**Research Paper**

# Language Assessment Literacy Components; Now and Then: A Case of Iranian EFL Head Teachers

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**Abstract**
Inspired by Fulcher's Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) framework, this study focuses on two central concerns: first, the current components of LAL; and second, the needed components of LAL from the Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) head teachers' point of view. To this end, 147 EFL head teachers working at the Ministry of Education were selected. Semi-structured interviews, including demographic information and assessment-related issues, were used as the data collection method for this qualitative study.

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Moreover, Fulcher's assessment literacy framework was drawn on as the analytic model guiding the study. Based on the findings, knowing and understanding LAL basics, principles and processes such as knowledge of reliability and validity, assessment models and frameworks, washback, ethical issues, rubric development, interactiveness, test formats, design of receptive and productive skills and assessment process were among the current components of LAL. Further, the effects and consequences of LAL on learners such as social, political, educational, economical and psychological consequences, were identified as the needed components for the future. The implications of the study for teachers' Continuing Professional Development programs were also noted.

## 1. Introduction

Assessment is a crucial component of the teaching process as it enables teachers to evaluate learners' progress and achievement in learning (Harris et al., 2008). Assessment literacy in foreign/second language teaching is crucially important since it enables language teachers to understand, analyze and utilize the information to improve or change their instructional practices (Falsgraf, 2005; Scarino, 2013). Furthermore, knowledge of assessment literacy helps language teachers to choose the most effective and appropriate instruments to assess learners' learning and progress (Siegel & Wissehr, 2011). Assessment literacy is also an essential component of learners' learning process. Highlighting the importance of being an assessment literate teacher, Zolfaghari and Ahmadi (2016) asserted that learners' interests in choosing their field of study at universities and later their future job in the society is highly related to their performances in high school. In other words;

they believed that highly assessment literate high school teachers can recognize learners' learning strengths and weaknesses appropriately and give them a realistic picture of their potential and actual abilities. According to Spolsky (1987), those who are good in teaching are not necessarily good at assessing. Being responsible for language assessment and adapting themselves to the reformed version of assessment make language teachers be language assessment literate to attain what is expected from them (Brindley, 1998; Rea-Dickins, 2004; Inbar-Lourie, 2013; Yastibas & Takkaç, 2018). Therefore, to assess students' progress and achievement in learning felicitously, teachers need to have sufficient knowledge of assessment literacy (Popham, 2006).

Despite the increasing and considerable importance of language assessment literacy and its components, it has remained unexplored in Iran educational system. Since most of the teachers are involved in the process of decision-making and spend much of their professional time on doing assessment-related tasks and activities, it is not still satisfactory (Brookhart, 2011; DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; Popham, 2009). Determining the major components of assessment literacy in different subject areas help teachers develop their assessment competencies appropriately. In this regard, Jeong (2013) stated that identifying assessment components can be done through various ways such as interviewing, using questionnaires, and considering the role of context in analyzing learners' responses. Moreover, Taylor (2013) believed that by having a clear understanding of components of assessment literacy, teachers benefit from different teaching approaches.

## 2. Literature Review

Accountability and assessment literacy are now served as rudimental features for all teachers (Xu & Brown, 2016). Considering the concept of education, assessment is highly advantageous. Not only does it reflect

teachers' success in teaching but it shows students' progress in classroom setting. Moreover, according to Öz and Atay (2017), assessment helps teachers recognize what is wrong, what is right, and what parts need to be changed, improved, or omitted. Integrating assessment and instruction to support, monitor, and report students' learning and demonstrating educational standards is recommended to all teachers throughout the world (DeLuca et al., 2016; Gotch & French, 2014). Some of the educational researchers (e.g., Black & William, 1998; Hattie, 2009) highlighted the role of assessment literacy and assessment-based instruction as potential strategies for improving students' achievement. Moreover, highlighting the significance of classroom assessment as one of the learning processes, Eckhout et al. (2005) emphasized the role of teachers as assessors and state that "good teaching is impossible in the absence of good assessment" (p. 3). Among different assessment literacy models proposed by different scholars (e.g., Fullan, 2001; Webb, 2001; Mertler & Campbell, 2005), Fulcher's (2012) assessment literacy model is considered as the most comprehensible one. He argued that in addition to knowledge, skills and principles, familiarity with testing process including codes of ethics and practices; and ability to place knowledge and principles in wider frameworks (e.g., social, political, and historical) to see the effect of assessment on individuals and society should be included in assessment literacy models.

As Taylor (2013) confirmed, teachers, materials developers, stakeholders, and experts have various viewpoints about the needed components of assessment literacy. For instance, Melone (2013) revealed the differences between testing and teaching experts' views on assessment literacy and its components. From the viewpoint of teaching experts; selecting and implementing appropriate tests are the main components of assessment literacy. However, testing experts favor test developing process, standards

and criteria, and interpretation and analysis of test scores as the general components of assessment literacy. As Jeong (2013) argued, even non-language testers have different views toward components of assessment literacy. Most of them are interested in everyday learning and teaching practices in the classroom.

