Examining Classroom Assessment Literacy of English Teachers in Iran's Language Institutes: Curricular Gap Analysis of Iranian Universities' Programs

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the disparities between the language assessment pre-service education received by 100 EFL language institute teachers (including 35 men and 65 women) before entering the profession, and their perceived actual language assessment requirements. The comparison was conducted using the gap analysis method, along with a scale specifically developed for this study. The scale utilized a semantic differential Likert scale consisting of 44 items. The results demonstrated that all areas received high importance ratings (M ≥ 4.97 out of 6). The participants placed the highest importance on items related to 'assessing different language skills and components', while the item regarding 'reporting assessment results to relevant stakeholders clearly and timely' was rated as the least important area in language assessment. According to the findings, all areas received low scores (average of 3 or less out of 6) for classroom assessment preparation. The gap analysis revealed a significant disparity between the participants' perception of the importance of assessment knowledge and skills areas and their level of pre-service training. This discrepancy suggests "under-education" in classroom assessment, with the gaps being more pronounced in skills items. The implications of these findings for teacher education and classroom assessment are discussed in this study.

Keywords: Assessment Literacy, English Teacher, Gap Analysis, Language Institute, Pre-service Education

Introduction

In today's globalized world, learning foreign languages, such as English, has become crucial for individuals both personally and professionally. Many people in Iran choose to learn English in language institutes for various reasons, such as improving conversational skills or preparing for exams like IELTS, TOFEL, and Konkur. According to Berry, Sheehan and Munro (2022), effective assessment is essential to support and enhance learning. As language teachers play a crucial role in assessment, a question arises: do they possess the necessary knowledge and skills to evaluate their students accurately? Engelsen and Smith (2014) emphasize that the quality of classroom assessment is determined by teachers' assessment literacy (AL). Puspawati (2022) highlights the significance of AL, as inadequate AL can reduce the effectiveness of education. Poorly designed assessment practices may lead to superficial learning and a mismatch between classroom assessment practices and educational goals. Therefore, AL is crucial for teachers since it ensures that assessment practices align with educational objectives.

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According to studies by Levy-Vered and Alhija (2015) and Sayyadi (2022), there is a positive relationship between the assessment curriculum provided during teacher training and their AL. To produce teachers who are proficient in language assessment, they must receive instruction in all the necessary knowledge areas of assessment as well as the corresponding skill areas. Universities, as the optimal setting for teacher education, should incorporate comprehensive assessment courses and practical workshops to provide hands-on assessment experience.

According to Soodmand Afshar and Ranjbar (2021), there is widespread dissatisfaction among various stakeholders, including teachers who were previously students, regarding different aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Iran. Despite the significant financial and human resources invested in developing the EFL curriculum and preparing students for their future roles as teachers and classroom assessors, there are various issues with EFL education in Iran.

Despite the growing interest in pre-service assessment education as a crucial component of English Language Teaching in Iranian universities, there is a notable gap in the assessment of language teachers' competency in this area. While language teachers are well-versed in the educational process, they may not be adequately assessed to determine whether they have received adequate training in assessment through pre-service curriculum (Tavakoli & Tavakol, 2018). This highlights the need for further research and improvement in pre-service assessment education to ensure that language teachers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively evaluate their students.

The current study aims to identify the disparities between the existing level of AL of language institute teachers and the desired acceptable level that should be provided through pre-service assessment curriculum, using gap analysis as a new approach. Although the significance of different aspects of AL in language teachers' current classroom assessment has received attention from researchers in Iran, there is a lack of comprehensive investigation into this issue. This study will shed light on the differences between the present status of teachers' AL and the desired acceptable situation that should be imparted through pre-service assessment curriculum.

Literature Review

According to Harding (2020), there is a clear connection between assessment and education. Assessment not only affects teaching but also learning. Since teachers are the primary actors in classroom assessment, effective classroom assessment requires them to have proficiency in all areas of AL.

The concept of AL in language education, known as language assessment literacy (LAL), is a combination of theoretical foundations from both language education and language assessment. It is influenced by social and instructional contexts and is understood by teachers in relation to their teaching practices. Sufficient LAL involves having skills in creating assessments, administering them, gathering results, and interpreting the outcomes. These abilities enable teachers to make well-informed decisions based on the assessment results. The certification of teachers in classroom assessment can be used as a measure of their qualification. Universities, as the providers of pre-service curriculums, aim to prepare future teachers with the necessary LAL for classroom assessment (DeLuca, LaPointe-McEwan, & Luhanga, 2019).

The significance of pre-service assessment education is highlighted as a crucial component of English Language Teaching. While there is growing research on the importance of AL for language teachers (Janatifar & Marandi, 2018; Jan-nesar, Khodabakhshzadeh & Motallebzadeh, 2020; Mertler, 2003; Xu & Brown, 2016), the related literatures show that the extent to which pre-service assessment curriculum effectively prepares teachers in this area has not been thoroughly investigated in Iran. To address this gap, the present study employs gap analysis as a new tool to identify discrepancies between teachers' current AL and the desired acceptable situation provided by pre-service curriculum. As teachers are the primary stakeholders in language assessment, their views, requirements, and experiences should be taken into account to enhance the effectiveness of pre-service assessment education. Studies have shown that promoting teachers' AL through curriculum-related studies is

Chabahar Maritime University
Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2024, 13(1), 18-35   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

essential for meeting the expectations of classroom-based assessment. Gap analysis can also reveal in-service EFL teachers' perspectives on the shortcomings and gaps between classroom assessment requirements and their pre-service training.

