aimed (a) to investigate the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions, preferences, and impediments regarding oral/aural skills LAL and (b) to construct and validate a questionnaire to measure their oral/aural skills LAL. In the first phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Iranian EFL teachers. Four major themes of 'perceptions of oral/aural skills LAL', 'preferred techniques', 'impediments in oral/aural skills LAL', and 'remedies' with their sub-categories were extracted from the collected data.

In the second phase of the study, 150 Iranian EFL teachers answered the developed oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire. The obtained data were used for the validation of the questionnaire. The results showed that the oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire had an acceptable level of reliability and it consisted of three components of 'oral/aural skills assessment types and needs', 'knowledge of oral/aural skills assessment', and 'oral/aural skills assessment in the classroom'. Further, the analysis of the teachers' responses showed that they had low to average awareness and literacy of oral/aural skills LAL issues. The only exceptions were the teachers' high awareness of their need to improve their oral/aural skills LAL, their need for scoring rubrics for oral/aural skills assessment, and their need to interpret the learners' oral/aural skills assessment scores.

The outcomes of the first phase of the study are in line with Farhady and Tavassoli (2018) and Tavassoli and Farhady (2018), who investigated the levels and needs of Iranian EFL teachers' LAL and concluded that their knowledge of the major topics in language assessment was below average and the teachers had to improve their LAL through training courses. Regarding the EFL teachers' impediments with LAL, the results of the study are compatible with those of Berry et al. (2019) and Narathakoon et al. (2020), who found that lack of confidence, experience, and knowledge were the major problems EFL teachers had in assessing their students. One of the impediments EFL teachers complained about was the inaccessibility of proper scoring rubrics for oral/aural skills assessment. As a consequence, the obtained scores were inflicted with low reliability and the learners' dissatisfaction (Popham, 2009). Another major impediment was low-quality training courses on LAL as a hindrance to EFL teachers' professional development (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2021; Popham, 2011).

The Iranian EFL teachers' low awareness of oral/aural skills LAL reported from the second phase of the current study is also similar to Plake et al. (1993), Narathakoon et al. (2020), and Shah Ahmadi and Ketabi (2020). Shah Ahmadi and Ketabi (2020) also indicated that even though LAL is a prominent requirement for Iranian EFL teachers, they believe both their knowledge and practice of LAL are at an unsatisfactory level. Since assessment

promotes language teaching and learning (Popham, 2009), it is essential to enhance various aspects of teachers' LAL during in-service training courses (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2021).

Additionally, the results of the study shed light on the problematic areas in the teachers' oral/aural skills LAL. The difficulty in recognizing the effectiveness of different oral/aural skills assessment techniques, the difficulty in using technology in the oral/aural skills assessment, and the inability to provide appropriate feedback to students were some of the most commonly stated problems as the consequential impacts of the EFL teachers' LAL inadequacies. Such complicated factors were also identified by Berry et al. (2019), Djoub (2017), Farhady and Tavassoli (2015, 2018, 2021), Firoozi et al. (2019), and Narathakoon et al. (2020). To overcome such problems, the prospective and in-service EFL teachers should actively participate in training courses and be supervised by teacher educators while doing classroom assessments to increase their self-awareness of assessment processes and to enhance their autonomy in doing classroom assessments.

The results of this study showed that conventional oral/aural skills assessment techniques were dominant in Iranian EFL teachers' assessment practices while alternative techniques such as portfolios, self- and peer-assessment, dynamic assessment, and performance assessment (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018) were not welcomed in the classroom assessment practices in the Iranian EFL context. The findings corroborate the results of Farhady and Tavassoli (2021) who notified that the Iranian EFL teachers' status is far behind the new trends in language assessment. The same results were relatively identified by Berry et al. (2019) who found that EFL teachers used various techniques as part of their teaching practice but were cynical about their effectiveness as assessment techniques.

Probably, the most important aspect of the current study was specifying the particular context of Iran for scrutinizing EFL teachers' LAL. As the LAL literature revealed investigating localized LAL has been neglected. Thus, it is vital to examine EFL teachers' LAL in different local settings (Gan & Lam, 2022) and to provide support to local teachers to overcome the dilemmas they may face in assessing their students (Sun, 2022). In this regard, identifying Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions, priorities, and problems of LAL was informative. Since the results of this study showed that the assessment techniques Iranian EFL teachers preferred to use were conventional, it could be concluded that lack of training in the new trends of language assessment led to Iranian EFL teachers' LAL insufficiencies and obliged them to use the traditional techniques of assessment. Consequently, making these teachers familiar with the new trends in language assessment through training courses deems essential.