In the educational context of Iran, in their study on 32 English and non-English language teachers, Zolfaghari and Ahmadi (2016) found that identifying appropriate assessing contents, emotional understanding of the learners, knowing the assessment process, and ethical knowledge are the general components of assessment literacy among the urgent needs of both English and non-English language teachers. In a similar survey on 280 Iranian EFL teachers from seventeen different provinces of Iran, Janatifar and Marandi (2018) revealed that language assessment literacy in Iran's educational context consists of four parameters, namely: test structure and development, large-scale classroom assessment and standardized tests, beyond-the-test concepts such as ethical and social aspects of language assessment, and validity and reliability.

In another study, in the context of Malaysia, Lian et al., (2014) argued that the main components of language assessment literacy are; validity, reliability, use of assessment information, transparency, and fairness of the assessment. In her study, ingredients of language assessment literacy for language teachers, Inbar-Lourie (2013) mentioned the followings as the components of language assessment literacy:

- Knowing the social role of assessment and the responsibility of teachers as language testers.

- Knowing political and social forces.

- Knowledge of writing, administrating, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting test results.

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- Having the knowledge of large-scale test data.

- Being proficient in language classroom assessment.

- Knowing language teaching/learning theories and their relationship to assessment.

- Having the current knowledge of language teaching pedagogies and match them to assessment.

- Being aware of the problems that may occur in assessment (e.g., internal/external, validity and reliability.

- Knowing that language assessment literacy is the product of the experience and knowledge that every language teacher brings to the assessment and teaching process (i.e., is individualized).

Novelty of this study in terms of language assessment literacy refers to the EFL head teachers' viewpoints about the components of language assessment literacy after publishing the newly-developed English books in the Ministry of Education based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Moreover, this study, unlike the previous ones, considered the components of language assessment literacy in wider contexts (e.g., social, political, educational, …) based on Fulcher's (2012) language assessment literacy framework. Moreover, this study was to investigate not only the current but the needed components of assessment literacy from the EFL head teachers' perspectives. Therefore, this study had some implications for course developers and educational policymakers to highlight the concept of language assessment literacy in teachers' continuing professional development programs.

To sum up, the above literature review indicates that previous research studies have been reductionist in dealing with language assessment literacy components, therefore, drawing on Fulcher's assessment literacy framework

(2012), this study aimed to delineate EFL head teachers' viewpoints about both the current and future components of assessment literacy.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study relied on Fulcher's assessment literacy framework (2012). Based on Fulcher, language assessment literacy components can be illustrated in three categories. The first one refers to teachers' knowledge of language assessment literacy and its basics, their abilities and aptitudes, and capacities to plan, develop maintain, and assess large-scaled classroom-based exams. The second part refers to teachers' knowledge of concepts, principles, and processes of tests and test development. Besides, the last part refers to the teachers' ability to put knowledge, concepts, principles, and processes into practice in wider contexts such as historical, social, and political ones.

### 3.2 Design

This study drew on Fulcher's framework (2012) in language assessment literacy was to investigate the current and the needed components of assessment literacy in the Iranian educational system. The study relied on collecting, analyzing, and integrating qualitative approaches, considering the nature of the variables under investigation (see Dörnyei, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The aforementioned data was in the form of words and utterances produced by interviewees during the interview.

### 3.3 Participants

The participants were 147 Iranian EFL head teachers working at the Ministry of Education who were selected randomly. They were teaching in different cities representative of different cultures and experiencing teaching in various contexts. All of them were Persian native speakers with different university degrees (BA, MA, PhD) in English Language Teaching (ELT). All had more than five years of teaching experience aged between 23 and 50.

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Because of an unequal number of males and females, gender was not considered to be a moderator.

EFL head teachers were selected by the educational dean of the Ministry of Education in provinces for several reasons. Since; they had been involved in the curricular reform from its very inception through a variety of workshops, they were regarded as the most informed teachers. Being active and experienced teachers themselves, head teachers supervised other in-service teachers and were in constant contact with other teachers and were aware of their needs, problems, and concerns. They formed a network for efficient communications between practicing teachers and the Ministry of Education and echoed teachers' needs, issues, and progress to the Ministry of Education.