According to Brown (2004), gap analysis in this study refers to the difference between what students as future teachers should learn in their pre-service education and what they as in-service teachers currently can accomplish in their teaching and classroom assessment. This analysis can help identify teacher satisfaction, needs, and inconsistencies, enabling them to examine and communicate where the curriculum intends to equip learners with essential skills and knowledge upon completion of their training. This includes considering their existing knowledge and skills, as well as their current capabilities within the program. (DeLuca et al., 2019). In this regard Babaii and Asadnia (2019) showed that designing efficient curriculums can address teachers' assessment training requirements. Consequently, Esfandiari and Nouri (2016) indicated that developing teachers' perception of assessment components through their pre-service education enables them to do their classroom assessment in the best way.

Prior research in various regions on teachers' perception of assessment components, including Malone's (2017) study in seven European countries, as well as Vogt and Tsagari's (2014) study, have demonstrated that EFL teachers frequently lack the essential skills and knowledge required to conduct effective classroom assessment. Similarly, Watmani, Asadollahfam, and Behin (2020), in their study conducted in Iran, have also identified this issue among EFL teachers in that region. Understanding the significance of the AL, (Anne-Marie & Huzinec, 2021; Berry et al., 2022; Engelsen & Smith, 2014; DeLuca et al., 2019; Firoozi et al., 2019) indicated that the in-service teachers were under-prepared and were not received the knowledge and skills that they required to assist their students to be succeed. These findings are consistent with those of Sayyadi (2022), who reported that professors in Iran received insufficient training, particularly in skill areas, because they were only taught assessment theories and knowledge in their pre-service training courses, which were limited and impractical. In line with the studies reviewed above, Kleinsasser (2005) and Yan et al. (2018) argued that a key flaw in pre-service training curriculums is their inability to effectively connect knowledge with skills, which they identified as the primary hurdle in training language assessment courses.

Along the same lines of research concerning teachers' pre-service assessment training, Zolfaghari and Ahmadi's (2016) research explored teachers' conceptual understanding of LAL and their actual classroom assessment practices. The study revealed a disparity between teachers' beliefs about assessment and their implementation in the classroom. Additionally, Razavipour and Rezagah (2018) highlighted that a deficiency in Iranian teachers' LAL contributes to the disconnection between the demands of language assessment and teachers' assessment practices.

According to Tavassoli and Farhady (2018), the majority of Iranian EFL teachers view all aspects of LAL as crucial and important for learning in assessment courses. However, these teachers have limited proficiency in LAL. Fortunately, these teachers are willing to enhance their LAL abilities. In contrast, Soodmand Afshar and Ranjbar (2021) found that only a small number of Iranian EFL teachers are currently assessment literate. Furthermore, these studies suggest that there are discrepancies between the assessment knowledge and skills of these teachers.

The author points out that teachers continue to require ongoing support in LAL due to shortcomings in both their pre-service and in-service LA education. To address this issue, LA education should be tailored to meet the specific needs of teachers' classroom assessment. In contrast, although assessment is crucial for promoting successful learning, most language teachers are not adequately prepared to execute classroom assessment effectively (Puspawati, 2022).

According to previous studies, such as Mertler's (2003) and Tavakoli and Tavakol's (2018) research, EFL teachers lack adequate skills and knowledge in classroom assessment due to insufficient pre-service education in this area. These studies suggest that teachers who receive assessment training during their pre-service curriculum have higher AL than those who do not receive such education. This highlights the significant role that pre-service assessment training plays in ensuring that all teachers receive the necessary education in instructional assessment required for competent classroom

assessment. Additionally, Vogt and Tsagari's (2014) research found that teachers believed their pre-service education in this area to be inadequate, and referred to their personal experiences during teaching as a source of their AL.

Recent studies (Anne-Marie & Huzinec, 2021; Fulcher, 2010; Janatifar & Marandi, 2018; Tayyebi, Moradi, & Abbassian, 2022) have indicated that assessments have often been overlooked or provided by instructors who may not possess adequate AL. As a result, many new teachers may lack the necessary assessment skills and face difficulties in implementing classroom assessments. In light of these deficiencies, researchers have recommended a review of pre-service teacher training programs (Ranjbari et al., 2020; Taghizadeh and Mazdayasna, 2022).

