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### Research Paper

## Development and Validation of Language Assessment Literacy Scale for High School EFL Teachers: A Mixed Methods Approach

**Salah Addin Rahimi<sup>1</sup>**

*Ph.D. Candidate of TEFL, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran*

**Seyyed Ayatolla Razmjoo**

*Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran*

**Rahman Sahragard**

*Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran*

**Alireza Ahmadi**

*Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran*

### Abstract

Teachers need to keep up to date with a set of clear and common expectations and formidable challenges that arise in classroom assessment practices. Defining and conceptualizing of language assessment literacy have been the subject of much debate, especially with regard to detecting and defining the main components of language assessment literacy for language teachers (Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2019). The main aim of the study was to pinpoint and define the main components of LAL in the EFL context of Iran. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with high school EFL teachers, and reviewed existing literature, documents on language assessment literacy as well as utilized the grounded theory approach to explore EFL teachers' perception and insights into language assessment

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [salah.rahimi8@gmail.com](mailto:salah.rahimi8@gmail.com)

literacy and define the main components of language assessment literacy based on the EFL teachers' perceptions. The proposed model consists of three elements, namely awareness of language pedagogy, assessment principles and interpretation, assessment policy and local practices. In the second stage of the present study, to ensure reliability and validity of the scale, 203 Iranian EFL teachers with the age range between 22 to 55 were asked to complete the newly-developed instrument. Finally, to measure the EFL teachers' language assessment literacy, 41 five-point Likert-scale items were developed. Based on all validation and statistical procedures, the newly-developed scale can be considered a valuable tool for measuring high school EFL teachers' language assessment literacy.

**Keywords:** Language assessment literacy, scale, EFL teachers, Mixed-Methods

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## 1. Introduction

Language education in the age of technology, migration, and globalization is recognized as the important aspect of transdisciplinary process which is embedded within interlingual and intercultural settings (Leung, 2010). Given what has been said, teachers' performance is major contributor to effective teaching and learning (Challob, 2021). Enhancing teaching effectiveness is crucial that can lead to academic standards (Merati, Ghonsooli, & Alavi, 2021). Since the results of studies, some of which have been shown that teacher is recognized as the important school-related factor in determining of success and failure of students. In fact, many researchers and education system have become increasingly concerned about helping to promote learning by establishing appropriate evaluation system (Golombeck & Johnson, 2021).

Language assessment literacy can also profoundly affect teachers' involvement in decision making about their teaching and, in turn, their practices. Due to its vital role in the educational context, assessment literacy has always been the center of attention. In fact, LAL is significant in the number of language testing textbooks and articles published (e.g., Malone,

2013; Leung, 2014; Xu & Brown, 2016). While some scholars have considered broader analysis of LAL (e.g., Brown, 2011), others have focused on assessment practices in classroom (e.g., Calveric, 2010; Qian, 2008). Language assessment knowledge is considered to be the core component of language assessment literacy, and different aspects of assessment knowledge and assessment literacy are inextricably intertwined (Fulcher, 2012). In fact, determining the essential components of LAL and identifying the weakness and strength of language assessment literacy of teachers enable the researchers to detect the needs of language teachers (Scarino, 2013).

Over the last decade, the language assessment literacy has witnessed a surge of interest in language assessment (Calveric, 2010; Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018; Hill, 2017; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Olmezer-Ozturk & Aydin, 2018; Popham, 2013; Xu & Brown, 2016). Language assessment literacy is claimed to be an indispensable tenet of knowledge and skill for gathering information about students' activity and utilizing the assessment result to promote learners' performance (Popham, 2013). Assessment literacy is an essential aspect of teaching practices (Leung, 2014). It has a crucial role in improving the efficiency of language teachers' instruction and students' performance in learning (Fulcher, 2012; Leung, 2014).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Language Learning Constructs and Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)**

Over a long time, the compartmentalized view of the language structure and the centrality of discrete grammatical knowledge points reflect decontextualized orientations toward oral interaction in language development. Nowadays, understanding language learning utilizing in real-life situations needs to be matched with corresponding evaluation and assessment theory (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018). Developing LALS requires a

deep understanding of domain knowledge and the relationship among these domains. Disciplinary domain knowledge proved to be efficacious in identifying the dimension of LAL and, beyond this, the way it is constructed and utilized in practice (Scarino, 2013). Moreover, exploring teachers' conception of the assessment process and others' conception for developing teacher assessment literacy is vital in shaping assessment literacy. In fact, LAL is required for stakeholders involved in decision-making processing. Teachers are not necessarily at the center of assessment literacy domains. Language assessment knowledge is considered to be the core component of language assessment literacy, and these entities are inextricably intertwined (Fulcher, 2012). Thus, determining the essential components of LAL and identifying the weakness and strength of teachers' LAL enables the researcher to detect language teachers' needs (Malone, 2013).

## **2.2 Research on Teachers' Assessment Literacy and Practice**

Research in many countries has demonstrated that there are various types of assessment-related activities among language instructors. Many language teachers use assessment knowledge to improve their teaching practices.

Farhady and Tavassoli (2018) conducted a study to develop a language assessment knowledge (LAK) test to measure language teachers' LAK. The study was carried out in multiple stages. In the first stage of the study, the researchers attempted to identify EFL teachers' needs and perceptions regarding language assessment and testing. After a comprehensive review of recent literature related to language assessment, a data-driven test for language teachers was designed. In fact, different stages were followed to develop LAKT, including a thorough review and eliciting language testing practitioners' opinions. Initially, the test was composed of 35 items, and each item was carrying 1 point. Then, the test was examined in the language testing field, and it was revised. Next, the newly developed test was piloted

with 50 EFL teachers. Next, the LAKT was revised again and finalized with 32 items. Finally, the final format of LAKT consisted of four constructs, including test type/functions, stages of language test design, test characteristics, key terms/concepts, alternative assessment techniques, and assessing examination and skills.