## 3.4 Instrumentation

This study employed a semi-structured interview, the main instrument, due to its ability to provide in-depth data with elevated validity. The interview was generally divided into two sections. Initially the questions of the interview emphasized the participants' demographic information leading onto their knowledge, skills, and principles in language assessment literacy and their ideas about the current components of assessment literacy (Figure 1).

| **Section one** | 1. what is your major and academic and qualification?<br>2. What type of assessment training did you receive?<br>3. Have you learned anything about testing and assessment during your academic and professional training period?<br>4. how many years have you been teaching English?<br>5. Do you have any experience of being a question developer (for public examinations/for internal school exams) |
| --- | --- |

| **Section two** | 6. What assessment methods do you use? |
| | 7. As an EFL teacher, to what extent are you familiar with test methods and strategies? |
| | 8. what are the different assessment resources in your country? |
| | 9. As an EFL teacher, are you familiar with different online assessment tools? |
| | 10. What are the common test formats in your country? |
| | 11. Do you think it is essential for teachers to improve their knowledge of assessment? (how?) |
| | 12. How do you enhance the quality of assessment? |
| | 13. What are the components of assessment literacy? Which ones are available in the Iranian educational context? |
| | 14. What components do you think should be added to the current language assessment literacy in educational settings? |

*Figure 1.* Interview protocol

The questions were designed in such a way that adequate responses could be elicited thereby contributing to the efficacy of the research question.

## 3.5 Procedure

This study followed the qualitative design using interviews for data collection. The interview consisted of 14 questions. Since the study was drew on Fulcher's assessment literacy framework (2012), all the interview questions were based on this framework. However; when interviewees provided ambiguous, unclear, and general responses, researcher asked more questions to clarify the main points, improve the validity of the survey results, and avoid biased interpretations. During the interviews, the EFL head teachers were asked whether they had received any training on assessment and to what extent they could apply what they had received in their classroom practices. They were also asked about assessment tools and methods they applied in their classes. Moreover; they were also asked about their ideas

about the current components of assessment literacy in the EFL educational system in Iran.

The interviews were conducted objectively and did not lead the interviewees to speak mentally about the investigator's ability to evaluate. This; was done by applying justice rather than equality while providing interview prompts to interviewees. The researcher simplified, repeated, or elaborated the problem-based and external variables such as the teacher's level of attention, personality factors, and noise level.

For the participants' convenience, the interviews were conducted both in Persian and English. They were digitally recorded. After reaching the data saturation of points, the interviews were stopped. The interviewer transcribed the interviews and coded the data based on an open coding procedure to generate some categories to investigate the components of language assessment literacy based on recurring themes and questions mentioned by the interviewees. The inductive thematic analysis was used as the data analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006); therefore; the identified themes were firmly rooted in the data. First; the researcher reviewed the recoded interviews and transcriptions and extracted the initial themes and codes. Then, similar codes were put together to create common themes. Third, the researcher went through the codes and themes and rechecked them in the light of the purpose of the study. Finally; based on a thorough analysis of codes, the researcher finalized the main cluster of themes corresponding to the purpose of the study.

## 4. Results

This study, relied on Fulcher's assessment literacy framework (2012), aimed to investigate the EFL head teachers' viewpoints of the current and needed components of language assessment literacy. To fulfill the purpose of the study, the inductive thematic analysis method was implemented in the

analysis of the obtained data. The following sections elaborate more on the participants' responses to the interview questions. The statistical analyses were carried out through MAXQDA software.

## 4.1 Demographic information

The first part of the interview consisted of some demographic information such as the participants' academic qualifications, university degree, received types of training in assessment literacy, teaching experience and their major. Table 1 summarizes the information of the number of EFL head teachers, their gender and academic qualifications.

Table1
*Participants' Information*

| Gender | Academic Qualifications | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | BA | MA | PhD |
| **Female EFL Head Teachers** | 33 | 38 | 7 |
| **Male EFL Head Teachers** | 35 | 30 | 4 |

As Table 1 represents the total number of participants were 147 EFL head teachers (male and female) with three different academic qualifications (i.e., BA, MA, PhD). All of them had their major in English Language Teaching, and they had more than 5 years of teaching experience. Since they were regarded the most informed and experienced teachers and supervised the in-service teachers and they were in constant contact with other teachers almost all of them were question developers for public examinations and internal school exams. Surprisingly, almost all the participants had not participated in any assessment workshops and their assessment knowledge and training got back to their time of university, when they were teacher students.

## 4.2 Assessment methods

The first question of section two of the interview (question number 6) asked the interviewees about the assessment methods that they have been using in their classes. As figure 2 presents, four general themes were extracted from the interviewees' responses.
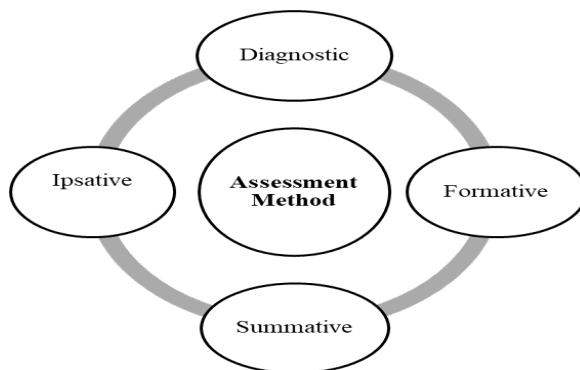
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*Figure 2.* EFL head teachers' ideas on assessment methods

From the responses of the EFL head teachers about the assessment and various practical methods that they employed in their classes; it can be concluded that the EFL teachers' knowledge of assessment was of tacit nature.