Studying pre-service curriculums, Engelsen and Smith (2014), Kleinsasser (2005), and Yan et al. (2018) have highlighted the main challenge in training language assessment courses - linking knowledge with skill. They argue that pre-service training curriculums often fail to achieve this linkage. Similarly, Tavassoli and Farhady (2018) and Firoozi et al. (2019) have found that Iranian EFL teachers lack both assessment knowledge and skill, making it challenging for them to conduct professional classroom assessments. These findings suggest that pre-service assessment curriculums might not fulfill their duty effectively in educating students regarding AL. The previous research on LAL and assessment training for language teachers has primarily focused on English teachers in public schools, with only a few studies conducted on institute teachers. This gap in the literature is particularly evident in Iran, where the AL and pre-service trainings of language institute teachers have not been explored. To address this issue, this investigation aims to fill this gap by answering the following research questions:

Research Question One: What is the hierarchical descriptive distribution pattern of importance of knowledge and skills areas to teachers' current classroom assessment in Iranian language institutes?

Research Question Two: Is there any significant gap (under-education or over-education) between teachers' perception of the skill and knowledge important to their current classroom assessment at language institutes and the education provided for them by the TEFL programs at B.A. level in Iranian universities?

Methodology

Participants

This study used non-probability sampling to build up a picture of the national context. A total of 2,000 EFL teachers were selected for participation, either through direct contact (in person or via telephone) or through a Telegram group specifically for Iranian EFL teachers. Out of these teachers, 800 individuals with three to five years of teaching experience were invited to partake in the study. It was assumed that these participants possessed a comprehensive understanding of classroom assessment needs and challenges, as well as the ability to recall their pre-service education. From among the invited teachers, 300 agreed to participate and were provided with the assessment scale through the website www.Porsal.com. Ultimately, 116 scales were returned, some of which were incomplete. The final sample size for analysis consisted of 100 teachers. Detailed demographic information for these participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Background of the Participants

		frequency	percentage
Major	TEFL	100	100%
Gender	Male	35	35%
	Female	65	65%
Age group (years)	24 to 26	38	38%
	27 to 30	47	47%
	31 or older	15	15%
Teaching Experience (years)	3	49	49%
	4	39	39%
	5	12	12%
Degree	B.A.	59	59%
	M.A.	30	30%
	Ph.D.	11	11%

Instrument

To gather data, a semantic differential scale (see appendix) was employed, which had been previously validated in a study with a similar objective, but within the context of public schools in Iran (Authors, 2022). Several sources including insights from the relevant literature, the first researcher's first-hand experience as a classroom assessment teacher, university assessment curriculum and course standards, and interviews with five university professors of assessment courses (for details see Bachman and Palmers, 2010) served as a guide to create all 44 items, which were evenly distributed into two components: knowledge and skills areas for classroom assessment. Each area was assessed using a six-point Likert scale, with forced-choice anchors ranging from 1 (indicating the least importance or least adequate preparation) to 6 (indicating the highest importance or most adequate preparation).The first column of the scale focused on the importance of the required knowledge and skill areas for classroom assessment, while the second column asked teachers to rate their satisfaction with the pre-service education provided in these areas.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers utilized the website www.Porsall.com to create an online scale and disseminated its link through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram to various English groups across Iran. They encouraged the members of these groups to complete the scale and further share it with other teachers they knew. The data collection process took place between January and August 2021.

Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were divided into two sections. The first section focused on the importance of the knowledge and skill items required for language assessment, while the second section dealt with the level of education obtained through university programs in Iran, specifically the B.A. TEFL program. Each section had forty-four items with one hundred differential responses. The researchers utilized SPSS (version 26) to analyze the data both descriptively and inferentially. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and means, were calculated to obtain a hierarchical distribution pattern of the significance of AL areas to classroom assessment in language institutes in Iran and the extent of education received for the intended knowledge and skill items through the B.A. TEFL program at universities. The independent samples t-test were also used to contrast the importance and preparation to see whether the EFL curriculum of Iranian universities had prepared the teachers for their role as classroom assessors or not. If any significant differences were found between the importance of

assessment knowledge and skill items to classroom assessment and their training, it would indicate a gap, either over-education or under-education, in their preparation.

Results

First Research Question

Table 2 displays the teachers' perceptions of the importance of knowledge items related to AL in classroom assessment and their training for these items through pre-service education at universities.

Table 2

Descriptive Hierarchical Distribution Pattern of Importance of Assessment Knowledge Items to Language Assessment and Their Associated Training

Hierarchical Order		
Variables	Importance	Preparation
Item13	5.5200	3.4500
Item 12	5.5200	3.3100
Item 5	5.3500	2.9100
Item 15	5.3000	3.2700
Item 6	5.2600	2.6600
Item 20	5.2000	3.3900
Item 19	5.1800	3.1900
Item 14	5.1700	3.2100
Item 22	5.1700	3.100
Item 7	5.1700	3.5200
Item 18	5.0600	3.1500
Item 21	5.0300	3.3000
Item 16	4.9600	3.2200
Item 17	4.9200	3.2600
Item 11	4.8300	3.2600
Item 3	4.9000	3.6600
Item 2	4.6700	3.4900
Item 9	4.6300	3.3500
Item 4	4.6000	3.3900
Item 10	4.5800	3.3700
Item 1	4.0400	3.3900
Item 8	3.9700	3.0900