Furthermore, Firoozi et al. (2019) conducted a study to detect Iranian EFL teachers' assessment needs to perform the assessment-related task in line with reform-based policies in the EFL context of Iran. To this end, the researchers employed the grand document about reform and interviews to collect data about language teachers' assessment need based on the reform-based assessment policies. A total of 15 EFL teachers took part in this study. After a comprehensive review of grand documents, the researchers determined 42 assessment-relevant standards. Then, the data were classified into three standards. Moreover, the analysis of qualitative data led to the emergence of two major themes. The findings showed that language assessment guidelines should be more transparent. In addition, analysis of the document revealed that reform-based policies in Iran are in line with the assessment for learning.

Vgot, Tzagari, and Spanoudis (2020) carried out a study to examine language teachers' perceptions toward their assessment literacy needs in order to investigate their beliefs about LAL and their LAL levels. The results revealed that context is the important dimension of need analysis and language assessment literacy model can be developed based on a context-specific teacher education program. More recently, Bohn and Tzagari (2021) carried out a study to detect the main components of LAL. The findings showed that the final format of LAL consisted of four constructs including disciplinary, assessment-specific, pedagogical, and collaborative. In addition, Shahzamani and Tahririan (2021) conducted a study to investigate ESP teacher', content

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teachers', and EFL teachers' LAL to evaluate students' reading skills regarding formative assessment. The results revealed that there are not significant differences among the teachers' assessment literacy to assess students' reading skills.

Having reviewed previous research on language assessment literacy, the researchers found a few gaps on three major issues as follows:

First, most studies on language assessment literacy have examined the language teachers' beliefs toward language testing and evaluation (Inbar-Lourie, 2008) and the result is that instructors should be equipped with sufficient knowledge to be more assessment literate.

Second, most assessment literacy tests are not designed based on teachers' voices, especially language teachers. A number of well-known tests such as NBC test, Praxis tests, are designed based on only stakeholders' perceptions following a top-down approach (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018).

Finally, insufficient studies have been conducted on Iranian high school EFL teachers' assessment literacy. Nevertheless, these attempts have been limited to reviewing different areas of LAL issues that ranges from definitions and conceptualizations of assessment literacy or investigating the relationship between teachers' perceptions of LAL and their demographic features (Calveric, 2010). In addressing these gaps, the main aim of the present study is to measure language teachers' familiarity with the basic definitions of language assessment and applying multiple methods of assessment to classroom practices. Drawing from previous work (e.g., Firoozi, Razavipour, & Ahmadi, 2019; Homayoonzadeh, 2019), the present study seeks to complement and expand the current beliefs, practices, and understanding of LAL in the EFL context of Iran by investigating existing literature, documents, and high school EFL teachers' perception. The present study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the components of language assessment literacy for the Iranian high school EFL teachers?
2. What are the psychometric properties of language assessment literacy scale?

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Design**

In the current study, the researchers selected an exploratory sequential mixed-methods research (QUAL+ Quan) design to broadly explore and understand the EFL teachers' perceptions of the language assessment literacy in their teaching practices, and identify the high school EFL teachers' assessment needs to execute assessment-related tasks based on new curriculum objectives. Exploratory sequential design is an approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative research and methods in a sequence (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The design of the current study is defined by having exploratory embedded within an experimental design because it is data-driven rather than theory-driven. However, this doesn't mean that the researchers are not allowed to use information from the existing, legitimate source of literature, but the qualitative data will be guided by a conceptual theoretical framework to capture the research problems better. The researchers postpone the quantitative phase of the study because collecting additional conceptual leverage allows the researchers to better understand the phenomena before administering a survey or questionnaire.

#### **3.2 Participants**

The number of participants involved in the study is as follows:

**Group1:** The participants in the interview phase were high school EFL teachers from different education levels, genders, ages, and teaching experiences. A total of 15 high school EFL teachers took part in this phase of the study. The participants of the present study were selected based on the purposive sampling technique. To be specific, the participants were selected by criterion sampling. The researchers tried to recruit participants who create

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as many differences as possible concerning gender, teaching experiences, and variations in qualifications, individual skills, and workplaces (i.e., urban, rural, and inner-city schools) in order to construct a robust view of the issue from the EFL teachers' perspectives.

**Table 1**  
*Profile of participant teachers*

Teacher	Academic degree	Gender	Professional qualifications	Teaching experience
T1	Ph.D. in TEFL	M	Attended a few workshops on performance-based assessment and ELT workshop	7
T2	BA in English Literature	F	Attended a few ELT and classroom management workshop	5
T3	MA in TEFL	F	Attended a few ELT workshop	7
T4	Ph.D. in TEFL	M	Attended a few proficiencies and performance assessment workshop	8
T5	BA. English Literature	M	Attended a few ELT workshops	14
T6	MA in TEFL	M	Attended a few classrooms management workshop	21
T7	BA and MA in TEFL	F	Attended a few ELT workshop	5
T8	BA in English Literature	M	Attended a few ELT workshop	6
T9	MA in TEFL	M	Attended a few ELT and performance-based assessment	17
T10		F	Attended a few ELT workshop	12
T11	MA in TEFL BA in English Translation and MA in TEFL	M	Attended a few training sessions on syllabus design	19
T12	MA in TEFL	M	Attended a few classrooms management workshop	5
T13	BA and MA in TEFL	F	Attended a few ELT workshop	8
T14	MA in TEFL	M	Attended a few workshop	18
T15	BA in TEFL	F	Attended a few ELT	26