Table 2
*EFL Head teachers' Ideas on Assessment Methods*

| | Themes | (%) | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **What assessment methods do you use?** | **Diagnostic** | **55** | *Head teacher 5: usually at the end of each session/ end of each unit/ each skill separately* |
| | **Formative** | **100** | *Head teacher 13: depending on the number of units…. I administer mid-term exams* |
| | **Summative** | **100** | *Head teacher 36: at the end of the term …. I employed a general exam for each skill to grade the students* |
| | **Ipsative** | **14** | *Head teacher 17: …compare the students' scores with their previous score or task* |

As portrayed in Table 2, all teachers (100%) have frequently mentioned that they used assessment for monitoring students' learning during the course and providing feedback (formative assessment) and they also used

assessment for grading and measuring students' skills at the end of the course (summative assessment). It was believed that they had mastered these types of assessment and they were familiar with their basic technical counterparts, as if, it had been imprinted in their minds that formative and summative assessment were the only assessment methods, and other methods are extracted from these two methods. Despite, closely monitoring the responses, it can be understood that more than half of the teachers used assessment to get to know more about their students' strengths, weaknesses before the instruction (diagnostic assessment). Moreover, about 14 percent of teachers knew about ipsative assessment (i.e., measuring the performance of a student against previous performances from that student).

Interestingly, some teachers applied some assessment strategies and methods that they were not acquainted with what it is called in language testing and assessment. For instance, *teacher 21*, a female EFL head teacher BA in TEFL, stated that

> "I asked the students to, first, assess their own learning then each other's success".

This indicated her practice of self and peer assessment, while she did not know the technical terms. Another MA head teacher from Fars province, *teacher 43*, stated that;

> "I asked the students to write journals, essays and paragraphs related to the topics of the book then kept them in a folder for monitoring their progress during the term".

Obviously, he practiced alternative assessment unintentionally while he did not know its technical term in language testing and assessment. Further attention to the teachers' responses to this question revealed that testing and assessment courses at universities provide general theoretical information about assessment without preparing teachers for practicing them. Therefore,

practically, EFL teachers put more emphasis on their experiences rather than the theories they have learnt at universities.

## 4.3 Familiarity with assessment methods and strategies

The second question of part two of the interview (question number 7) concerned with EFL head teachers' attitudes toward the importance of improving assessment literacy and becoming familiar with newly developed methods and strategies in assessment. All interviewees believed that by changing the English language teaching system in Iranian schools and developing newly-developed textbooks based on Communitive Language Teaching (CLT), it was essential for EFL teachers to learn various methods and strategies of assessment and evaluation. They all agreed that improving assessment literacy and becoming familiar with new assessment methods and strategies was highly prominent. *Teacher 65*, a female PhD candidate in TEFL from Tehran, expressed that;

"Assessment and teaching are inseparable elements that complete each other".

She added that;

"Successful teachers are those who are successful in both teaching and assessment".

Moreover, *teacher 32*, a male MA from Kerman, emphasized different roles of teachers and most importantly their role as language assessors, he expressed that;

"Good teaching is impossible in the absence of good assessment".

*Teacher87*, further, claimed that;

…. most workshops were held about different ways of teaching language skills and sub-skills while there is an urgent need for holding workshops and conferences on assessment literacy.

"Not only does improving assessment literacy help teachers evaluate their own teaching but also it helps them to assess students' learning, strengths and

weaknesses based on new standards" asserted by teacher12.

## 4.4 Assessment resources

Another question of the interview (question number 8) was related to the various resources that EFL teachers used in their classes. As figure 3 below represents, five assessment resources were taken from the interviews' responses.



*Figure 3.* EFL head teachers' ideas on assessment resources

As Table 3 illustrates, more than half of the interviewees (53%) preferred to use variety of resources in their classes. Using their own experience (22%), others' tasks and assessments (12%), Internet (8%) and books (5%) were followed the integration of all resources respectively.

