

**Toward a Conceptualization of Critical Poetry Assessment Literacy: A
Constructivist Grounded Theory Study****Abstract****Article Type:****Original Research****Authors:****Elham Aminaie¹**ORCID: [0009-0008-4653-0484](#)**Morteza Lak²**ORCID: [0000-0003-4409-7636](#)**Gholam-Reza Abbasian³**ORCID: [0000-0003-6949-1736](#)**Article History:****Received:** 2026.02.12**Accepted:** 2026.06.06**Published:** 2026.06.15

Teacher assessment literacy is a crucial component of assessment quality in higher education. Addressing the need for contextually responsive assessment literacy, this study aimed to develop a conceptual understanding of Iranian English literature lecturers' critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL). Drawing on constructivist grounded theory, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants possessing expertise and experience in English poetry assessment, selected via purposive sampling. Data collection and analysis proceeded concurrently, with meanings co-constructed through the interaction between researchers and interviewees. The analysis was informed by a critical perspective on language assessment as a sensitizing lens while remaining grounded in participants' perspectives. Through coding and constant comparative analysis, five conceptual categories were generated: theoretical foundations of English poetry assessment, contextual conditions, critical conceptions of English poetry assessment, professional development programs, and critical agency in English poetry assessment. The resulting conceptual framework highlights the multidimensional nature of poetry assessment literacy and underscores the importance of adopting a critical approach to professional development tailored to the needs of Iranian English literature lecturers. The study may contribute to the advancement of poetry assessment practices, professional development initiatives, educational policy, and future research on poetry assessment literacy.

Key Words: Assessment Literacy, Conceptual Framework, English Literature Lecturers, Poetry Assessment

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1. Introduction

Teacher assessment literacy (AL) encompasses a collection of competencies that enable teachers to observe, interpret, evaluate, and analyze students' performances effectively (Shafiee Rad & Alipour, 2024). The scholars have arrived at a broad consensus that all stakeholders involved in language assessment need language assessment literacy (LAL), though at different levels and in different aspects (Malone, 2013; O'Loughlin, 2013; Pill & Harding, 2013). Language assessment is value-laden and context-dependent; that is, language assessment is highly pertained to the context where it is actually practiced for certain purposes (Shohamy, 2001, 2022). In this regard, the conceptualization of AL has evolved from a knowledge and skills approach into a socially situated, and context-dependent practice (Pastor, 2023). In fact, LAL is no longer conceived as passive combination of knowledge and skills, but rather a co-constructed construct mediated through a range of experiential factors (Fan & Yan, 2020; Scarino, 2013).

The growing use of digital assessment systems has added new layers of complexity to teachers' AL. This challenge stems not only from the technical nature of digital assessment outputs but also from the lack of adequate literacy that helps teachers translate digital assessment data into meaningful instructional decisions (Wei et al., 2026). Considering the evolving nature of assessment practices and educational contexts, teachers' assessment literacy requires ongoing development to remain effective and responsive to contemporary demands.

Given the context-specific nature of assessment literacy (Kremmel & Harding, 2020; Zolfaghari & Ahmadi, 2016) and that different teaching specializations require distinct assessment knowledge (Pill & Harding, 2013), there is a need to conceptualize assessment literacy frameworks that are responsive to the unique demands of specific disciplinary contexts, such as poetry in English literature education. Poetry occupies a unique position among literary genres due to its reliance on figurative language, aesthetic expression, and interpretive openness (Wei et al., 2026). Therefore, effective poetry assessment extends beyond the evaluation of linguistic competence to encompass an appreciation of poetry as an artistic form and an understanding of the cultural contexts in which it is produced and interpreted (Qutub, 2017). Poetry assessment seeks to evaluate students' ability to apply their literary knowledge and analytical skills, as well as their capacity to comprehend, interpret, and critically engage with poetic texts (Chen et al., 2024).

The literature review suggests that poetry teachers consider assessment as an essential

element of teaching, but they cannot enact their beliefs due to the lack of sufficient research studies on poetry assessment literacy (Ugwu, 2023). Existing assessment literacy models and scales (Fulcher, 2012; Tajeddin et al., 2022; Vogt & Tsagari, 2014; Xu & Brown, 2016) mostly focus on EFL/ESL assessment contexts, overlooking the complex demands of English poetry pedagogy as a unique literary genre which involves interpreting complex textual themes, artistic dimensions, figurative language, and sociocultural nuances. As a result, English literature lecturers lack validated frameworks and practical tools for designing alternative, authentic, and fair assessment tasks that can foster higher-order critical thinking, emotional engagement, and creative responses in poetry courses (Shah Ahmadi & Ketabi, 2019; Ugwu, 2023).