**Group 2:** The researchers conducted a focus-group interview to collect data for grounded work. A total of 10 high school language teachers took part in the present study. The participating teachers were asked six core questions about characteristics of *good assessment*, *purpose of the assessment*, and *quality of assessment*. Focus group interviews are group interviews that participants have interaction with each other in order to share their ideas. The sampling design for this phase of the study was criterion technique. The demographic information of high school EFL teachers in the focus group interview is parented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics of High School EFL Teachers based on Age, Degree, Teaching Experience, and Major*

		Frequency
<b>Age Range</b>	22-30	3
	31-40	2
	41-55	5
<b>Gender</b>	Male	6
	Female	4
<b>Degree</b>	BA	3
	MA	5
	Ph.D.	2
<b>Major</b>	TEFL	8
	English Translation	1
	English Literature	1
<b>Teaching experience</b>	2-5	1
	6-10	3
	11-28	6

**Group 3:** A total of 203 experienced and novice high school EFL teachers took part as the participants of this study. They had different degrees, including BA, MA, and Ph.D. for the reliability and factor analysis stages. The selection of the participants was based on non-probability convenience sampling.

### **3.3 Instruments**

#### **3.3.1 Language assessment literacy scale**

The LAL scale was designed in multiple stages to measure high school EFL teachers' familiarity with the purpose of assessment and application of this concept into classroom practices. Based on the proposed LAL model, the scale was developed and administered to the participants. The newly developed instrument consisted of 41 four-point Likert scale items ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' with acceptable reliability and validity based on the three components as follows: (1) Awareness of Language Pedagogy (2) Assessment Principles and Interpretation (3) Assessment Policy and Local Practices. Example items include "I adjust my teaching methods and assessment process with learning goals and objectives", "I believe that teachers with a high command of English are more confident in assessing students", "I monitor students' performance every moment so that I can identify their weaknesses". In the quantitative phase of the present study, the LAL scale was tested through different statistical procedures included exploratory factor analysis, and Cronbach alpha for reliability.

#### **3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

The present study used interviews as the primary data collection methods. The researchers collected, analyzed the data using the grounded theory approach. At this stage in the research, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview to collect data for the grounded work. Dörnyei (2007) claimed that this type of interview is an accommodation between the two extremes, namely, structured and unstructured interviews. Although there are prior designed questions, it has an open-ended format.

#### **3.3.3 Focus-group interviews**

In the second stage of the interview, an online focus group was conducted as an original method of data collection in qualitative research. Focus group interviews involve organized interaction with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and specific topics (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus, the researchers adopted online focus group interviews to collect data. All data were collected virtually through social networks such as Skype and WhatsApp.

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedures**

The Covid-19 has created an unusual situation for researchers to conduct interviews and distribute the scales in person. In addition, lockdown and strict measures for social and physical distancing guidelines for residents are announced. This qualitative study collected, analyzed, and reported data using the grounded theory method. At this stage in the research, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview to collect data for the grounded work. Ultimately, the online interview has provided an effective opportunity for an unexpected level of speed and adjustability with scheduling. The semi-structured interview was running well over 30 minutes and the participants were willing to attend an online interview on Skype.

The interview questions were designed in English, but all the interviews were conducted in Persian. Most high school EFL teachers feel more comfortable and facilitate expressing ideas and attitudes. The participating teachers were asked some core questions about different aspects of characteristics of good assessment, the purpose of the assessment.

The researchers tried to elicit the EFL teachers' beliefs of LAL in their teaching practices and identify the language teachers' assessment needs to execute assessment-related tasks based on the new curriculum objectives. Finally, this study went through different stages to ensure the credibility of the obtained data, including member-checking and peer-debriefing. Member

checking was carried out to validate and improve the accuracy of the interpretations. To estimate the content validity, the researchers asked three experts in the related field to examine the drafts and emerging themes from the research to ensure the truthfulness of the data.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

In the study, the researchers used the grounded theory approach, which is a type of qualitative research method to collect, analyze, and report the data. The data analysis was conducted using three types of coding (Ary et al., 2019). Open coding is the first level of coding. The researchers examined the transcription of a few interviews to identify differences and similarities among the data. The step of axial coding allowed the researchers to use the existing category from open coding to find more categories and subcategories or find connections among the new categories. That is, the initial coding was removed, and the broken data from open coding were tied and compiled into 17 meaningful categories.

Finally, selective coding was used to identify and select the core category and then systematically link it to other categories. The researchers examined the connection between the categories by further data collection. Ultimately, it is considered an essential step toward establishing the overall LAL model for high school EFL teachers. Consequently, based on the existing literature, documents, and high school EFL teachers' perception, the probable model of LAL comprised of three themes.

## **4. Results**

The first research question refers to the qualitative phase of the study. In the qualitative phase of the study, the researchers pinpointed and defined the main components of the model in light of previous work by Firoozi et al (2019), Homayonzadeh (2019), and existing literature as well as high school EFL teacher perceptions. The results showed that the proposed model

consists of three elements: (1) Awareness of Language Pedagogy (2) Assessment Principles and Interpretation (3) Assessment Policy and Local Practices. Each element is explained in the following sections.