Table 3
*Assessment Resources*

| | Themes | (%) | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **what are the different assessment resources?** | **(only) Own experience** | **22** | *Head teacher 102: since I handle different classes in different schools I usually try to use my own method and implement the best one…..* |
| | **(only) Books** | **5** | *Head Teacher 68: most f the times I prefer to use the CELTA books….* |
| | **(only) Internet** | **8** | *Head Teacher 88: Internet is the most available source... I use it whenever I get* |

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| | | into trouble |
|---|---|---|
| **(only) Colleagues** | **12** | *Head teacher 125: I believe in my colleagues… especially the experienced ones* |
| **Combination of all resources** | **53** | *Head teacher 7: I try to use different sources…..to choose the best* |

Generally, most of the teachers believed that integration of many resources not only helps them become more familiar with different testing formats also makes them creative in developing their own questions. *Teacher 43*, insisted on;

> using his own experience for developing different questions, asserted that based on the level and background of the students and the types of instruction they received, the questions should be developed by teachers. He asserted, further, that since no one except the teacher of the class knows students' knowledge and abilities, therefore, he/she must use his/her experience and level of teaching in developing assessment tasks.

In agreement with him, *teacher103* explained that;

> teachers' use of different resources may have three main reasons; lack of knowledge, lack of time and lack of motivation and creativity. He also asserted that using Internet resources and others' tasks are not generally appropriate because they do not consider students' different abilities.

## 4.5 Online assessment tools

In response to the question of using online assessment tools, EFL teachers mentioned different tools which are presented in Figure 4.

*Figure 4.* EFL head teachers' ideas on online assessment tools

As table 4, below, shows, generally most of the EFL head teachers (83%) preferred to use both Shad and Google Forms for doing assessment. Shad is the largest interactive application is being used at the time of Coronavirus in Iran, implemented by Hamreh-e-Aval technical team for the Ministry of Education. More than 14 million students and teachers are now active in this digital system. And, Google Forms, one of the google apps, allow teachers to create documents that students can collaborate on in real time using tablets, smartphones and laptops. Consequently, EFL high school teachers agreed on using these tools because they are user-friendly and free of charge.

Table 4
*Online Assessment Tools*

| | Themes | (%) | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| To what | **Only Shad** | 7 | *Head teacher 55: Shad is not an educational App. ...it is good just for* |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | *chatting….* |
| **Only Google Forms** | 4 | *Head teacher 16: good …but needs training …* |
| **Only Kahoot** | 1 | *Head teacher 19: a good online tool. …but needs training…. difficult to use* |
| **Only Monta** | 3 | *Head teacher 29: nice site, but it should be charged and not good for public schools* |
| **Only Classkick** | 0.5 | *Head teacher 44: a good site…. needs training…. Needs VPN in Iran* |
| **Only Quizlet** | 1 | *Head teacher 62: hard to work…. needs training* |
| **Only Edulastic** | 0.5 | *Head teacher 67: needs training and difficult to use in Iran… not free* |
| **Combination of Shad and Google Forms** | 83 | *Head teacher 101: the most available ones for both teachers and students* |

About 7% of teachers used only Shad, because their lack of knowledge about other applications and tools. Moreover, 4% of them implemented Google Forms for assessment. They believed that Google forms were more flexible for developing various types of questions than other tools. Other online assessment tools such as Kahoot, Monta, Classkick, Quizlet and Edulastic were totally preferred by 6% of teachers. Kahoot is a game-based classroom response system that allows teachers to create quizzes using Internet content, this online tool was preferred by EFL teachers who worked at private schools. Monta is an online tool that contains different questions with three levels of difficulty based on topics of the books, but it is not free and as *teacher 54* asserted;

"It is restricted to only multiple-choice questions".

About 3% of teachers, specifically those who worked at private schools, used only Monta for assessment. Classkick allows teachers to assign tasks to students so that both teachers and colleagues can comment on assignments. Students can also monitor their own development. Less than 1% of teachers used this tool. *Teacher 96*, who knew this site, mentioned that he became

familiar with this online tool through a free online assessment workshop by Cambridge. Quizlet creates engaging and easily accessible flashcards, quizzes, and learning games online and via mobile devices. 1% of interviewees asserted implementing this tool in their classes. Because of filtering, it is not easily accessible for Iranian teachers. And finally, Edulastic which is not free and easily accessible in Iran is used by 0.5% of teachers.

## 4.6 Common test formats

Figure 5, shows head teachers' responses to the 10th question of the interview about different types of test formats. Eight themes were extracted from their responses.
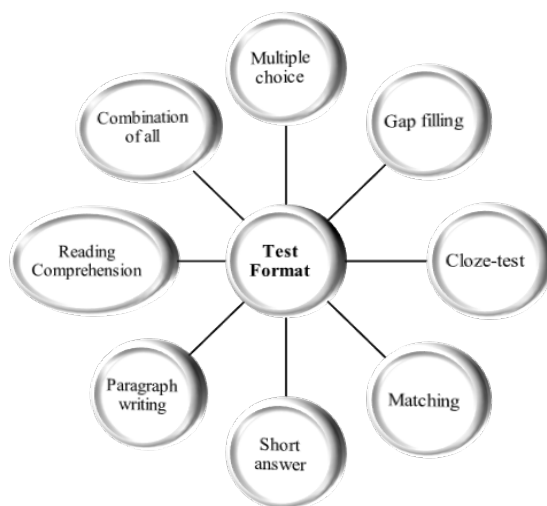


*Figure 5*. EFL head teachers' ideas on test formats

As portrayed in table 5, 80% of the interviews used an integration of all types of test formats in their classes. They believed that this mixture of test formats was useful for summative assessments.