All twenty-two items were found to be highly significant for classroom assessment but the teachers received relatively low level of preparation in these items through their pre-service training. The significance of AL knowledge items ranged from 3.97 to 5.52 (M= 4.72 of 6), while the conceived training varied from 2.66 to 3.49 (m = 3.26 of 6). The knowledge areas with the highest scores were "how to test different language skills" and "how to test various language components" (both with a score of 5.52). However, the knowledge areas with the lowest scores were "assessment theories as a method to develop assessment" (3.97) and "different eras of testing" (4.04). In terms of preparation, the highest scores were for the knowledge areas of "different aims of classroom assessments" (3.66) and "essential criteria for a good classroom assessment" (3.52), while the lowest scores were for the knowledge areas of "how to assess the learning of students with special needs" (2.66) and "self- and peer–assessment" (2.91).

According to Table 3, all skill areas were deemed highly important, with mean scores ranging from 4.81 to 5.43 (M=5.21 of 6). The highest mean scores were associated with the skill areas of "developing formal and informal assessment methods" and "how to involve students in cooperative assessment," with mean scores of 5.43 and 5.42, respectively. The lowest importance was attributed to

the skill areas of "reporting the assessment results clearly for relevant stakeholders" (M=4.81) and "how to devise test rubrics" (M=4.88). In contrast, the preparation mean scores for these skill areas were lower than their importance mean value (3), ranging from 2.86 to 2.40. The skill areas of "developing various forms of assessments" (M=2.86) and "taking the rational decision about the learner's assessment results in a given situation" (M=2.74) had the highest preparations, while the lowest preparations were associated with the skills of "providing and implementing suitable accommodation to assess the learning of learners with special inadequacies" (M=2.40) and "devising test rubrics" (M=2.43).

According to the data presented, the average importance of assessment skills was higher than the average importance of related knowledge areas, with scores of 5.21 and 4.72, respectively. This suggests that teachers placed greater emphasis on skill areas than knowledge areas in relation to classroom assessment. It is worth noting that while the mean score for knowledge training was 3.31, which is higher than the mean score for skills training (2.25). This indicates that teachers received more training in knowledge areas compared to skill areas during their pre-service education at universities.

Table 3

Descriptive Hierarchical Distribution Pattern of Importance of Assessment Skills Items to Classroom Assessment and Their Associated Training

Hierarchical Order		
Variables	Importance	Preparation
Item31	5.4300	2.7500
Item 25	5.4200	2.6500
Item 44	5.4200	2.7400
Item 26	5.3100	2.4000
Item 37	5.3600	2.6900
Item 30	5.3000	2.8600
Item 32	5.2800	2.5800
Item 23	5.2800	2.6500
Item 34	5.2700	2.4400
Item 24	5.2700	2.6100
Item 39	5.2300	2.6300
Item 40	5.2100	2.6700
Item 33	5.2100	2.4200
Item 35	5.2000	2.5100
Item 38	5.2000	2.4900
Item 29	5.2000	2.4800
Item 41	5.1500	2.6300
Item 36	5.1100	2.6500
Item27	5.1000	2.7200
Item 42	4.9400	2.5100
Item 28	4.8800	2.4300
Item 43	4.8100	2.5700

Regarding research question one, it can be concluded that the participants placed a significant importance on all 44 assessment items related to AL in classroom assessment for language institutes. However, their perception of training in these components was relatively low. The participants' high significance ratings were observed for both knowledge and skill areas, indicating that they considered both the conceptual and practical dimensions of AL to be important. This suggests that the participants viewed both the theoretical and practical aspects of AL as crucial for effective classroom assessment in language institutes.

Second Research Question

According to Table 4, there was a noticeable difference, or gap, between the importance of all twenty-two knowledge items related to AL in classroom assessment and the level of training that teachers

Chabahar Maritime University
Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2024, 13(1), 18-35   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

received for these items during their pre-service education at universities. The gap ranged from 0.65 to 2.60, with an average gap of 1.71. The t-test analysis revealed that this gap was statistically significant, indicating that teachers rated the importance of these items significantly higher than their level of preparation in these areas. This suggests that teachers perceive a lack of preparation, or "under-education," in all areas related to AL in classroom assessment.

Table 4

Gap Analysis of Participants' Perception of the Significance of Assessment Knowledge Items vs. Their Preparation by Pre-service Assessment Program

Variables	Importance	Preparation	Gap	T-Value	Sig.
Item1	4.04	3.90	0.65	3.479	.001*
Item2	4.67	3.49	1.18	6.357	.000*
Item3	4.90	3.66	1.24	6.947	.000*
Item4	4.60	3.39	1.21	6.930	.000*
Item5	5.35	2.91	2.44	12.005	.000*
Item6	5.26	2.66	2.60	12.146	.000*
Item7	5.17	3.52	1.65	9.308	.000*
Item8	3.97	3.09	0.88	4.160	.000*
Item9	4.63	3.35	1.28	6.749	.000*
Item10	4.58	3.37	1.41	7.192	.000*
Item11	4.83	3.26	1.57	8.556	.000*
Item12	5.52	3.31	2.21	11.130	.000*
Item13	5.52	3.45	2.07	10.307	.000*
Item14	5.17	3.21	1.96	9.332	.000*
Item15	5.30	3.37	2.03	1.298	.000*
Item16	4.96	3.22	1.74	9.574	.000*
Item17	4.29	3.26	1.66	8.846	.000*
Item18	5.06	3.15	1.91	10.270	.000*
Item19	5.18	3.19	1.99	10.405	.000*
Item20	5.20	3.39	1.81	10.616	.000*
Item21	5.03	3.30	2.03	11.310	.000*
Item22	5.17	3.10	2.07	12.746	.000*

*p ≤ .05.

