



## Investigating Assessment Literacy of EFL Teachers in Iran

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### Abstract

Assessment literacy is the possession of knowledge about the basic principles of sound assessment practice, including its terminology, the development and use of assessment methodologies and techniques, and familiarity with standards of quality in assessment. The aim of the present study was to determine the level of assessment literacy of EFL teachers in Eghlid, Fars Province, Iran. The participants were included 52 EFL teachers teaching English at public schools and private institutes. The sampling method was convenient available method. The instrument used to collect data was Melter's (2003) Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory adapted from a similar instrument called the Teacher Assessment Literacy Questionnaire (Plake, 1993; Plake, Impara, & Fager, 1993). Data were analyzed by using descriptive analysis. The results showed that the most of the teachers were at the low level of assessment literacy.

**Keywords:** classroom assessment literacy, classroom assessment literacy inventory, testing

### INTRODUCTION

Assessment literacy is the term which first proposed by Stiggins(1991), it refers to the range of skills and knowledge that a range of stakeholders need in order to deal with the new world of assessment into which we have been thrust. Gullickson's two studies (1982, 1985) and the findings of Fleming and Chambers (1983) seemed to indicate that teachers rely most heavily on teacher-made tests for student evaluation and classroom instructional feed-back.

Impara, Plake, and Fager (1993) in their survey found that majority of teachers agree that teacher-developed assessment information should be used extensively to enhance instruction. However, majority of them also tend to agree only in the idea that standardized test information should be used extensively to enhance instruction. This reflects the teachers' lack of information and utility for standardized tests.

Plake (1993) in a national survey for teachers reported that their best area of performance was on "administering, scoring, and interpreting test results" and the lowest performance was on "communicating test results." Plake (1993) further recommends inservice materials for teacher training to include standards of assessment.

Training in student assessment procedures has been shown to be important to teachers (Borg, Worthen, & Valcarlos, 1986). However, researches revealed that the preparation of teacher at most universities in the area of assessment training is either inadequate or totally absent (Noll, 1995; Roeder, 1972, 1973; Schafer & Lissitz, 1987, 1988).

Schafer and Lissitz (1987) in their study proposed that teachers are not well-prepared to conduct accurate classroom assessment that includes proper concepts, test construction principles, and test use. Mayo's (1967) survey results seemed to indicate that many respondents placed equal emphasis on teacher knowledge of standardized testing and classroom or teacher-made test.

Schaffer (1993 cited in Plake & Impara, 1997) points out that teachers need to be equipped with assessment skills. At least 50% of the teacher accreditation programs in the United States do not have a curriculum on assessment. At the same time, the programs that include a curriculum on assessment do not cover all assessment methods which are most beneficial for teachers. In a survey on classroom assessment literacy of teachers in the United States, the mean score on the 35-item rating-scale classroom assessment literacy inventory was only 66% (Plake & Impara, 1997).

Plake and Impara (1999) found that teachers receive little or no formal assessment training in the preparatory programs and often they are ill-prepared to undertake assessment-related activities. The results of their study indicate low levels of assessment competency for teachers. They further explained that the education community needs to recognize that teachers are ill-equipped to successfully undertake students' assessment as one of the most prevalent activities of their instructional program.

Hasselgreen, Carlsen and Helness (2004) and Huhta, Hirvalä and Banerjee (2005) conducted a survey designed to uncover the assessment training needs of teachers in Europe, their research seems to have uncovered the following needs in the area of training : portfolio assessment, preparing classroom tests, peer-and self-assessment, interpreting test results, continuous assessment, giving feedback on work, validity, reliability, statistics, item writing and item statistics, interviewing and rating. This represents a significant shift from traditional notions of assessment, with its focus on end products, towards an increasing recognition of the importance of assessment processes of the 'power' of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Davies (2008) argues that what is missing is a focus upon 'principles', or the reasons for testing or assessing, explored within a social and historical context. This would also include issues such as the ethics of testing, test fairness, and the role of tests in political decision making in controversial areas like immigration.