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Table 5
*Types of Test Formats*

| | Themes | % | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **What are the common test formats in your country?** | **Only Multiple-choice Questions** | 8 | *Head teacher 14: to assess vocabulary and grammar … I use this format ... since it is easy to score* |
| | **Only Gap Filling** | 3 | *Head teacher136: it is useful for assessing vocabulary knowledge of students* |
| | **Only Cloze test** | 1 | *Head teacher 113: I use it in grade 12 classes… because of university entrance exam* |
| | **Only Matching** | 1 | *Head teacher 22: mostly I use it in beginners' classes…. More interesting to students* |
| | **Only Paragraph Writing** | 2 | *Head teacher 89: I always use it after finishing the grammar section of each unit…. Ask the students to write a paragraph about the topic of the lesson* |
| | **Only Short Answer Questions** | 3 | *Head teacher 26: use this format when I am in short of time …. easy to score* |
| | **Only Reading Comprehension Questions** | 2 | *Head teacher 141: a useful technique for students of grade 10 and above…. Similar to university entrance exam* |
| | **Combination of All Formats** | 80 | *Teacher 5: I try to use various formats to assess students' skills clearly* |

Multiple-choice questions, gap-fillings, cloze-tests, matchings, paragraph writing, short answer questions and reading comprehension questions were used for the purpose of formative assessments such as mid-term exam, pop quizzes or chapter-based exams. Considering the necessity of knowing different test formats, almost all the interviewees confessed that teacher should know the unique properties of each test format and its usage. *Teacher 35* claimed that; *"teachers' knowledge of test formats and items is a truly indicated teachers' assessment literacy level"*.

Moreover, *teacher 66* asserted that;

"If a teacher doesn't know how to answer test
questions, he can't expect his students to give the
best answers to test questions".

## 4.7 Necessity of Participating in CPD Programs

All the interviewees were agreed on the necessity of improving EFL teachers'
knowledge of assessment literacy. They, all, agreed upon the fact that
teaching and assessment are two inter-related factors that have mutual effects
on each other. Since there was a great shift toward CLT in developing new
English books and integration of all language skills in each book;

"it is essential for EFL teachers to become
acquainted with new strategies and methods of
assessing language skills and sub-skills", asserted
by teacher 23.

Therefore, participating in assessment workshops is an urgent need for
teachers. A great number of them confessed that most of the workshops
concentrated on teaching than assessment. Figure 6 shows two main themes
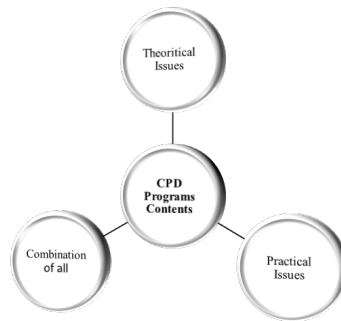extracted from the interviewees' responses about the contents of CPD
programs.



*Figure 6.* EFL head teachers' ideas on CPD programs contents

As the following Table 6 represents, 75% of the EFL teachers asserted
that their teacher training courses had focused only on theoretical issues of

assessment literacy, 10% of them claimed that their assessment workshops had focused only on practical issues and 15% of them mentioned that both theoretical and practical issues were practiced in their assessment courses.

Table 6
*Teacher Training Courses Content*

| | **Themes** | **(%)** | **Examples** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Do you think it is essential for teachers to improve their knowledge of assessment? (how?)** | **Only theoretical issues** | 75 | *Head teacher 115: most of the workshops focus on theoretical issues which we studied before in universities* |
| | **Only practical issues** | 10 | *Head teachers 71: workshops of the private institutions are more practical than those of the Ministry of Education* |
| | **Combination of both theoretical and practical issues** | 15 | *Head teacher 15: I prefer to participate in workshops and CPD programs which consider both practical and theoretical issues of the assessment….* |

Most of the participants asserted that the theoretical issues of teacher training courses mostly reflected those topics were taught at universities; including testing, evaluation, assessment, the philosophy of assessment, features of good tests, reliability, validity and assessment standards. On the other hand, they mentioned that the practical aspects of these courses reflected topics such as developing a standard test, knowing and doing performance-based assessment, practicing problem solving activities and providing feedbacks.