A t-test was conducted to examine the difference between the significance and training of skill items, as shown in Table 5. The results revealed that the gaps between significance and training for the twenty-two skills ranged from 2.24 to 2.91 (M=2.62). The gap analysis demonstrated that there was a significant disparity between the degree to which participants considered classroom assessment skills significant and the degree to which they received training in these skills during their pre-service assessment program (p < .05). The participants were found to be "under-education" in all skill items, as they rated the significance of these items higher than their preparation.

Table 5

Gap Analysis of Participants' Perception of the Significance of Assessment Skill Items vs. Their Preparation by Pre-service Assessment Program

Variables	Preparation	Importance	Gap	T- Value	Sig.
Item23	5.28	2.65	2.63	12.909	.000*
Iitem24	5.27	2.61	2.66	12.953	.000*

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Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2024, 13(1), 18-35   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

Item25	5.42	2.65	2.77	13.367	.000*
Item26	5.31	2.40	2.91	14.51	.000*
Item27	5.10	2.72	2.38	11.458	.000*
Item28	4.88	2.43	2.45	11.555	.000*
Item29	5.20	2.48	2.77	12.688	.000*
Item30	5.30	2.86	2.44	11.282	.000*
Item31	5.43	2.75	2.68	12.723	.000*
Item32	5.28	2.58	2.70	13.132	.000*
Item33	5.21	2.42	2.79	13.466	.000*
Item34	5.27	2.44	2.83	14.438	.000*
Item35	5.20	2.51	2.69	12.603	.000*
Item36	5.11	2.65	2.55	11.723	.000*
Item37	5.36	2.69	2.67	12.435	.000*
Item38	5.20	2.49	2.71	12.899	.000*
Item39	5.23	2.63	2.60	11.845	.000*
Item40	5.21	2.67	2.54	11.432	.000*
Item41	5.15	2.63	2.52	11.492	.000*
Item42	4.94	2.51	2.43	10.341	.000*
Item43	4.81	2.57	2.24	10.029	.000*
Item44	5.42	2.74	2.68	12.253	.000*

$*p \leq .05$.

Regarding the second research question, the gap analysis revealed a disparity between the perceived importance of all forty-four knowledge and skill items related to AL in classroom assessment and the level of training received during their pre-service education in assessment at universities. It is noteworthy that both knowledge and skill items contributed to this "under-education." However, the gap average for skills items (2.62) was higher than that for knowledge items (1.71), suggesting that Iranian EFL teachers were more "under-educated" in skills items than in knowledge items. This finding implies that there is a greater need for more emphasis on developing practical skills related to AL during pre-service teacher education programs.

Discussion

The present study aimed to practically investigate the hierarchical distribution pattern of importance of both knowledge and skill items related to classroom assessment, as perceived by EFL teachers in Iran's language institutes. Additionally, it aimed to identify any discrepancy or gap between the significance of these items for classroom assessment recognized by the teachers and the education provided for them through the EFL curriculum at the BA level at state universities in Iran.

The study revealed that EFL teachers in Iranian language institutes assigned high significance (M= 5.02 out of 6) to all knowledge and skill items related to AL for classroom assessment. This finding suggests that the significance of different areas of AL is well-established in the context of Iranian language institutes, which aligns with Bachman and Palmer's (2010) framework of AL. Many international scholars, such as Authors (2022), Berry et al. (2022), Brown (2004), Fulcher (2010), Henning (2001), Janatifar & Marandi (2018), Jan-nesar, Khodabakhshzadeh and Motallebzadeh (2020), Mertler (2003), and Xu and Brown (2016) in the education domain have also affirmed the importance of classroom assessment and emphasized the necessity of AL for every teacher as a classroom assessor.

The research's results go against the viewpoint expressed by Shah Ahmadi and Ketabi (2019), who argued that language teachers do not necessarily need to acquire knowledge and skills related to AL and do not have to make an effort to learn about it because there should always be an assessor

Chabahar Maritime University
Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2024, 13(1), 18-35   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

available to handle assessment practices. However, this perspective is not supported by existing literature.