#### **4.1 Awareness of Language Pedagogy**

The first element of the LAL model was thematically coded as awareness of language pedagogy. The first element of LAL consisted of 8 components namely, awareness of applied linguistics, awareness of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), clarity of assessment objectives, content of assessment, aligning assessment criteria with learning objectives, English proficiency of EFL teachers, giving feedback based on assessment, and teachers' self-Efficacy beliefs and their English proficiency.

##### **4.1.1 English proficiency of EFL teachers**

There is much emphasis on general English proficiency of language teachers which has been known as a crucial aspect of language teachers' knowledge (Richards, 2015). Almost all the interview respondents stated that EFL teachers' general English proficiency is recognized as a crucial factor in effective teaching. In fact, language teachers with a high level of general English proficiency are seemed to be more qualified in providing wide-ranging input for students (Ellis, 2005).

In this regard, one of the interviewees argued:

I think EFL teachers with a higher level of general English proficiency are more confident in giving instruction, assessing students, explaining the meaning of a word, or solving unpredictable speaking or writing problems.

##### **4.1.2 Awareness of Applied Linguistics**

Most high school EFL teachers claimed that it is necessary to gain full understanding of teaching methodology, second language acquisition, awareness and comparing approaches for language teaching and assessment to diagnose students' strength or areas of weakness in the learning process.

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Moreover, these teachers' competencies and language acquisition awareness are quite different from those in a subject like mathematics (Borg, 2006). As mentioned by one of the teachers:

The most important thing is that EFL teachers should use a variety of teaching methodology and a wide range of resources based on learner's learning style and personal character. Accordingly, EFL teachers should be equipped with a wide range of techniques, methods, and teaching strategies that they should use in their classroom.

#### **4.1.3 Awareness of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)**

The teachers explained that language teachers need to be experts in the wide range of instructional processes such as teaching methods, classroom management, and student learning. EFL teachers need to represent and formulate content in a way that enable students to develop their understanding. It should be noted that language teachers need to understand different aspects of pedagogical content knowledge. More specifically, one of the participants stated:

I firmly believed that a language teacher needs to understand examine different ways to improve students' learning, such as what is to be taught, assessed, and learned. Understanding how to mix subject content knowledge and pedagogy facilitates the learning process in the classroom.

#### **4.1.4 Clarity of assessment objectives**

The teachers claimed that assessing students highly depends on the learning objectives. In further discussion on this matter, they stated that EFL teachers should have clear assessment objectives to assess the readiness of the students. In fact, they should perform well in construct definition and test specification which are the essential components of language assessment (MacLellan, 2004). It should be noted that if there is a mismatch between learning objectives and teaching in the classroom, this will have a negative

impact on learning outcomes or “when there is alignment between what we want, how we teach and how we assess, teaching is likely to be much more effective than when there is not” (Biggs, 2007, p. 6). As mentioned by one of the teachers:

Language teachers often eliminate or ignore several relatively essential parts of the coursebook and instructional objectives and spend considerable amount of time in class on reading comprehension and improving this skill based on the GTM method.

#### **4.1.5 Content of assessment**

The high school EFL teachers argued that EFL teachers often neglect activities that are not connected with passing an exam. In particular, it was found that EFL teachers' approach to assessing their students' ability is much dependent upon the final exam. In fact, EFL teachers should be aware of the objectives of teaching practices and students' achievement, as stated in the instructional material and syllabus. Several research reviews have demonstrated that EFL teachers in high school need to collect information about student learning and change or adjust their course based on the collected evidence of students' performance. It is worth mentioning that one of the EFL teachers argued:

I believed that all items in test should be based on the goals of the teaching practices and teachers need to cover content from all section of textbook.

#### **4.1.6 Aligning assessment criteria with learning objectives**

EFL teachers should design their teaching and learning syllabus to meet the students' needs and interests. Considering the importance of communicative competence of the students, EFL teachers should prepare their instruction based on learning objectives as stated in the curriculum and assess students' language ability. That is, the learning objectives as a measure of student success should be aligned with the teaching and learning goals and the assessment tasks. Thus, in order to achieve a certain degree of validity as to

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what is intended from a course, it is important to measure course objectives by the measurement tasks which are in line with the ones mentioned in the syllabus (Falcao, 2013). According to one of the teachers:

Generally, EFL teachers in high school skip some lessons that are not included in tests and ignore the primary objectives of new textbooks, which is developing communication skills.

### **4.2 Assessment Principles and Interpretation**

The next element of the proposed LAL model was coded as assessment principles and interpretation. Six subcategories were extracted from this element, which is explained as follows:

#### **4.2.1 Purpose of Assessment**

In light of the thematic analysis of the literature, document, and interview data different assessment types including formative assessment, summative assessment, and assessment for learning were extracted.

One prominent theme that emerged from the data was related to two main categories of assessment purposes: summative assessment and formative assessment. The majority of EFL teachers claimed that they employ a wide range of interactive strategies to integrating assessment into the learning and teaching process. In fact, monitoring students' progress toward achieving the desired goals and evaluating the outcomes can help students take more control over their learning. Along these lines, one of the participants stated:

Every session, I try to assess my students' speaking ability through role-play, monologue description, etc. generally, I evaluate them to see if they need any correction or explanation.