## 4.8 Assessment Literacy Enhancement

Through analysis of the interviews' responses to the next question of the interview, three general factors contributed to assessment quality enhancement were identified (shown in figure 7).
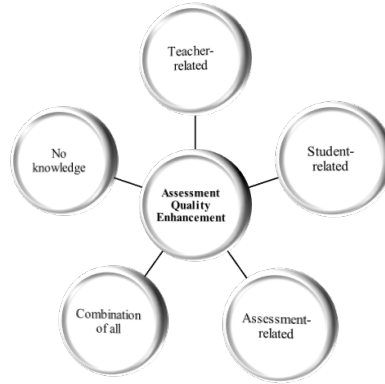
*Figure 7.* EFL head teachers' ideas about factors of enhancing assessment quality

As shown in Table 7 the factors may be related to teachers, learners or assessment.

Table 7
*Factors Enhancing the Quality of Assessment*

| | Themes | (%) | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **How do you enhance the quality of assessment?** | **(only) teacher related factors** | 28 | *Head teacher 44: participating in CPD programs…. Being up-to-date in assessment* |
| | **(only) learner related factors** | 11 | *Head teacher 146: making students aware of the content of the exam* |
| | **(only) assessment related factors** | 10 | *Head teacher 11: focusing on the content of the book and using different tasks* |
| | **Combination of all factors** | 49 | *Head teacher 50: considering students psychological matters, focusing on the book, knowing various tasks,…* |
| | **No Knowledge** | 2 | *Head teacher 3: I have no idea in this regard* |

Teacher-related factors include those features which can support and help teachers in the process of assessment. For instance,

"increasing educational and academic level" asserted by teacher 46,
"being up-to date in assessment skills and methods" mentioned by teacher 77,

> "increasing knowledge of understanding students" stated
> by teacher 52.

Based on table 7, 28% of the EFL head teachers were agreed that quality of assessment can be increased through increasing teachers' attributes. By learner-related factors, on the other hand, interviewees referred to *"learners' process of learning"*, *"learners' mental and psychological behavior"* and *"learners' assessment strategies"* and *"learners' awareness of the content of the course and teachers' expectations"*. Based on table 7, only 11% of the participants knew learners' attributes as a factor of enhancing the quality of assessment. Considering the assessment features, as shown in table 7, only 10% of the participants agreed upon this factor. *Teacher 107* believed that;

> "specifying assessment goals, providing sufficient
> assessment context, focusing on the content of the book
> and using various tasks which leads to students'
> awareness raising" can contribute to the enhancement of
> the quality of assessment.

Moreover, 49% of the participants agreed upon on the contribution of all three factors while 2% of the participants had no idea/knowledge in this regard.

## 4.9 Current components of assessment literacy

In this question the EFL head teachers were asked to name the current components of assessment literacy in educational context of Iran. They provided a description of both general and specific components of assessment literacy. As figure 8 shows, fourteen themes were taken from the interviewees' responses.

*Figure 8.* EFL head teachers' ideas about current components of assessment literacy

Table 8, represents the head teachers' ideas on current components of assessment literacy.

Table 8
*Participants' Ideas on Current Components of Assessment Literacy*

| | Themes | (%) | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **What are the components of assessment literacy?h** | **Test reliability and its different forms** | 6 | *Head teacher 5: although teachers studied reliability in universities, they are not aware of its usage in classrooms…* |
| | **Test validity and its different forms** | 5 | *Head teacher 12: I learned it from university but never found its application in real classes* |
| | **Testing models and frameworks** | 5 | *Head teacher: 60: models and frameworks of assessment are not useful in classes* |
| | **Types of test score interpretations** | 3 | *Head teacher 144: a useful issue but not practiced adequately…* |
| | **Principles of test administrations** | 4 | *Head teacher 111: …. are very missed in today's classes* |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Washback** | 10 | *Head teacher 19: to know the effect of testing on teaching is a good idea…. but a few teachers rely on it* |
| **Interactiveness in testing** | 8 | *Head teacher 18: ...tests should be the manifestation of what students learn in class…* |
| **Familiarity with the assessment process** | 17 | *Head teacher 29: an issue that is neglected in classroom assessment…knowing the process of assessment, how to assess,…. Are essential for teachers* |
| **Process of administrating a test** | 11 | *Head teacher 56: how and when to administer a test are essential issues that should be considered in classroom assessment* |
| **Knowing ethical issues** | 4 | *Head teacher 27: knowing students' rights, knowing their abilities and weaknesses …..generally ethical issues are neglected in this system* |
| **Design of assessment for receptive skills** | 7 | *Head teacher 12: I need to know more about it…. Since assessing reading and listening skills and knowing different assessment methods are important for teachers* |
| **Design of assessment for productive skills** | 8 | *Head teacher 12: I need to know more about it…. Since assessing writing and speaking skills and knowing different assessment methods are important for teachers* |
| **Different test formats** | 10 | *Head teacher 99: depending on the purpose of assessment, knowing different formats is useful* |
| **Principles of rubric development** | 2 | *Head teacher 29: knowing the principles and processes of rubric development is something that I am weak in….I think it is a must for every teacher.* |

As Table 8 shows, familiarity with assessment process, process of administrating a test, different test formats and washback had the highest percentage among the other components. On the other hand, principles of rubric development, test score interpretations, principles of test administration and ethical issues had the least percentage. In other words, the

interviewees believed that these components were very common among Iranian EFL teachers, however, they confessed that some new components should be added to this categorization.