Drawing on the constructivist grounded theory approach articulated by Charmaz (2014), the present study aimed to fill the identified gaps by developing a conceptual framework of critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL) tailored to Iranian English literature lecturers and grounded in subject-matter experts' understandings of poetry assessment literacy. This study may contribute to the theoretical understanding of critical poetry assessment literacy and may provide a foundation for more authentic, critical, and context-sensitive poetry assessment practices, rubric development, and future research on poetry assessment literacy. Accordingly, this study was guided by the following research question:

RQ1. What are the conceptual dimensions of Iranian English literature lecturers' critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL)?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored in Shohamy's critical approach to language assessment developed, coherently, across her several works (Shohamy, 2022; 2020; 2007; 2001). Drawing on Shohamy (2001, 2007, 2020), CLA is not viewed as a neutral process but as one shaped by cultural, social, political, educational, and ideological agendas. It asks whose interests and agendas language tests serve and views tests as political tools and test-takers as political subjects situated within broader social, political, and ideological struggles. CLA asks questions about which and whose agendas tests serve. It views tests as political tools and test-takers as political subjects within a context of political, social and ideological struggle. CLA challenges the dominant psychometric traditions and considers interpretive approaches to assessment that appreciate different interpretations. The validity framework of CLA developed

includes ethical considerations, especially conscious consideration of the power relations that are at the center of the assessment context. Shohamy (2001) described language assessment as value-laden and context-dependent, that is language assessment is highly pertained to the sociopolitical, cultural, and educational context where it is actually practiced for certain purposes. Given the power of tests, CLA focuses on consequences and uses of tests, promoting equity and justice (Shohamy, 2022).

2.2. Related Studies

Teacher assessment literacy has attracted considerable attention in both global and local contexts. Using a mixed-methods design, Yan (2026) examined the role of language assessment coursework in developing pre-service English teachers' language assessment literacy (LAL). The findings showed significant improvements in teachers' assessment knowledge, task design, ethical awareness, and understanding of formative and learning-oriented assessment, highlighting the effectiveness of structured assessment courses in teacher education.

Similarly, Sultan Eshagh et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between reflective teaching and Iranian EFL teachers' LAL. Their findings revealed that highly reflective teachers demonstrated significantly greater assessment literacy than their less reflective counterparts. The study also identified gaps in low-reflective teachers' understanding of assessment concepts and alternative assessment methods, emphasizing the importance of reflective practice in enhancing assessment competence.

Providing a broader perspective, Hull and Vigh (2025) reviewed studies on assessment literacy published between 2014 and 2023. Their review showed that assessment literacy is conceptualized differently across educational contexts, extending beyond assessment knowledge to include learning-oriented assessment, dialogue, self-regulation, and critical assessment practices. They further highlighted the influence of contextual factors, such as educational policies and institutional culture, and concluded that professional development and teacher training are essential for strengthening assessment literacy.

Several studies have focused on developing valid instruments to measure teachers' assessment literacy. Mohammadkhah et al. (2022) developed and validated a language assessment literacy scale comprising conceptual and affective dimensions, providing a comprehensive tool for evaluating teachers' assessment competence. Likewise, Tajeddin et al. (2022) developed and validated a Critical Language Assessment Literacy (CLAL) scale

encompassing teachers' knowledge of assessment purposes, fairness, assessment consequences, and policy issues. Both instruments contribute valuable resources for assessing and promoting teachers' assessment literacy.

With the growing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, researchers have also explored its implications for assessment. Al Mukhallafi (2020) argued that AI can enhance English language teaching by supporting personalized instruction and assessment. Extending this line of inquiry, Shakirovna (2026) found that AI-assisted literature instruction improved learning experiences and facilitated objective feedback. However, the study also noted that AI has limited capacity to foster human-centered competencies such as cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking.

Research on assessment literacy in literature education remains limited. Chen et al. (2024) examined the relationship between curriculum and assessment in university poetry education and found that lecturers' assessment practices were shaped by curriculum objectives, instructional approaches, and institutional constraints. The study emphasized the importance of balancing curricular requirements with teacher autonomy and continuous professional development to improve assessment practices.

Similarly, Ugwu (2023) explored English literature teachers' beliefs about classroom assessment. The findings indicated that teachers viewed assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning and regarded assessment literacy as essential for effective literature instruction. The study also showed that teachers' assessment beliefs were influenced by social expectations, suggesting that contextual factors may shape assessment practices despite teachers' professional beliefs.

3. Method

3.1. Design

The present study aimed to conceptualize Iranian English literature lecturers' critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL) as perceived by subject-matter experts. To achieve this aim, the study adopted a qualitative research design. More specifically, it drew on Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as articulated by Charmaz (2014), which emphasizes the co-construction of meanings between researchers and participants throughout the research process

3.2. Participants

Through purposive sampling, Iranian subject-matter experts were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria. Participants were required to hold a PhD in English literature or applied linguistics, have at least 10 years of university-level teaching experience, possess documented experience in teaching and assessing English poetry courses, and demonstrate scholarly engagement in the field through relevant publications. Accordingly, 18 eligible participants were initially recruited.

Consistent with Constructivist Grounded Theory, the sampling process continued until theoretical saturation of the data was achieved, that is, when additional data no longer contributed meaningful insights to the development, refinement, or understanding of the emerging categories. This judgment was informed through ongoing memo writing, constant comparative analysis, and continued engagement with participants during the analytic process. The final sample comprised 12 subject-matter experts.

3.3. Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide was employed to elicit participants' perspectives on critical poetry assessment literacy. The initial version of the guide was developed through an extensive review of the literature and consisted of 25 open-ended questions. To enhance the clarity, relevance, and coherence of the interview questions, the guide was reviewed by a panel of five experts, including Iranian university faculty members holding PhD in Applied Linguistics and English Literature with substantial expertise in language assessment, literary studies, and qualitative research. Based on their feedback, the interview guide underwent iterative refinement, resulting in the removal of redundant or ambiguous questions and the consolidation of overlapping items.