With respect to summative assessment, this type of assessment is conducted to assess students' achievement at the end of the course. That is, most teachers employ this type of assessment to evaluate effectiveness of teaching strategies, lesson planning, and assessing the growth of students' progress. In fact, the core purpose of summative assessment is to evaluate



students' ability, knowledge, and learning that have developed over a period of time. According to one of the teachers:

I usually assess how much my students have learned at the end of a particular course to obtain information about the knowledge and skills they have learned during the course.

#### **4.2.2 Impact of assessment on the teaching process**

This component refers to the effect of evaluation and tests on the teaching and learning process. This point is entirely in line with Alderson and Wall (1993, p.117), who stated that "teachers do things they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test." Similarly, another teacher argued:

I think the final exam influences EFL teachers, and they focus on the contents that are likely to be included in the final exam, and the rest of the contents are all neglected. We have to prioritize the primary purpose of foreign language learning, which is developing communication skills.

#### **4.2.3 Scoring (analytic vs. holistic)**

One of the most recurring themes about English high school EFL teachers' language assessment literacy was related to the scoring procedure and rating scale in the study. This repertoire included two categories namely holistic and analytic scoring. Some teachers believed that using an analytical scale is more appropriate for assessing students' speaking skills, and identifying areas of weakness. In his regard, one of the participants stated:

I often employ an analytic scale to identify weak points and strong points regarding students' speaking ability to encourage them to improve it step by step.

However, some EFL teachers believe that teachers' ability to use holistic scoring matters most. They believed:

I believe that holistic scoring is more logical. I often assess students' speaking and listening abilities according to my experience and intuition. I have about 40 students in the class, so it is challenging and complicated when there are over 40 students and paper.

#### **4.2.4 Assessment type**

From the interview, it was apparent that the primary purpose of sampled teachers is to evaluate students' readiness for the final exam. The purpose of designing tests is to rank students in the class or grade them. Thus, assessment can be conducted to compare students' achievement with each other (norm-referenced) or assessment maybe utilized to compare students' performance base on the course content (criterion-referenced). The majority of EFL teachers in high school argued that they are not familiar with assessing learning principles. This implies that AFL practices are not well integrated into the curriculum to be implemented. In some cases, EFL teachers in high school mentioned that they are not provided sufficient appropriate training and opportunities to learn new capabilities regarding assessment for learning principles and practices. one of the interviewees argued:

Actually, I didn't receive any academic training in language assessment and assessing learners in relation to each course assignment and final exam. In fact, majority of teachers have not adequate knowledge in order to understand and perform underlying issue of assessment in the classroom.

#### **4.2.5 data literacy**

EFL teachers need to be data literate, which helps them understand data and use it appropriately and effectively. Mandinach and Gummer (2016) posited that "Data literacy for teaching can transform information into actionable instructional knowledge and practices by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting all types of data to help determine instructional steps. It combines an understanding of data with standards, disciplinary knowledge and practices..." (p.367). Data literacy help EFL teachers to diagnose, analyze, summarize, and prioritize data. This implies that teachers need to be

statistically literate, such as identifying assessments for supporting learning, not only measuring learning. One of the interviewees mentioned that

we need to take relevant information and apply it to make appropriate decisions for addressing the given problem or question about multiple types of relevant data available to generate future questions, inform, improve, and tailor instruction to better understand student learning.

#### **4.2.6 Communicating feedback to students**

The majority of EFL teachers argued that the ways students receive feedback to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses are rarely effective. This implies that students are not well informed about deciding and acting upon this feedback. It should be noted that feedback can be effective if learners easily perceive it and take action in response to it. Students' feedback literacy depends on their understanding, capacities, and teachers to inform them about the effectiveness of feedback.

#### **4.2.7 Using different methods for assessing students**

The majority of EFL teachers in high school stated that they are not systematically trained in developing specific tools or rubrics to score learners' performance. One point needs to discuss is that subjective evaluation of student's performance without applying any standard criteria and using intuition to score learners' performance is neither reliable nor valid. Teachers cannot assume that the given scores are reflect actual ability of students. That is, using various types of assessments would provide adequate information regarding students' learning conditions.

### **4.3 Assessment policy and local practices**

The third element of LAL deals with institutional considerations for designing language assessment. Having reviewed existing literature and documents related to educational assessment as well as interviewing high

school EFL teachers, two major categories were extracted. They include (a) Institutional policy for designing language assessment (b) socio-emotional dimensions.

#### **4.3.1 Institutional policy for designing language assessment**

This extracted theme consists of five self-expressive and sub-categories as follows:

1. EFL teachers must monitor students' progress throughout the course and foster assessment literacy of students. In fact, students should accurately self-assess themselves and gather information and reflect on their learning to develop specific learning skills and meta-cognitive capacity.
2. It is essential to apply appropriate assessment tools and rubric for grading and scoring students' performance in order to obtain a highly reliable and valid result regarding assessing students' performance.
3. EFL teachers need to fit classroom assessment practices with the reforms and modify their teaching practices.
4. It is necessary that teachers align their instruction based on students' learning needs.
5. EFL teachers need to collect information about student learning and modify or adjust their course based on the collected pieces of evidence of students' needs.

On the other hand, the second theme that is the socio-emotional dimensions in which EFL teachers need to embrace contextual matters in language education, language assessment and students' diversity including, cultural, individual, linguistic, religious, and ethnic characteristics. The extracted theme consists of five sub-categories as follows:

1. Language teachers should be aware of what language assessment means, its implication, and the impact of the evaluation on language learning and teaching strategies.