Davies (2008) reviews several textbooks about how to teach language testing, he characterized a paradigm includes skills, knowledge and principles. He proposed that "skills provide the training in the necessary and appropriate methodology, including item-writing, statistics, test analysis, software programs for test delivery. Background Knowledge in measurement and language description, and principles concern the proper use of language tests (cited in Zing & Zonghui, 2016).

Brindley (2001), Taylor (2009) argues that most available textbooks are “...highly technical or too specialized for language educators seeking to understand basic principles and practice in assessment”. Davies (2008) would call a ‘skills + knowledge’ approach to assessment literacy. ‘Skills’ refers to the practical know-how in test analysis and construction, and ‘knowledge’ to the “relevant background in measurement and language description” (Jin, 2010).

There was a focus on teachers’ understandings of Standards and criteria as well as on the alignment of high -stakes Assessment with other purposes of classroom -based assessment (CBA). The other key impetus has been the shift in emphasis in CBA from assessment of learning to assessment for learning (Fulcher, 2012).

Chappuis et al (2012) define classroom assessment literacy a necessary knowledge and skill for compiling data about students’ achievement (cited in Yamtin & Wongwanich, 2013). Yamtin & Wongwanich (2013) investigated the classroom assessment literacy of primary school teachers in Thailand, they suggested a developmental approach for improving the classroom assessment literacy , that their approach emphasize on cooperative learning and teamwork , with knowledgeable persons acting as mentors and coaches .

Scarino (2013) emphasizes on the need for teachers to develop language assessment literacy in ways that enable them to explore and evaluate their own preconceptions, to understand the interpretive nature of the phenomenon of assessment and to become increasingly aware of their own dynamic framework of knowledge, understandings, values, which shape their conceptualizations , interpretations, judgments and decisions in assessment and their students’ second language learning ( Mertler and cambell, 2005 ; Otero, 2006, cited in Rezaei and Bayat, 2015).

Focusing on the significant role played assessment literacy in educational system, Some teachers suffer from poor assessment literacy in classroom assessment despite of the crucial role of assessment in the area of teaching (Zing & Zonghui, 2016).

Assessment of students is one of the most important responsibilities of teachers, because it helps teachers to perceive, analyze students, and also helps them to obtain positive consequences in the area of teaching. It is easy to consider the essential role of assessment literacy in educational context. The importance of assessment competence were highlighted by Rudman, Kelly, Wanous, Mehrens, Clark, and Porter (1980) who describe the necessity for teachers to use a variety of assessment methods in order to make appropriate decisions about student grading ,grouping, placement and instruction. It is believed that the art of teaching is encouraging the teachers to challenge the problems and find suitable solution for the area of language assessment. So, the major purpose of the present study is to investigate the level of assessment literacy of EFL teachers.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study consist of 52 EFL teachers who were teaching at public and private institutes. They were selected from language institutes and public schools in Eghlid, Fars province. The selected teachers have the degree of education in BA, MA & doctorate degrees. Most of the participants were female about 69% percent, and about 31% were male. 52% were responsible to for teaching at the language institutes and 48 % were teaching both at private and public schools. and most of them fell in the 41 –45 age range; however, 17% of all respondents were in the 34 –43 age range, and 15% were in their twenties. 69% of the sample held a relevant BA degree as their highest qualification, 28% held an MA degree, and % 3 held a doctorate degree.

## **Instruments**

### ***Classroom assessment literacy***

In the course of this study, the researcher made use of one instrument to collect the necessary data. The instrument include the Classroom Assessment Literacy Inventory (Melter, 2003) which was adapted from a similar instrument called the Teacher Assessment Literacy Questionnaire (Plake, 1993; Plake, Impara, & Fager, 1993), This questionnaire consist of 35 multiple –choice items with four options, one being the correct answer, the items were aligned with "Standards for Teacher Competence in the Educational Assessment of Students" (AFT, NCME, & NEA, 1990). This questionnaire utilized to understand teacher's knowledge and basic elements and principles in educational assessment. According to Plake, Impara, & Fager, 1993, the original survey instrument has been shown to have reliability with both pre-service and in-service teachers of  $r_{KR-20} = .54$ . also, Campell, and Fager (1993) investigated the reliability of this instrument in a two-stage pilot study which was conducted with 152 pre-service teachers with 249 pre-service teachers, they showed that there is an overall instrument reliability (KR20) of .74. Alkhausi, (2011) also investigate the reliability, validity and level of difficulty of this questionnaire; they concluded that the TALQ's scores correlated positively with total course's scores. And it also measures a unitary construct of the assessment literacy. The classroom assessment literacy questionnaire was based on seven standards that these standards provided by American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in Education and National Association (1990).