According to the researchers' analysis, based on the data collected, the knowledge and skill areas related to "how to test different language skills and their components", "developing formal and informal assessment methods", and "how to involve students in cooperative assessment" were deemed as the most important. In contrast, the knowledge and skill areas of "assessment theories as a manual to outline and judging tests ", "reporting the assessment results clearly for relevant stakeholders", and "how to devise test rubrics" were considered as the least important ones. The researchers noted that there is a lack of literature on the hierarchical descriptive distribution pattern of the significance of knowledge and skills items of LAL to language assessment.

The highest importance was attributed to areas related to "how to test different language skills and their components". This finding is consistent with the content of current assessment courses for pre-service teachers, as highlighted by scholars such as Fulcher (2010), Green (2017), Harding (2020), Henning (2001), and Heaton (1990). Given that teachers' beliefs about the role of assessment courses are primarily focused on testing language skills and components, it is logical to assume that participants would prioritize these items among all knowledge and skill items related to LAL. This finding also aligns with Weir's (2005) assertion that EFL teachers' LAL encompasses their knowledge of assessing learners' proficiency in the four language skills and their related components, with the decision about which skills or components to measure being determined by the training department's program.

The significance given to the skill areas of "developing formal and informal assessment methods" and "how to involve students in cooperative assessment" in this study is consistent with the content of some common assessment courses in pre-service education programs at Iranian universities, such as those presented by Farhady, Jafarpur and Birjandi (2004), Brown (2004), Fulcher (2010), and Mertler (2003).

Green (2017) emphasized that after teachers have identified the specific skills or components they want to measure, they should select the appropriate assessment method to accurately evaluate them. This requires teachers to have a broad understanding of various types of assessment, as it allows them to determine which method is most suitable for a particular situation. By recognizing that every moment of teaching can serve as an assessment opportunity for both students and teachers, teachers can use assessment as a learning facilitator rather than as a tool to penalize students. This perspective allows teachers to view assessment as a means of identifying their own weaknesses and strengths in teaching, which they can then address and improve upon to enhance language education overall. Some teachers may not fully understand that assessment is an integral part of education, and that every moment of teaching can be considered an assessment opportunity.

The importance of teachers' understanding of different types of assessment has been emphasized in various sources, such as academic articles (Tayyebi et al., 2022; Yamtim & Wongwanich, 2014) and popular textbooks for university testing courses (Farhady et al., 2004; Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Brown, 2004; Fulcher, 2010; Henning, 2001; Heaton, 1990). These sources highlight the relationship between teachers' AL and the types of assessments they use. Teachers who are more assessment literate are more likely to utilize a variety of assessment types. Practical literacy also involves an understanding of the suitability of different assessment types for different purposes (Weir, 2005). English teachers should be familiar with various types of language assessments, including proficiency, achievement, diagnostic, and alternative assessments (e.g., homework, lectures, monitoring, and cooperative assessments) (Fulcher, 2010). Cooperative assessments, in particular, have been found to be effective in promoting student learning by empowering students to help and support each other (Farhady et al., 2004; Brown, 2004; Fulcher, 2010). This technique can also help to shift authority among students and increase their interest in learning (Mertler, 2003).

The study's findings regarding the lower importance scores assigned to "assessment theories as a manual to outline and judge the tests" and "reporting the assessment results to relevant stakeholders clearly and timely" contradict the views of Farhady et al. (2004) and Brown (2004), who emphasized the significance of assessment theories such as Generalizability Theory, Classical Theory, and Item

Response Theory in evaluating the quality of assessment scores. They argue that these theories help to determine the reliability and validity of test scores by considering observed scores in relation to the entire test and latent traits regarding the items of the test. Maddalena (2012) also highlighted the importance of theory in connecting our views and practices, as it provides a systematic framework for analysis and development. However, many assessment course books used in Iranian pre-service curriculum either do not discuss assessment theories at all or provide only a brief overview, which may not capture students' attention. This could explain the lower importance scores assigned to these areas in the study.

The emphasis on grades and their significance in the Iranian educational context, referred to as "grading culture" by Reddy, Dudek and Lekwa (2017), has led to a lack of motivation among teachers to carry out classroom assessment accurately in the stage of result rubrics and communicating test results to relevant stakeholders. This is because in this context, assessment is primarily seen as an assessment of learning, and the assessment stakeholders are already aware of the expected high grades for all learners at the beginning of the semester. As a result, teachers become hesitant towards interpreting assessments and communicating test results (Anne-Marie & Huzinec, 2021).

The study found that the ability to create test rubrics, which are grading guidelines that outline specific performance standards for assessing student tasks on achievement assessments, is ranked as the third least important area by language institute teachers. This finding goes against some previous studies (Panadero & Romero, 2014; Reddy et al., 2017) that have either included rubrics in their body or appendix or highlighted the importance of creating rubrics for EFL classrooms. However, Firoozi, Razavipour and Ahmadi (2019) noted that Iranian English teachers require instruction in developing rubrics for assessing various language skills.

The findings and explanations presented in previous studies (Anne-Marie & Huzinec, 2021; Firoozi et al., 2019; Reddy et al., 2017) could shed light on why teachers in Iranian language institutes do not place a high value on the items related to reporting assessment results and creating test rubrics. Based on these insights, it may be necessary to revise and update the pre-service English teacher training program to effectively educate future teachers about the significance of these aspects. The results suggest that there is a need for educational authorities in Iran to shift their focus from raw scores to norms and standards when it comes to educational contexts.