2. EFL teachers should ensure privacy and protect the confidentiality of student data.
3. Islam placed high value on self-evaluation, and teachers need to provide feedback and information that allow learners to find opportunities and obstacles to improve their lives through reflection upon moral conduct, Islamic ethics, and education.
4. Assessment should provide an emotionally safe learning environment to improve student performance and emotional state.
5. Student voice should be employed to influence educational policies' outcomes and change curriculum and instruction.

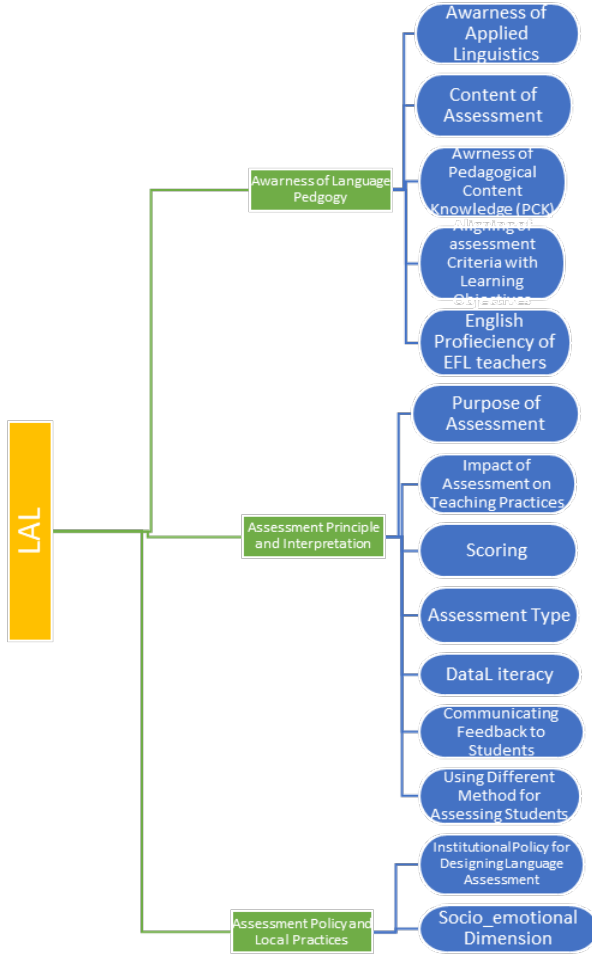
#### **4.4 The Proposed LAL Model**

The emerging model of LAL illustrates the relationship between LAL elements as circular and dialectic rather than a linear one, wherein the elements of assessment principles and interpretation, awareness of language pedagogy, and assessment policy and local practices influence and are influenced each other. Further, these elements reflect an extension and modification of Firoozi (2019) and Homayoonzadeh's (2019) study. It is worth noting that several points are notable regarding the newly developed category, namely "Awareness of Language Pedagogy" which has been emerged to provide a focus for language teachers' English proficiency and the ability to represent and formulate content in a way that are comprehensible to students. It should be noted that Firoozi's LAL framework is not implemented hierarchically. (i.e., awareness of language pedagogy category is ranked high). Regarding the presented model, Awareness of language pedagogy ranks high in the model as it deals with teachers' ability in comparing approaches for language teaching and assessment to diagnose students' strengths or areas of weakness in the learning process, awareness of

different aspects of pedagogical knowledge, and educational aspects of content knowledge.

It should be mentioned that the core of the aforementioned colloquium refers to general English proficiency which are known as a crucial aspects of language teachers' LAL, an important element affecting student learning. Moreover, Homaoonzadeh's study (2019) is structured into three central components, introduced by Pastore and Andrade (2019), each was theoretically based on three dimensions model for teacher assessment literacy, namely conceptual dimension, socio-emotional dimension, and praxiological dimension. Following this, within the socio-emotional dimension, the researchers include Pastore and Andrade (2019) suggestion that policy of designing language assessment and socio-emotional dimensions should be part of high school EFL teachers' LAL; for example, language teachers need to embrace contextual matters in language education, language assessment and students' diversity.

With respect to Firoozi's study (2019), *Data Literacy* and *Diverse Assessments* form one category and it can be combined as belonging to one category namely, *Assessment Principles and Interpretation*. Finally, Assessment Policy and Local Practices function as a standalone category, suggesting that institutional considerations for designing language assessment may have extensive applicability across EFL teachers.



**Figure 1.** *The Proposed Model of LAL for EFL teachers in the Iranian High Schools.*

#### **4.5 Results of the quantitative phase of the study**

To answer the second research question which indicates the quantitative phase of the study, 203 high EFL teachers answered the LALS. The reliability of the scale was estimated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient which showed the scale's internal consistency. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for

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the whole scale was .75 that is considered acceptable reliability of the scale indicating the scale could be used as valuable tool for the main study. To estimate the validity of LAL, the researchers implemented different types of validity. For face validity, LAL scale was scrutinized by a panel of experts considering a good layout, proper font, suitable margin, etc.