The revised guide was subsequently piloted with two experts who shared characteristics similar to those of the target participants but were not included in the main study. Feedback obtained from the pilot interviews informed minor revisions to the wording and sequencing of the questions. The final interview guide comprised 13 open-ended questions (see Appendix A). Consistent with the constructivist grounded theory approach, the guide served as a flexible framework for inquiry, allowing probing and follow-up questions to explore emerging concepts in greater depth. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via email, allowing participants sufficient time to provide detailed written responses.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Consistent with Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) articulated by Charmaz (2014), data collection and analysis occurred concurrently in an iterative and recursive process. Rather than considering interviews as neutral accounts, the researchers critically acted upon the interview transcripts, moving back and forth between interviews to examine the assumptions underlying participants' perceptions and to explore how broader social, institutional, political, and ideological factors shaped their conceptualizations of poetry assessment literacy. Throughout the process, memo-writing helped the researchers to increase the level of abstraction of their findings.

Data analysis proceeded through three interconnected stages. During the initial line-by-line coding the researchers remained close to the data and generated 175 initial codes. Focused coding was not a linear process. During this stage, the researchers moved back and forth across interviews, constantly comparing participants' interpretations to synthesize and explain larger segments of data. This iterative process led to the development of 15 focused codes. Finally, theoretical coding was undertaken to integrate the focused codes into a coherent conceptual framework. Through this integrative process, six conceptual categories were developed, representing the core dimensions of the proposed framework. The coding and data analysis were managed using MAXQDA 2020 (See Appendix B).

To establish the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were employed, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, whereby participants reviewed and commented on preliminary interpretations of the findings. Transferability was supported through rich descriptions of the research context and through reviews conducted by experts in qualitative research and English poetry education. Dependability was strengthened through maintaining an audit trail documenting methodological and analytical decisions throughout the research process. Confirmability was enhanced through memo-writing, reflexive engagement with the data, peer debriefing, and ongoing consultation with a senior faculty member experienced in grounded theory and qualitative data analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Theoretical Foundations of Critical Poetry Assessment

Theoretical foundations of critical poetry assessment emerged as a conceptual category

that captures how the theoretical knowledge base underpinning CPAL is developed. Constant comparative analysis revealed that the category was constructed from the integration of six focused codes, which are presented below.

4.1.1. Multidisciplinary Knowledge of English Poetry. Analysis of the interview transcripts indicated that participants viewed multidisciplinary knowledge as a central component of the theoretical foundations underpinning CPAL. They emphasized that poetry is not produced in isolation but is rooted in a wide range of disciplines such as history, politics, religion, sociology, philosophy, the arts, and other related areas of inquiry. Therefore, understanding poetic meaning often involves recognizing how these disciplinary perspectives and semiotic systems are reflected, either explicitly or implicitly, within poetic texts.

Participants further indicated that the meanings embedded in poetry frequently emerge through broader social, cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts. Consequently, lecturers require sufficient multidisciplinary knowledge not only to interpret these layers of meaning but also to evaluate the extent to which students could identify, analyze, and critically engage with them. In this regard, students are expected to produce evidence-based interpretations that demonstrate an understanding of the historical, cultural, philosophical, and artistic dimensions reflected in poetic texts. Participants also expressed concern that pedagogical knowledge and assessment practices are influenced by curriculum requirements, institutional expectations, and prevailing social values. They argued that these factors shape how poetry is taught and assessed, particularly in relation to its social, political, and cultural dimensions.

4.1.2. Knowledge of English Poetry assessment objectives and types. Based on the participants' views, the main objective of poetry assessment is to evaluate students' critical engagement with poetic texts and their ability to develop evidence-based interpretations. Participants emphasized that poetry assessment extends beyond measuring the reproduction of predetermined interpretations. Instead, it examines how students engage with the form, content, and context of poetic texts and how they construct and justify their own interpretations.

Regarding assessment types, participants identified formative assessment as an important means of supporting learning, reflection, feedback, and the development of students' interpretive abilities. At the same time, they acknowledged the importance of summative assessment for grading, certification, and documenting achievement within the Iranian higher education system. However, participants noted that the predominance of summative assessment in university settings may influence how poetry assessment is designed and implemented.

4.1.3. Knowledge of Alternative assessment in English Poetry Education. Regarding the discursive nature of poetry, the experts' tendency to implement more critical stance towards poetry assessment was observed. The participants highlighted the importance of alternative forms of assessment, such as classroom presentations, self-assessment, and peer assessment. According to the experts' views, alternative assessment can have a positive psychological effect on test-takers, motivating them to apply their subjective reasoning and interpretation skills. Thereby, a better understanding of students' performance and ability can be captured.

However, the participants identified significant institutional and ideological barriers to this shift. The lack of professional development programs has forced many lecturers to engage in self-censorship, restricting their alternative practices to classroom discussions or presentations.