The study's results showed that Iranian EFL teachers from language institutes considered all assessment knowledge and skill areas to be important. However, the study also revealed that their pre-service education in these areas was insufficient to adequately prepare them for their role as examiners in real classroom assessments. This disparity between the perceived importance and actual preparation level suggests a gap in the current pre-service assessment program for these teachers.

According to DeLuca et al. (2019), the more significant an item is, the more training is required for its implementation. Similarly, in line with the principles of AL, participants anticipated that pre-service education should provide sufficient training for teachers to become qualified classroom assessors. However, in contrast to this expectation, the study revealed that EFL teachers were under-educated in both knowledge and skill items related to classroom assessment. This finding is consistent with previous research by Authors (2022), Sayyadi (2022), and Taylor (2013), which also highlighted EFL teachers' dissatisfaction with the assessment training they received during their pre-service education. The studies mentioned above suggest that there is a need for improvement in the assessment training provided during pre-service education for EFL teachers. In contrast, Ranjbari, Heidari Tabrizi, & Afghari (2020) reported that while assessment training was adequately planned and considered useful by EL teachers regarding its educational appropriateness, some shortcomings still exist that require further attention.

In summary, the study found that English teachers at Iranian language institutes had a greater lack of training in skills compared to knowledge items related to classroom assessment. This finding is consistent with previous research (Berry et al., 2022; Engelsen & Smith, 2014; DeLuca et al., 2019; Firoozi et al., 2019) that suggests teachers were not trained effectively and equally in both theory and practice of LAL through their pre-service education. The teachers were more literate in knowledge

Chabahar Maritime University
Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes   ISSN: 2476-3187
IJEAP, 2024, 13(1), 18-35   (Previously Published under the Title: Maritime English Journal)

domains than skill ones, making them more "under-educated" in skill items for classroom assessment. This finding is supported by Green (2017) and Harding (2020), who suggest that language teachers are more familiar with the conceptual foundations of LAL compared to its practical domains. The separation between theoretical and practical units in education is still a lingering issue, preventing language teachers from applying their knowledge to related competent skills. This is also evident in the current study regarding classroom assessment at language institutes in Iran. Overall, the study highlights that the teachers were dissatisfied with their pre-service training for becoming deficiently trained for classroom assessment, with greater deficiency and coming discontentment observed in skills areas of assessment.

Conclusion and Implications

The study, which employed gap analysis, aimed to examine EFL teachers' perspectives, as experienced individuals, on the significance of both knowledge and skills items related to LAL for classroom assessment in language institutes. The study also aimed to identify any gaps between the intended importance of AL and the pre-service assessment training received by the teachers. The findings revealed that participants viewed both knowledge and skills items as essential components for implementing classroom assessment, highlighting their complementary nature.

Based on the hierarchical distribution of significance pattern, the study found that the knowledge and skills items related to "assessing language skills and components," "developing formal and informal assessment methods," and "how to involve students in cooperative assessment" were considered the most significant by the participants. In contrast, the items related to assessment theories, different eras of testing, reporting assessment results to relevant stakeholders, and devising test rubrics were deemed the least significant by the participants.

The study found that the Iranian EFL teachers' perception of the importance of both knowledge and skills items for classroom assessment did not match the extent of their pre-service training. This suggests that these teachers are "under-prepared" in all knowledge and skill items for classroom assessment. Additionally, the teachers were found to be "higher educated" in knowledge domains compared to skill domains, indicating an "under-education" in skills areas. This under-education and inequality in education can be attributed to the weaknesses of the Iranian EFL pre-service training program in adequately educating teachers to fulfill their role as classroom examiners, particularly in practical domains.

The study's findings regarding the Iranian language institute teachers' under-preparedness in all LAL areas can raise awareness among educational authorities about the shortcomings of the pre-service training program in developing EFL teachers' assessment skills. These gaps can serve as a starting point for considering the potential of the EFL curriculum to meet the demands of language assessment and enhancing the current status of EFL assessment programs in Iranian state universities.

The responsibility of preparing EFL teachers as competent classroom assessors is a shared educational duty that involves the teachers themselves, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology. To address the shortcomings in the pre-service training curriculum, both ministries must prioritize incorporating the diverse knowledge and skill aspects of LAL into the training program. This requires a focus on the assessment requirements of language institutes to bridge the gap between assessment knowledge and skills and teacher training. To achieve this, universities in Iran must update their curricula, resources, instructional materials, and techniques to meet the demands of classroom assessment more effectively. Additionally, there is a need to emphasize AL in pre-service training for EFL fields to support current teachers' dual roles as teachers and assessors. However, it is crucial not to overlook the significance and importance of in-service training, which should supplement and reinforce what teachers learn during their pre-service training.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding Details

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Appendix: Semantic Differential Likert Scale

The assessment -related courses in TEFL B.A. program in Iranian universities

Dear respondent!