To estimate the content validity, the researchers asked three experts in the related field to examine the drafts and emerging themes from the research to ensure the truthfulness of the data. Next, two experts in language assessment with five EFL teachers were asked to review the scale and make comments on whether the items are accurate and plausible and whether they encounter difficulties in understanding some specific terms. In addition, the researchers then examined the newly designed English language textbooks, student's workbook, and teacher's guidebook. Besides these books, the essential elements were cross-checked with the topics from the literature of language testing, including the publications referenced so far on language testing and evaluation (Heaton 1990; Bachman 1990; Alderson 2000; Brown 2003; Fulcher and Davidson, 2007). Besides, the current study went through different stages to ensure the credibility of the obtained data, including member-checking and peer-debriefing. The researchers conducted member checking to validate and improve the accuracy of the interpretations. Before beginning the analysis, the data was scrutinized to ensure that the data is adequately factorable for exploratory factor analysis. As seen in Table 3 the results (KMO = .88 and Bartlett's test of sphericity:  $p < .001$ ) indicated that factor analysis would be an appropriate method. After ensuring the factorability of data, the researchers conducted PCA and EFA analyses (with varimax rotation) in order to detect a number of factors extract based on PCA and represent the degrees of their loading.



**Table 3**  
*KMO and Bartlett's Test*

<b>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.</b>		<b>.880</b>
<b>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity df</b>	Approx. Chi-Square	12,159.600
		555
	Sig.	.000

**Table 4**  
*Rotated Component Matrix*

	Component 1	Component3	Component 2
Item 1	.87		
Item 2	.74		
Item 3	.89		
Item 4	.72		
Item 5	.64		
Item 6	.50		
Item 7	.91		
Item 8	.91		
Item 9	.85		
Item10	.94		
Item11	.84		
Item12		.88	
Item13		.90	
Item14		.89	
Item15		.90	
Item16		.87	
Item17		.76	
Item18		.81	
Item19		.87	
Item20		.89	
Item21		.89	
Item22		.64	
Item23		.61	
Item24		.76	
Item25		.86	
Item26		.79	
Item27		.87	
Item28		.72	
Item29			.89
Item30			.87
Item31			.92
Item32			.85
Item33			

.75	
Item34	
.65	
Item35	
.62	
Item36	
.84	
Item37	
.86	
Item38	
.81	
Item39	
.82	
Item40	
.73	
Item	41
.76	

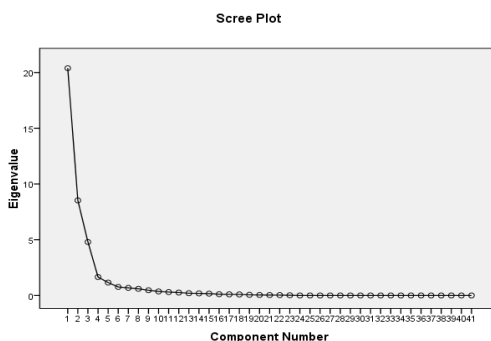
Following the analysis, the items grouped together under the same factor were scrutinized carefully to identify their commonalities and whether items clustered could establish new constructs of EFL teachers' LAL. It is also worth noting that items loading on factor 1 contained 11 items each related to the processes of assessment in language teaching and learning, contextual, awareness of language teaching, communication skills, and clarity of assessment objectives. In addition, each of the 15 items in factor 2 clearly related to technical considerations for designing language assessments, the impact of assessments on the teaching processes, and awareness of the technical skills. Ultimately, Factor 3 also contained 15 items, each of the fifteen items related to assessment policies that influence teaching practices and socio-emotional dimensions. As can be seen from Table 5, the three factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1, which explained 89 percent of the total variance. The finding indicated that the first three components recorded eigenvalues above 1, including component 1 (20.38), component 2 (8.52), component 3 (4.79).

**Table 5***Total Variance Explained*

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared	Rotation Sums of Squared
-----------	----------------------------	--------------------------

	Loadings			Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
<b>1</b>	20.387	49.725	49.725	18.730	45.682	45.682
<b>2</b>	8.529	20.802	70.526	8.016	19.551	65.232
<b>3</b>	4.796	11.697	82.223	5.88	14.362	79.594

The scree plot derived from the result in Figure 2 along with other criteria such as parallel analysis confirmed the presence of three components. It indicated a very small change between the values of 3 and 4, a suggestion was made that three factors should be retained.



**Figure 2.** Scree plot of the Eigenvalues and the items of 'LAL' scale

## 5. Discussion

With regard to the first research question, the results showed that the proposed model consists of three elements, namely, awareness of language pedagogy, assessment principles and interpretation, assessment policy and local practices. In line with the developed model, similar to Brindley (2001), Davis (2008), Fulcher (2012), and Giraldo (2018), we can argue that language assessment literacy can be thought of a three-dimension construct. In relation to the findings of the current study, the first constituent of LAL in this study, i.e., awareness of language pedagogy reflects that EFL teachers need a broad range of teaching methodology, awareness, and comparing approaches for language teaching and assessment in order to identify

students' weaknesses in the classroom improve students' learning. Accordingly, EFL teachers in high school should have the ability to represent and formulate content that is comprehensible to the students. The findings are in line with Shah Ahmadi and Ketabi (2020) study where EFL teachers' theoretical knowledge of the language and second language acquisition were considered as an essential factor for all language teachers. This conforms to Taylor's model (2013, p. 410), which supports knowledge of language teaching and pedagogy as the main components of teachers' LAL.