4.1.4. Knowledge of Grading, Interpretation and Communication. Regarding the interpretive nature of poetry assessment, assigning subjective judgment into grades is recognized as one of the main challenges. On the other hand, the absence of an appropriate scoring scale has made it challenging to communicate assessment results effectively to students. English literature lecturers highlighted the importance of knowing how to interpret and communicate evidence obtained from poetry assessment. According to the participants' views, interpretation and communication of assessment results are not only central to subsequent educational decision-making but also play a crucial role in fostering students' trust in educational measurement.

4.1.5. Knowledge of English Poetry Assessment Consequences and Ethics. The field-specific experts suggested that poetry assessment has consequences that extend beyond individual learning outcomes, shaping how poetry is valued within TEFL and how students come to understand their own literary abilities. The experts warned the risks of underestimating the significance of poetry assessment, with the consequence that English poetry ends up being perceived as an impertinent university course within TEFL. Mismatch between the objectives of poetry assessment in higher education and the types of assessment selected by the lecturers, might bolster the misconception that it is one of the most challenging genres to tackle in TEFL.

Participants associated unclear analytic rating scales and the unfair evaluation of students' subjective understandings with reduced opportunities for active learning and critical engagement, as students may become more inclined to reproduce accepted interpretations than to develop their own readings of poetic texts. In addition, the participants associated ethical assessment practices with concerns for equity, justice, and fairness, highlighting the importance of understanding the ethical implications of assessment decisions. Data analysis revealed that

participants viewed ethical considerations as relevant to multiple aspects of English poetry assessment including transparent rubrics and assessment criteria, unbiased grading and interpretations of poetic texts. The findings are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1.

Factors and causal conditions affecting Iranian English literature lecturers' critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL)

Instances of Initial Codes	Focused Codes	Theoretical Code
• Multidisciplinary knowledge enables English literature lecturers to critically reflect on the predetermined interpretations. • Multidisciplinary knowledge should align poetry assessment objectives with pedagogical content.	Multidisciplinary Knowledge of English Poetry Assessment	Theoretical Foundations of English Poetry Assessment
• Formative assessment responds better to the requirements of poetry assessment. • Poetry lecturers are expected to reflect on objectives that different types of poetry assessment are used for.	Knowledge of English Poetry Assessment Objectives and Types	
• Alternative assessments give students sufficient space to present their individual understanding of poetic texts.. • Alternative assessment contributes to make knowledgeable decisions and informed judgements about subjective interpretation.	Knowledge of Alternative assessment in English Poetry Education	
• Regarding the subjective nature of poetry assessment, expertise in designing poetry-specific rubrics for grading is necessary. • Interpretive approaches to assessment that appreciate negotiation across diverse interpretations is suggested. • Students as the main stakeholders that would be affected by the grading system should be informed about the components of the analytic rating scales and scoring criteria. • Assessment interpretation and communication would prevent unfair decision making.	Knowledge of English poetry Assessment Grading, Interpretation and Communication	
• Knowledge of washback effects and consequential validity is essential. • English poetry lecturers should reflect critically on the value of the identified test use consequences.	Knowledge of English poetry Assessment Consequences	
• Ensuring fairness needs inclusion of all affected stakeholders in all steps of the process of assessment. • Assessment should give all the stakeholders enough space to establish a meaningful identity for themselves.	Knowledge of English Poetry Assessment Ethics	

4.2. Critical Conceptions of English Poetry Assessment

Critical Conceptions of English Poetry Assessment emerged as a conceptual category

that captured Iranian English literature lecturers' orientations toward poetry assessment. This category was developed around two focused codes: enabling conceptions, which supported critical poetry assessment practices, and limiting conceptions, which restricted or challenged their implementation.

Participants described a range of conceptions concerning poetry assessment training programs, collaborative approaches to poetry assessment, and the consequences of poetry assessment. Positive conceptions of poetry assessment training programs were associated with participation in poetry assessment literacy workshops, while positive conceptions of collaborative approaches were linked to lecturers' reflection on institutional assessment policies and curriculum design. Participants further emphasized that their conceptions of the consequences of poetry assessment influenced their attention to assessment validity and fairness. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Factors and intervening conditions affecting Iranian English literature lecturers' critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL)

Instances of Initial Codes	Focused Codes	Theoretical Code
- Lecturers' critical reflection on the institutional assessment policies and curriculum design would enhance the quality of poetry assessment. - It is essential to negotiate English poetry lecturers' belief systems for designing quality assessment systems.	Enabling Conceptions	English Literature Lecturers' Critical Conceptions of English Poetry Assessment
- Poetry is not the major course in TEFL, thereby spending time and energy for enhancing English literature lecturers' CPAL is not wise. - In TEFL, English poetry is regarded as the pedagogical tool for general English instruction.	Limiting Conceptions	

4.3. Contextual Conditions for English Poetry Assessment

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that CPAL is influenced by the contexts in which it is enacted. Contextual conditions for English poetry assessment emerged as a conceptual category encompassing three main components. First, psychological conditions, which pertain to job satisfaction, motivation, passion, flexibility, and fairness. Second, economic conditions, which are associated with funding structures, institutional investment in teacher training programs and digital educational platforms, lecturers' salaries, and remuneration. Professional conditions, as the third component, are associated with assessment standards, digital literacy, professional development, reflexivity, and collaborative assessment practices. The

findings are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3.