## **Procedure**

At the beginning of the study, teachers's permission in order to collect data for the study was obtained. Then, 52 teachers were selected as the participants for the study and they were randomly assigned from public schools and private institutes in Eghlid, Fars province. It should be mentioned that for completing questionnaire the teachers were given enough time. Data was collected between November and December 2017. Then all questionnaires were analyzed for the purpose of data analysis. The sampling method was convenient available method

## **RESULTS**

After collecting the necessary data, the researcher used the descriptive statistics to interpret the data, this study attempts to investigate the assessment literacy of EFL teachers. For this purpose one questionnaire was administered and the data was collected.

The questionnaire was based on seven standards related to assessment literacy of teachers, they are included

1. Teachers should be skilled in choosing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
2. Teachers should be skilled in developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
3. Teachers should be skilled in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of both externally-produced and teacher-produced assessment methods.
4. Teachers should be skilled in using assessment results when making decisions about individual students, planning teaching, developing curriculum, and school improvement.
5. Teachers should be skilled in developing valid pupil grading procedures which use pupil assessments.
6. Teachers should be skilled in communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators.
7. Teachers should be skilled in recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information.

**Table 1.** Teachers' Scores of Classroom Assessment Literacy

Standards	Items	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Choosing an assessment methods	1,2,3,4,5	2	5	3.45	1.012
Developing assessment methods	6,7,8,9,10	0	3	2.54	1.72
Administering assigning, and interpreting learning outcomes	11,12,13,14,15	1	4	2.81	1.61
Using assessment outcomes in decision making	16,17,18,19,20	1	4	1.82	1.32
Using assessment to determine levels of learning outcomes	21,22,23,24,25	0	4	2.83	1.29
Communicating assessment outcomes	26,27,28,29,30	0	4	1.87	1.03
Knowing unethical practices	31,32,33,34,35	1	4	2.03	1.23
Total	35	9	27	18.39	3.74

The results of the study showed that the mean of the scores was 18.39 and the standard deviation of 3.74 with the total score of 35. The minimum total score was 9, while the maximum score was 27 points.

As Table 1 reveals the highest mean of the seven standards for teacher competence in educational assessment of students is Standard: M= 3.45 and the standard deviation of 1.012. This finding confirmed the results of the similar study done by Yamtim and Wongwanich (2014). The lowest mean belongs to Standard 4 i.e. using assessment outcomes in decision making with the mean of 1.82 and standard deviation of 1.32.

**Table 2.** Levels of Classroom Assessment Literacy

Standards	Classroom Assessment Literacy		
	Low	Medium	High
Choosing an assessment method	32.28	25.05	38.69
Developing assessment methods	41.34	23.05	35.61
Administering assigning, and interpreting learning outcomes	38.26	37.82	29.09
Using assessment outcomes in decision making	82.14	8.93	8.93
Using assessment to determine levels of learning outcomes	75.03	15.89	9.08
Communicating assessment outcomes	67.23	16.38	16.38
Knowing unethical practices	52.12	29.49	18.39
Total	65.38	24.24	10.38

The scores of classroom assessment literacy were divided into three levels: low, medium, and high. To get these levels the researchers considered three scales: 1. The scores lower than 40% as low, 2. between 40-75% as medium, and 3. above 75% as high levels. In an overall view the findings revealed that the participants got the score in low level. It means that 65.38% of the subjects were in low level.