This scale was devised to evaluate the assessment -related courses at B.A level in the Iranian universities intended to prepare students of TEFL as future teachers. Your careful answers are appreciated and will be meaningful to the curriculum developers. The information will be kept <u>confidential</u> and will be used just for evaluation by the researcher.   Please   read   each   item   carefully   and   select   your   response

		Importance	Preparation
		The significance of the following knowledge or skill areas needed for classroom assessment	The provided preparation of the following knowledge or skill areas delivered through your university curriculum for classroom assessment
Item	Knowledge /skill	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6

1	The knowledge of different eras of testing(e.g. pre-scientific, scientific, modern , communicative and innovative)		
2	The knowledge of what domain of language learning (e.g. thinking, communicating ,etc.) needs to be assessed in the context of class		
3	The knowledge of various purposes of classroom assessments (e.g. diagnosis, placement, etc.)		
4	The knowledge of advantages and limitations of different assessment methods		
5	The knowledge of self- and peer –assessment		
6	The knowledge of how to assess the learning of students with special needs (e.g. impaired or talented)		
7	The knowledge of essential criteria for a good classroom assessment (e.g. validity , reliability, practicality, washback, etc.)		
8	The knowledge of assessment theories (e.g. classical true score ,item response and generalizability) as a guide to design and evaluate tests		
9	The knowledge of test construction process, from defining the purpose through items writing to pre-assessment and item/test analysis		
10	The knowledge of test rubrics (e.g. test organization, instruction, time allotment, scoring method)		
11	The knowledge of test specification (e.g. test purpose, definition of constructs, etc.)		
12	The knowledge of how to test different language skills (e.g. listening, speaking, reading or writing)		
13	The knowledge of how to test various language components (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, etc.)		
14	The knowledge of advantages and limitations of different formats of test items (e.g. short answer tests, open-ended tests, etc.)		
15	The knowledge of how to write test items (e.g. item wording, etc.)		
16	The knowledge of how to analyze and interpret item characteristics (e.g. Item difficulty, discriminability, etc.)		
17	The knowledge of the procedures of test administration (e.g. Preparing the environment, collecting materials, etc.)		

18	The knowledge of external factors that might affect student's performance on a test (e.g. individual differentiations, anxiety, etc.)		
19	The knowledge of ethics in classroom assessment (e.g. fairness, avoiding bias, etc.)		
20	The knowledge of scoring procedures (e.g. subjective or objective) of language tests		
21	The knowledge of how to report student's test performance to relevant stakeholders (e.g. telling its purpose, student's weakness and strength, etc.)		
22	The knowledge of test wash-back (negative or positive test impact on stake holders)		
23	The skill of using the best assessment method aligned with the goals of specific teaching method		
24	The skill of how to align assessment methods with intended learning objectives		
25	The skill of how to involve students in cooperative assessment (e.g. self and peer assessment)		
26	The skill to provide and implement appropriate accommodation to test the learning of students with special needs		
27	The skill of going through the test development stages (e.g. setting clear and unambiguous objectives, drawing up test specifications, etc.)		
28	The skill of how to devise test rubrics (e.g. selecting process or product to be assessed performance, description of the assessing criteria, etc.)		
29	The skill of how to assess thinking skills (e.g. problem solving, decision making, etc.)		
30	The skill of developing different types of tests (e.g. subjective vs. objective, direct vs. indirect, discrete vs. integrative)		
31	The skill of developing formal and informal assessment methods (e.g. essay items, discussion, quiz, roll play, etc.)		
32	The skill of how to avoid common problems at item writing stage (e.g. mixed response, redundancy, etc.)		
33	The skill for assembling tests (e.g. organizing the test by item type, allowing sufficient spaces, etc.)		
34	The skill of how to reduce the sources of threat to test validity		

	(e.g. invalid application of the test, inappropriate selection of content, etc.)		
35	The skill of how to reduce the sources of threat to test reliability (e.g. fluctuation in the learner, in scoring, in test administration, etc.)		
36	The skill of computing test reliability (e.g. test retest, parallel forms, etc.)		
37	The skill of how to improve the test quality (e.g. validity, reliability, practicality, impact, etc.)		
38	The skill in administering the test economically by properly using available resources (e.g. human, material, etc.) so as not to overextend the school or institute		
39	The skill to control the extraneous variables (e.g. anxiety, situational factors, etc.)that may affect the test performance		
40	The skill of how to identify and eliminate the unethical practices in assessment (e.g. cheating, using assessment as a device to threat and embarrass the student, etc.)		
41	The skill to interpret test scores regarding specific framework (e.g. norm referenced , criterion referenced)		
42	The skill of using statistics (e.g. inferential or descriptive) in scoring and interpreting students' test performance (e.g. percentile ranks, standard deviation, T score, etc.)		
43	The skill to report in a clear, timely, accurate, and useful manner (for e.g. by anecdotal records, checklist, rating scales, rubrics and portfolios) the assessment results to relevant stakeholders (e.g. students, parents, school)		
44	The skill in making the appropriate decision about the student's test results in a given situation		