Factors and contextual conditions affecting Iranian English literature lecturers' critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL)

Instances of Initial Codes	Focused Codes	Theoretical Code
Transformative agendas aiming to include lecturers' voices would help them change their negative attitude towards poetry assessment.	Psychological Conditions	Contextual Conditions for English Poetry Assessment
Economic reforms aiming to financially support lecturers' creative endeavors would change the quality of poetry assessment, consequently the larger social and economic context.	Economic Conditions	
Recognition of test-takers' rights, justice in employment, and appreciation of lecturers' professional development, specifically, in digital literacy play a prominent role in setting the professional conditions.	Professional Conditions	

4.4. Professional Development Programs

The iterative analysis of the interview transcripts led to the construction of English literature lecturers' professional development as a conceptual category. This conceptual category was developed through the analytic integration of two focused codes, namely, 'formal English poetry assessment training' and 'informal colleague resource groups'. Participants described 'formal English poetry assessment training' as institutionally supported activities such as teacher training programs, workshops, seminars, and professional networks. These opportunities were reported to help lecturers become familiar with current educational expectations and curriculum requirements.

Informal professional development was described as taking place through collaboration with colleagues. Participants referred to colleague resource groups in which faculty members worked together, shared experiences, discussed assessment challenges, and explored alternative approaches to poetry assessment. The presence of experienced mentors was viewed as facilitating these collaborative activities.

The findings also indicated the importance of involving lecturers in curriculum-related discussions and conducting needs analyses when designing professional development initiatives. Participants emphasized interactions among lecturers, curriculum developers, and assessment specialists as opportunities for exchanging ideas and receiving guidance. Participants further

highlighted the use of virtual platforms as a means of extending communication, collaboration, and professional engagement among a wider group of stakeholders. Across both formal and informal contexts, professional development was reported to support ongoing learning and reflection on assessment practices. The findings are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4.

Factors and strategies affecting Iranian English literature lecturers' critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL)

Instances of Initial Codes	Focused Codes	Theoretical Code
- Teacher training programs as professional networks constitute a significant strategy for optimal utilization of diverse individuals' capacities and effective practices. - Teacher professional development programs should lead to a process of self-regulation.	Formal English Poetry Assessment Training	English Literature Lecturers' Professional Development
'Colleague resource groups' provide English literature lecturers with the opportunity to negotiate their ideas with their colleagues to understand alternative forms of assessment. - Constructive dialogue between teachers and curriculum developers promotes professional discourses among various stakeholders, and generates guidance and mentorship opportunities by specialists.	Informal 'Colleague Resource Groups'	

4.5. Critical Agency in Poetry Assessment

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that Iranian English literature lecturers' agency, manifested through their professional autonomy in assessment and resistance to policy-driven assessment constraints, plays a crucial role in the development of their assessment practices. Participants reported that lecturers exercise autonomy when responding to institutional expectations and the demands of poetry assessment, as well as when making assessment decisions. The findings also revealed that lecturers' critical agency enables them to participate actively in assessment-related discussions and position themselves as contributors to poetry assessment policy and practice.

Participants further emphasized the role of interactions with colleagues in shaping and strengthening Iranian English literature lecturers' critical agency. Collaborative engagement and professional dialogue were reported as important opportunities for negotiating lecturers' roles as assessors, particularly during periods of educational change and innovation. Access to teacher

training programs and professional learning opportunities was also identified as supporting the development and enactment of assessment agency. The findings are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6.

Iranian English literature lecturers' agency reconstruction as the consequence of their critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL)

Instances of Initial Codes	Focused Codes	Theoretical Code
- English literature lecturers reconstruct their agency by putting their critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL) into practice. - English literature lecturers' agency as a complex and dynamic entity enables lecturers to make contextualize assessment decisions.	Professional Autonomy in Assessment	Critical Agency in Poetry Assessment
English literature lecturers' agency as an 'assessor' is not only an object in the interactions among causal factors, but also has subjectivity.	Resisting Policy-driven Assessment Constraints	

5. Discussion

Applying a constructivist grounded theory approach, it was revealed that Iranian English literature lecturers' CPAL is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by lecturers' theoretical foundations of English poetry assessment, critical conceptions of poetry assessment, professional development, contextual conditions, and critical agency.

In this study, the theoretical foundation of English poetry assessment emerged as a multidimensional conceptual theme consisting several components. Participants characterized poetry assessment as a hermeneutic process in which assessors draw upon multidisciplinary knowledge to evaluate students' interpretations and meaning-making. Rather than treating poetry assessment as the identification of predetermined meanings, participants viewed assessment as the critical evaluation of evidence-based interpretations situated within historical, cultural, ideological, and aesthetic contexts. Consequently, lecturers are expected to examine not only what students interpret but also how meanings are constructed, justified, and negotiated.

The participants found multidisciplinary knowledge as a crucial knowledge enabling lecturers to recognize the essential dichotomy between the poetic discourse and general English discourse and to critically examine the predetermined ideological, social, and cultural interpretations of poetry and resist the use of assessment as a mechanism for reproducing

dominant agendas. This aligns well with Shohamy (2001) based on which without disciplinary knowledge, tests play the role of powerful tools for imposing the agendas of those with legitimate power, in unethical ways for disciplinary purposes.