Besides the knowledge of theoretical knowledge of the language, this study documented importance of teachers' English proficiency. EFL teachers' English proficiency and fluency have long been recognized as an important assessment requirement for language teachers. This echoes findings from previous studies in the literature (e.g., Krashen, 1985; Butler, 2004; Ellis, 2005; Richards & Farrel, 2005; Kim & Elder, 2008; Richards, 2015; Zolfaghar & Ahmadi, 2016; Razavipour & Rezagh, 2018). This underlines the importance of English proficiency for EFL teacher to cater meaningful communication and evaluate student's communicative competence. The second element deals with assessment principles and interpretation. It reflects that high school EFL teachers do not receive enough training to learn new capabilities regarding assessment for learning technical skills. These findings are supported by Vgot and Tsagari (2014) study in which they stated that teachers need to increase their knowledge towards giving grade, rating, and scoring. The results of the current study are also supported by Sultana (2019) who reported that language teachers did not have sufficient training in assessment. As stated by Walters (2010) and Kunnan (2003), language teachers need to promote their knowledge toward language testing and training issues. Most teachers favored diagnostic and formative assessment in order to diagnose students' areas of weaknesses. Past research has underlined

the importance of this component for teachers (e.g., Gabril, A & Plakans 2014; Leri & Inbar-Lourie, 2019).

Moreover, the findings are supported by Brindley's (2001) study in which he states that "teachers see assessment as an activity which integrated into the curriculum to improve learning, rather than a one-off summative event" (p.127). For their knowledge of assessment type, the majority of EFL teachers stated that they are not familiar with assessing and learning principles. The current study documented some EFL teachers employ diagnostic assessment to identify how much students know and don't know about upcoming topics. Given that this is confirmed in some studies for instance, Cumming (2013) stated that teachers with a wide range of pedagogical knowledge improve students' learning of the course material and it helps students to involve in language-oriented assessment based on their professional practices in order to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning and enhance their self-regulation abilities to be more autonomous.

Furthermore, the finding revealed that most EFL teachers ignore instructional objectives in favor of contents that are likely to be included in the final exam. It should be noted that EFL teachers need to be aware of the negative side of the washback effect. Given that this is confirmed in some studies, for instance, Sultana (2019) argued that language teachers often do address the major goals of curriculum in the classroom. It provided insight into the fact that EFL teachers are more test-oriented since they only focus on examinable parts of the content.

In fact, according to Brown (2004), most EFL teachers argue that tests have a negative effect on learning activities and teaching practices. Ostensibly, the evidence from the existing data showed that language assessment theory and practices are inextricably intertwined as a complex

and expanded process, embedded within language-learning constructs, striving to assess students. It implies that EFL teachers should be aware of the main aspects of language classroom assessment and theoretical concepts for language assessment. That is, language teachers need to clarify the significant steps in test construction and select transparent assessment tools and methods to design and develop scoring rubrics such as an analytic and holistic rubric.

Therefore, within the findings of the interview, the theoretical knowledge is of great importance for the language teacher. In fact, language teachers' theoretical knowledge of assessment literacy is essential on their way towards professionalism (De Jong & Harper, 2005; Scarino, 2013; Khany, AliAkbari, and Hajizadeh, 2016). Besides, the findings are in line with Bagherzadeh, Tajeddin, and Abbasian's (2019) study in which they stated that familiarity with multiple assessment methods is necessary for language teachers and should be included in teacher training courses.

Moreover, the element that constituted assessment policy and local Practices is broken down into two subcomponents: institutional policy for designing language assessment and socio-emotional dimensions. The interview data additionally suggest that teachers should provide security to ensure students' privacy and protect them against some unwanted access to data because they might be sensitive about their scores, and final grades. In fact, teacher should use the test and assessment that are fair and non-discriminatory. These findings are supported by Pastore and Andrade's (2019) study in which they state "language teachers need to be aware of the social aspects of language assessment (e.g., test fairness and equity) and provide an emotionally safe learning environment to improve student performance and emotional state" (p.137). These findings are supported by Arias, Maturana, and Restrepo (2012) study in which they pointed out

language teachers not only need to be transparent but also need to practice democracy. In fact, transparency is conceptualized as making students aware of test modes, assessment, scores, and others; and democracy refers to negotiation and using different methods and approach to assess learners.

With respect to institutional policy for language assessment, Giraldo (2018) pointed out language teacher should identify obstacles affecting language assessment in classroom and represent the general principles and policies that promote language assessment literacy in educational context. Finally, to answer the second research question based on the quantitative data, the newly-designed instrument was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha and factor analysis respectively. Ultimately, the current frameworks for model validation and assessment, resulting in a well-structured 41 items scale with acceptable reliability and validity based on the three components. Based on all validation and statistical procedures, the newly-developed scale can be considered a valuable tool for measuring high school EFL teachers' language assessment literacy.

## **6. Conclusion and Implications**

The study created a framework through multiple stages to understand the assessment literacy level of high school language teachers regarding the new English textbooks and whether language teachers have the required abilities to perform assessment-related practices based on the reforms. The main aim of the study was to pinpoint and define the main comments of LAL in the EFL context of Iran. Ultimately, three elements with fourteen components were initially identified that constitute language assessment literacy.

The major underlying reason behind developing and validating a LAL scale for high school EFL teachers is the urgent need for measuring the level of high school EFL teachers' language assessment literacy. It should be noted that identifying and defining the assessment components of LAL for language teachers can have a useful implication for future teachers,

curriculum developers, syllabus designers as and teacher educators as main authorities in developing training programs. Moreover, LALS not only offers detailed guidance for teacher educators interested in assessment literacy but also creates the model and framework which are excellent way to understand about language assessment literacy level of high school EFL teachers. Besides, the LAL scale can be used for present and target needs of in-service teachers and, it might have significant implications for preparation programs for pre-service teachers in preparing future high school EFL teachers.

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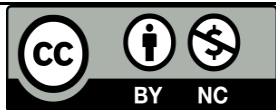


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