When considering the scores for each of the seven standards, it could be seen that most of the participants had scores for five standards at the poor level. The lowest score was for Standard 4: Using assessment outcomes in decision making (82.14%). However, the highest score belonged to Standard 1: Choosing an assessment method (38.69%). And Standard 2: Developing assessment methods (23.05%), was the medium standard.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Language testing has seen unprecedented expansion during the first part of the 21st century. there is an increasing need for the language testing profession to consider more precisely what it means by “assessment literacy” and to articulate its role in the creation of new pedagogic programs in language testing and assessment in order to meet the changing needs of teachers and other stakeholders for a new age. The goal of this study was to investigate the literacy assessment of EFL teachers.

Assessment is the bridge that links the curriculum and the instruction , it reflects many goals ( Oleksak, 2007), there are so many changes in the form of assessment, teachers in the area of assessment should be competent enough , it is better they familiar with different competencies including selecting assessments, developing assessments for the classroom, administering and scoring tests, using scores to aid instructional decisions, communicating results to stakeholders, and being aware of inappropriate and unethical uses of tests. Teachers need to be more competent in the rigors of assessing student learning to determine how effective their instruction are in developing student targets. The development of assessment competencies depends on the kind of experience and training that teachers receive in their pre-service years (Cizek, Fitzgerald, & Rachor, 1996). Teachers should be offered long-term and comprehensive in-service training programs on alternative and performance assessment methods. Training programs for teachers should be also based on practice more and find solutions for problems of teachers that may face. They should be provided appropriate materials and resources about novel alternative assessment methods (Birgin & Baki, 2009).

Student assessment is an essential part of teaching and good teaching cannot exist without good student assessment. Training to develop the competencies covered in the standards should be an integral part of pre-service preparation. This article describes assessment literacy of EFL teachers in which a survey instrument was used to elicit the assessment procedures used by language teachers. The results showed that the most of the teachers were at the low level of assessment literacy and teachers cannot successfully fulfill their duties; that is, to conduct learning assessment. Most of the participants had scores for classroom assessment literacy at the poor level. The standard that received the highest mean score was Standard 1: 3.45 choosing an assessment method, whereas the standard that received the lowest mean score was Standard 4 about 1.82 Using assessment outcomes in decision making. Such findings reflect and confirmed the study that conducted by Yamtin & Wongwanich, 2014.

Not only in this study but also in other previous studies conducted by Schafer and Lissitz (1987), Stiggins (1995) showed that teachers are not well-prepared to conduct classroom assessment; the educators are not very knowledgeable enough about sound assessment. Teachers and administrators are poorly prepared to face the increasing challenges of classroom assessment.

Also, the obtained results also inform the needs of our educational system to skillful and qualified teachers in the area of assessment. First, it provides data for the concept of assessment literacy within which teaching how to assess students performance become an integral part of teaching and learning. Second, it uncovered problems in the area of training teachers and in which every country has its own mechanism to measure student, so assessment literacy of students should be at the heart of education. Assessment training to teachers can be considered by educational system.

In the previous studies Borg, Worthen, & Valcarce, 1986 also showed that training in student assessment procedures was important to teachers. Plake and Impara (1997, 1999) found that teachers receive little or no formal assessment training in the preparatory programs and often they are ill-prepared to undertake assessment-related activities. The result also shows that the teachers lack of sufficient knowledge about assessment methods. Likewise, many studies in Turkey (Birgin, 2003; Daniel & King, 1998; Plake & Impara, 1993; Zhang Burry-Stock, 2003) reported that teachers are insufficient in alternative and performance assessment methods. The needs of teachers should be identified, some teachers are not enough knowledgeable in which how to assess students. The educational system can provide programs in the area of assessment. Also providing workshops based on standards for teacher competence in educational assessment of students.

The standards for teacher assessment defines standards for teacher preparation in student assessment developed to cover assessment competencies needed by classroom teachers. Teachers can develop growing roles in education and policy decisions beyond the classroom because these standards address assessment competencies underlying teacher participation in decisions. Teachers often seem unable to affect the policy and resist external imposition. It is suggested that language teachers engaged in classroom assessment practices and familiarized with these standards in order to do profession of

assessment. Focus on teachers' understandings of Standards and criteria were also emphasized by Fulcher, (2012) in the area of assessment for learning.

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