In addition, the findings suggested that knowledge of English poetry assessment objectives and types involves a critical understanding of assumptions underlying poetry assessment practices. The data analysis indicated that the main objective of poetry assessment is to evaluate students' evidence-based interpretation of poetry with regard to its hermeneutic dimensions. Regarding the discursive nature of poetry assessment, the participants questioned the legitimacy of predetermined readings, meanings, and literary values. From the lens of critical approach to assessment, teachers need to critically analyze which and whose demands and policies poetry assessment serves (Shohamy, 2001).

Formative assessment was valued because it provides opportunities for dialogue around competing interpretations, enables lecturers to examine students' reasoning rather than predetermined answers, and allows assessment decisions to evolve through interaction rather than solely through final products. Although the participants found formative assessment more consistent with the critical orientation toward poetry assessment, they mentioned institutional constraints as barriers that restrict the implementation of more transformative assessment approaches in Iranian educational system.

Iranian English literature experts reported that, although the assessment for grading approach has gradually been challenged by the emergence of assessment for learning approach, summative assessment at the end of term and students' scores are still the main criteria for educational decision-making. In fact, poetry assessment objectives and types are shaped by broader institutional and policy contexts. In light of a critical perspective, scores obtained from summative tests provide documentation for authoritative agencies that cannot be negotiated or changed, signifying the power of those in authority (Shohamy, 2022). These findings highlight the need for assessment practices that balance accountability with learner agency and diverse meaning-making. The concern of the experts, in the present study, is congruent with Tajeddin et al. (2022) based on which assessment objectives, scopes, and types are determined in testing syllabi.

In the same line, the participants considered alternative forms of assessment such as self-assessment, peer-assessment, portfolio etc. as a means to place students at the center of assessment. This is in line with Shohamy's (2001) emphasis on the need to conduct assessment in collaboration with those tested. In addition, the results suggested that knowledge of grading,

interpretation, and communication in poetry assessment involves navigating the tension between institutional demands for quantifiable scores and the inherently subjective nature of poetic interpretation.

The findings revealed the importance of poetry-specific rubrics that distinguish literary understanding from linguistic competence. Rather than standardizing literary interpretation, participants viewed poetry-specific rubrics as tools for making interpretive judgments transparent while preserving space for multiple defensible readings. On the other hand, interpretation and communication of assessment results emerged as critical processes requiring lecturers to acknowledge multiple meanings, reflect on their own interpretive authority, and communicate assessment outcomes transparently to students and other stakeholders.

Professional development should also support English literature lecturers in constructing poetry-specific rubrics, evaluating interpretive evidence, facilitating dialogic assessment, and recognizing the sociocultural and ideological dimensions embedded in poetry assessment. It enables lecturers to negotiate diverse interpretations while resisting uncontextualized and ideologically driven assessment practices. The participants also emphasized the necessity of identifying individual, financial, and social consequences of poetry assessment. Based on Shohamy (2001), careful examination of assessment use consequences in educational setting and social context is necessary. From a critical lens, English poetry lecturers are expected to scrutinize the power structures that evaluate the consequences of poetry assessment.

On the other hand, participants emphasized the importance of assessment ethics. The participants argued the legitimacy of the purpose of poetry assessment, fitness of assessment tools, evaluation criteria, and involvement of all stakeholders in negotiating assessment criteria to promote ethical assessment policies. From a critical perspective, for ensuring ethics, it is necessary to take all affected participants in the process of assessment into consideration (Shohamy, 2001). Critical conceptions of English poetry assessment emerged as another theoretical category. This category was constructed through the integration of two focused themes: enabling conceptions and limiting conceptions. Enabling conceptions refer to lecturers' beliefs and assumptions that support critical, reflective, and dialogic approaches to poetry assessment. In contrast, limiting conceptions refer to beliefs and assumptions that constrain critical assessment practices by underestimating poetry assessment, and reinforcing rigid standards and institutional constraints. The findings revealed that these conceptions are not merely personal beliefs; rather, they are socially and institutionally situated understandings that operate at both micro and macro levels. Participants suggested that lecturers' critical

conceptions function as a form of hidden curriculum that shapes assessment decisions and influences classroom power relations. The results highlight the importance of critically examining and negotiating these conceptions to support more equitable, reflective, and pedagogically sound poetry assessment practices.

The results also indicated that critical poetry assessment literacy is shaped by multilayered contextual conditions rather than emerging in isolation. Participants identified psychological, economic, and professional conditions as focused codes constructing contextual conditions within which lecturers enact their poetry assessment literacy. Consistent with a critical perspective, the findings indicated that these contextual conditions influence how assessment literacy is developed and practiced, directing it either toward the reproduction of dominant power structures or toward challenging and transforming them within poetry assessment. This highlights the need for reforms that promote equity, teacher agency, professional growth, and critical reflection on the broader social, economic, and educational contexts within which assessment occurs.

The participants emphasized interactions among lecturers, curriculum developers, and assessment specialists through professional development programs. Constructive dialogues between lecturers and curriculum developers promote professional discourses among various stakeholders, and generate mentorship opportunities by specialists. In light of critical approach to assessment, conducting a process of needs analysis to contextualize the professional development programs is suggested. In addition, both formal and informal teacher professional development programs should lead to a process of self-regulation. Virtual platforms in order for targeting a larger group of stakeholders is suggested.