## 4.10 New components of assessment literacy

In the last question of the interview, the interviewees were asked to express their ideas about adding new components to assessment literacy. All participants, unanimously, agreed upon that because of the newly-developed books and their focus on communicative aspects of language teaching and learning new components of assessment literacy should be added to the teacher education curricula. They explained that components such as social, political, economic, educational and psychological consequences of the tests are highly recommended. Moreover, they stated that knowing more about alternative assessments, various test taking strategies, different ways of providing test security, various platforms of online assessment, computer software programs for test construction, test analysis and test scoring should be practiced in CPD programs.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers as assessors should not simply pass through the assessment process without knowing the basics of assessment and having sufficient assessment experience. Therefore, assessment not only affects the learners' learning and but influence the teachers and their teaching (Fulcher, 2012). Inspired from Fulcher's assessment literacy framework (2012), the present study was to address both the current and needed components of assessment literacy in Iranian educational context. To this end assessment literacy related issues were recognized through semi-structure interviews of 147 Iranian EFL head teachers.

All the participants favored the use of formative and summative assessment methods. Their higher preference for final exams (summative

assessment) and continuous exams (formative assessment) is in line with Swaffield and Dudley's (2010) findings in their study. They asserted that most of the EFL teachers had a tendency toward the formative assessments since they had a significant role in assessing learners' abilities and skills. Moreover, in their comparative study, they referred to advantages of formative assessments over the summative methods, most important ones were; increasing compensation opportunities for learners for correcting their probable mistakes and allowing teachers to reflect on various abilities of learners. Furthermore, Alvarez et al. (2014) claimed that only knowing the assumptions of different types of assessment methods did not play a significant role in teachers' decision-making procedures. It implied that, based on Fulcher's assessment literacy framework (2012), knowledge of assessment methods was an essential prerequisite but not enough. To be effective, a combination of these methods should be practiced and implemented in the classroom.

In support of the Popham (2009) claim, all the interviewees believed that assessment should have a significant role in teacher education programs because it helps teachers increase their readiness in confronting the assessment challenges. In line with Vogt and Tsagari (2014), the participants believed that there was a close relationship between teaching and learning. Since the system of English language teaching has changed for many years, the interviewees confessed that they needed to increase their assessment knowledge and practice new assessment methods in line with new teaching approaches. All the interviewees maintained that both the theoretical and practical aspects of assessment literacy should be incorporated in teacher training courses and CPD programs.

According to Fulcher's framework (2012), assessment literacy has three main categories, knowledge and principles of assessment, familiarity with

test processes and different consequences of assessments, each of which has various components that have not been identified. In line with Kahl et al., (2013) and Lian et al. (2014) and according to the interviewees' responses the core current components of assessment literacy referred to the first and second categories of Fulcher's framework, i.e., knowledge and principles of assessment and familiarity with the process of assessment and testing, such as knowing reliability and validity and their various types, having the knowledge of assessment models and frameworks, knowing ethical issues, understanding washback and interactiveness, becoming familiar with assessment processes, score interpretation methods, test formats and rubric development process. Moreover, in line with Melone (2013), the findings revealed that the process of test development, the process of test score interpretation and the process of selecting and implementing the most appropriate tests are among the general components of language assessment literacy from the perspectives of teachers as assessors. Surprisingly, the components of the third category of Fulcher's assessment literacy framework (2012), i.e., the practical effects and consequences of assessment, were not known to the interviewees. They maintained that components such as the social and educational consequences of assessment were needed to be incorporated in future teachers training courses and CPD programs. In line with them, Zolfaghari and Ahmadi (2016) asserted that most of the teachers needed to know how to integrated different components of Fulcher's framework in their classes.

The findings of this study revealed the current and needed components of assessment literacy for EFL teachers. It also highlighted the role of these components in teachers' practices of assessment. For future studies it is highly recommended to investigate the effectiveness of each component in action. Moreover, since assessment literacy demands are context-based, it is

suggested to extend this study to other contexts such as universities. Further, it may be suitable to develop and run a CPD program, focusing on assessment literacy components, and investigate its effectiveness on teachers' assessment practices in their classes.

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