6. Conclusion

According to Popham (2009), if teachers intend to be adequately effective, they should learn the fundamentals of classroom assessment. Thus, it is essential to enhance various aspects of teachers' LAL as a part of their professional knowledge (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018; Tajeddin et al., 2022). However, despite the rich literature on LAL and the existence of various definitions and models of LAL (e.g., Davies, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Taylor, 2013), an analytic perspective toward LAL was absent in the literature,

which led to conducting this study to compensate for the lack of identification of oral/aural skills LAL in the literature.

The oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire designed in this study can act as a useful instrument to assess Iranian EFL teachers' LAL and to recognize their oral/aural skills LAL inadequacies. EFL teachers' responses to the oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire would inform teacher educators and supervisors about the degree of teachers' awareness of the related issues. Also, by identifying EFL teachers' inadequacies in dealing with innovations in oral/aural skills assessment, teacher educators and supervisors can familiarize them with such innovations and techniques to improve teachers' classroom assessment of oral/aural skills. The designed LAL questionnaire can also be utilized in various EFL settings with some modifications to match different contexts to recognize other EFL teachers' oral/aural skills LAL. In addition, the results obtained from the interviews regarding EFL teachers' perceptions, preferences, impediments, and remedies regarding oral/aural skills LAL have important implications, especially for Iranian EFL policymakers, teacher educators, and supervisors to understand the contemporary situation of EFL teachers' LAL better and to help teachers improve their LAL levels. Further, following the findings of this study, Iranian policymakers, teacher educators, and supervisors are encouraged to run training courses and workshops for EFL teachers on LAL in general and on oral/aural skills LAL in particular so that they would equip EFL teachers with the required LAL to get the desired outcomes.

To conclude, the present study suffers from some limitations which can be overcome in future studies. An important limitation of the study was the small sample of Iranian EFL teachers who participated in the interviews and the quantitative phase of the study which may jeopardize the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the oral/aural skills LAL questionnaire was localized to Iranian EFL teachers whose problems might not mirror those in other regions. Thirdly, following a new trend in questionnaire development studies, the LAL questionnaire in this study was not piloted before being validated. Probably if it was piloted, some of the items would be deleted or reworded in the validation phase. Thus, the results should be interpreted cautiously. Fourthly, to reassure the construct of oral/aural skills LAL, more research with diverse samples of EFL teachers in different contexts is needed. Moreover, relying on interviews for eliciting data would be considered another limitation of the study since the participants could hesitate to provide genuine answers to the interview questions (known as the social desirability bias in interviews) (Dornyei, 2007). It is recommended to replicate the study by collecting data from observing EFL teachers in their classes which could provide more natural and reliable information about EFL teachers' oral/aural skills assessment practice or by triangulating the collected data. Furthermore, another possible area of research might be carrying out a study in which EFL teachers attend training courses or workshops on oral/aural skills LAL to identify the benefits of such training on their classroom oral/aural skills assessment practices. Also, the interplay between the teachers' experience, training, certification, and their oral/aural skills and language assessment practices can be investigated.

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Appendix

The EFL Teachers' Oral/Aural Skills Language Assessment Literacy Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

The following are a number of statements related to the oral/aural skills language assessment literacy. We would like you to indicate your opinion after each statement by selecting the option that best suits your idea.

Gender: Age: Years of teaching experience: Degree:

1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I need to take part in speaking and listening assessment training workshops or classes.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I know the basic listening assessment types.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I'm aware of the basic types of speaking assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Knowing the history of oral/aural skills testing and assessment is a need.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Teachers should be provided with scoring rubrics for oral/aural skills assessment practices.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I know how to use technology in the processes of listening and speaking assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I'm able to use the internet resources for oral/aural skills assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Oral/aural skills assessment is a burden for me.	1	2	3	4	5

9. I know the macro and micro listening skills.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I know what the macro and micro speaking skills are.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I can develop oral and aural tasks.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I can distinguish summative from formative oral/aural skills assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I use alternative oral/aural skills assessment techniques.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I can realize the kind of washback oral/aural skills assessment usually has on my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Using technology to assess listening and speaking is useful.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Teachers should know how to interpret the learners' speaking and listening assessment scores.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Using authentic listening and speaking tasks is difficult for teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I'm aware of the components of oral/aural skills assessment in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I use different forms of oral/aural skills in classroom assessment.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you so much for your cooperation.