Finally, the participants positioned critical agency as a critical dimension of CPAL, capturing how lecturers continuously negotiate, interpret, and enact their assessment knowledge and values within institutional and social contexts. Participants viewed agency not merely as individual autonomy but as the capacity to question dominant literary interpretations, resist reductive scoring practices, and advocate for assessment approaches that recognize diverse but evidence-based readings of poetic texts. From this perspective, Iranian English literature lecturers' CPAL extends beyond the acquisition of assessment knowledge and skills to encompass lecturers' capacity to exercise informed judgment, negotiate institutional constraints, and advocate for more equitable assessment practices. The resulting CPAL code theory model is presented below (Figure 1).

Code Theory Model

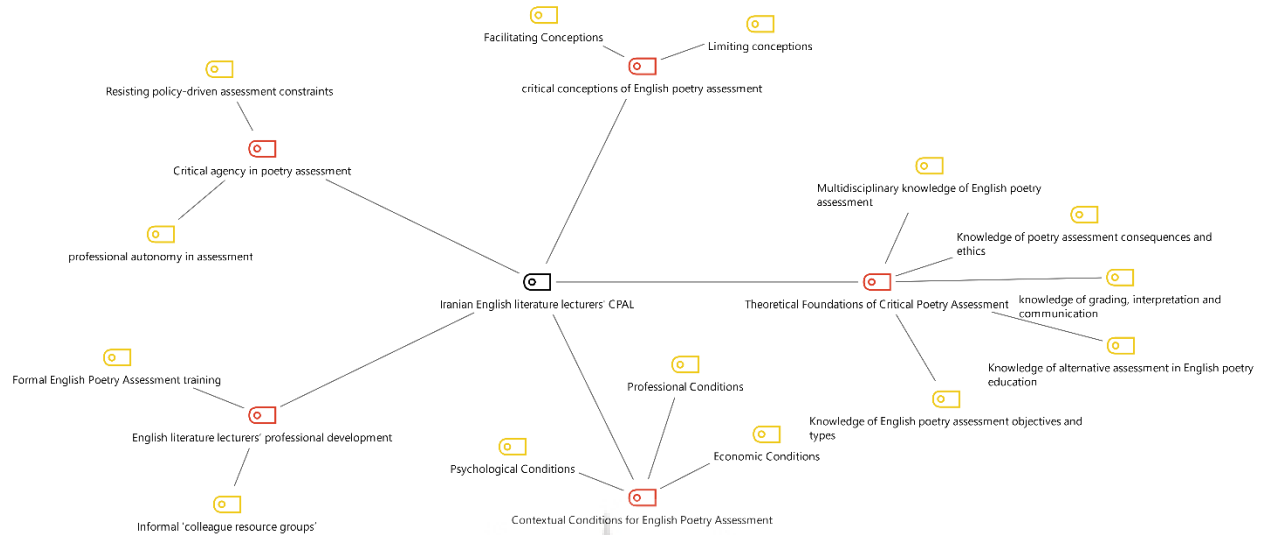


Figure 1.

Iranian English Literature Lecturers' Critical Poetry Assessment Literacy (CPAL) Code Theory Model

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to conceptualize Iranian English literature lecturers' critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL). Following the constructivist grounded theory approach articulated by Charmaz (2014), the conceptual dimensions of CPAL were generated through an analysis of Iranian subject-matter experts' perspectives through the lens of critical language assessment. The analysis generated a contextually grounded framework comprising five core categories: theoretical foundations of critical poetry assessment, critical conceptions of poetry assessment, contextual conditions, professional development, and critical agency. Collectively, these categories provide a nuanced understanding of how lecturers construct, negotiate, and enact poetry assessment literacy within the institutional, sociocultural, and disciplinary contexts of higher education.

The findings of this study may contribute to the assessment literacy literature by developing a contextually situated conceptualization of poetry assessment literacy. Although CPAL shares important conceptual foundations with LAL, reflecting its embeddedness within the broader domain of language education and assessment, the findings reveal distinctive

epistemological, sociocultural, hermeneutic, discursive, multidisciplinary, and aesthetic dimensions of CPAL that extend beyond language testing and assessment. Consequently, CPAL conceptualizes poetry assessment as a socially, culturally, and hermeneutically situated practice in which meanings, values, interpretations, and power relations are continuously negotiated.

The study may also contribute to the design of professional development programs for poetry lecturers by identifying the knowledge domains, critical dispositions, and contextual competencies required for effective poetry assessment. The findings suggest that professional development should incorporate opportunities for developing literary interpretive expertise, designing poetry-specific assessment criteria and rubrics, critically evaluating evidence-based interpretations, and reflecting on the sociocultural and institutional influences on assessment.

A particularly important contribution of the proposed framework lies in its conceptualization of critical agency as an integral dimension of CPAL. The findings suggest that poetry lecturers' assessment literacy is not limited to what they know about assessment but also encompasses their capacity to negotiate institutional constraints, participate in assessment-related decision-making, and enact contextually responsive assessment practices.

The findings carry important pedagogical implications for English literature education in higher education. By identifying the knowledge, competencies, critical dispositions, and contextual factors that shape effective poetry assessment, the CPAL conceptual framework may provide a clear conceptual roadmap for lecturers' poetry assessment practices. It may also offer a foundation for designing contextually responsive professional development programs to address the interpretive, hermeneutic, ethical, sociocultural, and critical dimensions of poetry assessment. In doing so, the framework can support institutions in fostering collaborative and reflective assessment cultures.

Despite its contributions, this study had several limitations. The proposed CPAL framework was developed from the perspectives of a relatively small group of Iranian English literature lecturers and subject-matter experts and therefore reflects a specific educational, disciplinary, and sociocultural context. In addition, the study explored participants' conceptualizations of CPAL rather than its enactment in actual assessment practices. As a constructivist grounded theory, the framework should be understood as a contextually situated and co-constructed interpretation rather than a universally applicable model.

Future research should examine the applicability of the framework across diverse

contexts, investigate how CPAL is enacted in practice and develops over time, and explore its relationship with students' learning experiences and perceptions of assessment. The development and validation of a diagnostic CPAL questionnaire is also recommended to operationalize and empirically examine the framework. Overall, this study may advance the assessment literacy literature by conceptualizing critical poetry assessment literacy (CPAL) as a contextually situated framework that integrates disciplinary expertise, hermeneutic interpretation, critical reflexivity, ethical responsibility, and professional agency. In doing so, it may provide a foundation for more reflective, equitable, and context-sensitive approaches to poetry assessment in higher education.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Dear Professor,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your insights will contribute to the development of a grounded conceptualization of critical poetry assessment literacy by helping to identify and understand the key elements and processes involved in poetry assessment practices in Iranian higher education context.

The interview questions are open-ended to encourage detailed reflections on your experiences and perspectives. As this is a semi-structured interview, a number of guiding questions was used; however, you are welcome to elaborate on any issues you consider relevant to the topic.

All information you provide will be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

Thank you for your valuable contribution.

Best regards,

1. How would you describe the concept of "assessment literacy" specifically within the context of English poetry education?
2. What unique assessment literacy competencies do Iranian English poetry lecturers require compared to other language teachers?
3. Could you describe the assessment methods or tools most appropriate and effective for assessing students in English poetry courses?
4. How can assessment literacy integrate pedagogical goals with English literature curriculum objectives?
5. What distinctive challenges do Iranian English literature lecturers face when assessing different literary genres such as poetry, drama, and prose?
6. How important is the integration of cultural, historical, and critical literary competence in assessment literacy for Iranian English poetry lecturers?
7. What alternative assessment methods do you consider effective and appropriate for English poetry courses? Name and describe each.
8. How can assessment literacy incorporate evolving digital tools and platforms to enhance English poetry assessment practices?
9. What types of professional development or training programs are most effective in cultivating assessment literacy tailored to Iranian English poetry lecturers?
10. In your opinion, how significant is an Iranian English literature lecturer's awareness of ethical considerations, fairness, biases and consequences in English poetry assessment practices?
11. What assessment skills should Iranian English poetry lecturers develop to design more learner-centered assessments?
12. How can assessment literacy support English poetry lecturers in designing tasks that fairly evaluate both linguistic skills and cultural understanding in students?

13. How important is the involvement of other stakeholders (e.g., students, administrators, curriculum developers) in shaping assessment literacy for English literature lecturers?

Appendix B

CPAL code system of Iranian English literature lecturers

Code System	Memo	Frequency
Code System		175
Iranian English literature lecturers' CPAL		
Theoretical Foundations of Critical Poetry Assessment		
Multidisciplinary knowledge of English poetry assessment	lecturers do not possess comprehensive expertise in every relevant discipline. But participants emphasized the importance of integrating relevant insights from multiple knowledge domains.	18
Knowledge of English poetry assessment objectives and types		15
Knowledge of alternative assessment in English poetry education	Although lecturers emphasized the importance of alternative forms of assessment, the data suggest that many lacked sufficient theoretical and practical knowledge to implement these approaches effectively.	14
knowledge of grading, interpretation and communication	The data suggest that the difficulty of converging subjective evaluations into numerical scores may reduce lecturers' commitment to systematic grading or record-keeping.	8
Knowledge of poetry assessment consequences and ethics	Although participants recognized the educational and psychological consequences of poetry assessment, they appeared to demonstrate limited knowledge of psychometric criteria including validity and reliability.	9
Critical Conceptions of English Poetry Assessment		
Limiting conceptions	Data analysis suggests that lecturers' conceptions of poetry assessment are influenced by contextual conditions. In the	13

	other words, the contextual conditions seem to shape how poetry assessment is understood and enacted in practice.	
Facilitating Conceptions		9
Contextual Conditions for English Poetry Assessment		
Psychological Conditions		10
Economic Conditions		11
Professional Conditions		12
English literature lecturers' professional development		
Formal English Poetry Assessment training	Data analysis suggests that formal development programs should extend beyond the development of technical skills and contribute to lecturers' positive conceptions of the purpose of poetry assessment in TEFL.	14
Informal 'colleague resource groups'		9
Critical agency in poetry assessment		
professional autonomy in assessment	Although professional autonomy is recognized as crucial, lecturers' limited conceptions of poetry assessment may constrain their capacity to exercise agency in assessment practices.	15
Resisting policy-driven assessment constraints		18