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A Critical View on EFL Teachers & Students' Perceptions Toward Language Assessment

Linguistics Society of Iran

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ABSTRACT

A growing body of literature has recognized the importance of language assessment that teachers' and students' perspectives and preferences can play an important role in it. However, it seems that prior studies of assessment have not dealt with the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives and preferences and little research has been carried out on EFL teachers' and students' perceptions towards language assessment. This study was conducted to uncover teachers' perspectives and preferences toward language assessment, to address the correlation between these variables and to investigate students' language assessment perceptions .To achieve the goals, three questionnaires including the Classroom assessment preferences survey questionnaire for language teachers by Gonzales and Aliponga (2012), teacher assessment for learning questionnaire by Pat-El,Tillema, Segers and Vedder (2013) and the student perceptions of assessment questionnaire developed by Fisher, Waldrip and Dorman (2005) were distributed among EFL teachers and students in different language institutes. The research indicated that EFL teachers' perspective was high toward monitoring scale. Analysis of teachers' preferences revealed that assessment as learning hit the highest place. Moreover, teachers' perspectives and preferences were highly correlated. Lastly, the results confirmed that students' perceptions were generally positive towards assessment especially in authenticity scale.

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I. Introduction

Assessment is central both for determining the achievement of educational aims and for the continuity in enhancement and learning improvement (Kavakli Ulutaş, 2023). Brown and Hirschfield (2008) point out that assessment refers to an action of interpreting students' performance, and providing evidence through various means. They also believe that the primary objective of assessment is to progress teaching and learning; consequently, understanding teachers' perceptions about assessment is of great importance. As Stiggins (2004) puts, classroom assessment considers as an indispensable part of teachers' work to encourage and help students in accommodating this task. Additionally, he proposes that teachers substitute their assessment of learning with assessment for learning as a more balanced and sensible approach. In other words, teachers should employ assessment not only to dynamically and constantly measure a learner's growth but also to obtain beneficial facts or information to inform their own instructional as well as professional practice. As argued by Dhindsa, Omar, and Waldrip (2007), investigating students' perceptions of assessment also encourages students to build up an authentic and realistic assessment and to be responsible for their own learning.

In spite of the fact that teacher' as well as students' perceptions can play a key role in addressing the issue of assessment; it appears that there is very little published research focusing specifically on EFL teachers' and students' perceptions and teachers' preferences in Iran. This paper has four main aims to be addressed. First, it seeks to explore Iranian EFL teachers' belief regarding language assessment. Second, it critically investigates their preferences on language assessment. Third, this research aims to explore the possible association between teachers' preferences with their perceptions on assessment. The last objective is to uncover Iranian EFL students' perceptions about language assessment. In particular, this paper will examine the following main research questions:

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions towards assessment in language institutes?
2. What are Iranian EFL teachers' assessment preferences in language institutes?
3. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment preferences and their perceptions towards assessment?
4. What are the Iranian EFL students' perceptions towards classroom assessment in language institutes?

In order to answer the above-research questions the following research hypothesis will be tested:

H0: There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment preferences and their perceptions towards assessment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Differentiation between Assessment and Testing

According to Brown (2004), testing and assessment differ in various ways. As Bachman (2004) defines, assessment is "A process of collecting information about something that we are interested in, according to procedures that are systematic and substantially grounded" (p. 6-7). Brown and

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Abeywickrama (2010) also state that assessment refers to an ongoing process comprising an extensive range of techniques such as simply making an oral evaluation of a student's answer or taking note to comment on a student's essay. Conversely, testing is defined as a way of conducting assessment which is strictly associated with fixed timing and stable procedures (Brown, 2004). Spolsky and Hult (2008) also believe that tests represent a specific kind of formal instruments which are often cautiously designed. According to Brown (2004), "A test, in simple terms, is a method of measuring a person's ability knowledge, or performance in a given domain" (p.3). When teachers think about an assessment task, their minds are obsessed with some questions such as: "When and how often shall we evaluate the students?", or "How should we conduct an assessment process? They believe that Why-questions hardly ever come to teachers' mind. The importance of Why-questions cannot be overlooked by teachers as assessors due to the fact that these kind of challenging questions will lead to decisions. It seems that assessors cannot rely on testers since they believe that the main concern of testers is the numerical analysis of data rather than content and administration of their tests (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Based on assessors' perspectives, tests are not communicative and interactive, and that they may cause negative washback (Brown & Hudson, 1998). On the other hand, although the assessors' methods of assessment may be innovative and stimulating, they do not value the significance of considering the validity and reliability of their instruments (Brown & Hudson, 1998). The spread and professionalization of language testing, have arisen some concerns about teachers' language assessment literacy due to the fact that teachers are the chief assessors of students' language ability so they must be informative in this field (Benjamin & Harding, 2020).

2.2. Perceptions and Preferences of Language Assessment

2.2.1 Conceptions of Assessment

Over the past century, the issue of conceptions or perceptions of assessment has been as one of the most significant current discussions. Along with dramatic changes in societies and education systems, the study of attitudes, beliefs, and policies regulating assessment pedagogies and practices disclose various changes (Calveric, 2010). Although it is imperative to know how teachers implemented assessment activities in the classroom, it is similarly essential to understand the rationale and perceptions of the teachers who used the assessment strategies (Yao, 2015). Van den Berg (2002) holds the view that conceptions are interconnected and sophisticated reflections of socially and culturally shared phenomena. Brown and Remesal (2012) say that it is vital for both for educators and policy makers to have a comprehensive understanding of assessment since research has recognized and proved their influence upon teaching and learning. While it is important to know how teachers implemented assessment activities in the classroom, it is equally important to understand the rationale and perceptions of the teachers who used the assessment strategies

2.2.2 Constructivist Perception of Assessment

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The classroom assessment in the 21st century is substantially affected with the concept of constructive learning. Based on constructivism, individuals actively construct their knowledge which is inner and personal to the individual. The proponents of this school of thought believe that there is no absolute knowledge instead different people will have diverse understandings of their own learning and will construct their own meanings (Cheng, 2008). As proposed by Shepard (2005), constructivists assert that classroom assessment is an unending process incorporated with instruction and utilize authentic tasks which reflect an interactive language practice similar to those employed in the social, real as well as cultural life of the individuals in order to support of student learning formatively. With the advent of constructivism, the roles of teachers as the providers of information changed into the assistants of learners as well as educational leaders (Christie, 2005). The constructivists do not consider teachers as responsible for transmitting knowledge to learners, rather they believe that learners employ a lot of strategies to achieve new information by analyzing data to identify patterns, forming and testing hypotheses, and mixing new knowledge with preceding understandings (Rueda & Garcia, 1996). According to constructivism-based curriculums, "The learning outcomes, the learning and teaching methods and assessment methods should follow on one from another and be seamlessly, demonstrably interrelated" (Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005, p. 232). They also mention that in the constructivism, student performance is evaluated in authentic, real and meaningful contexts, for instance through using portfolios, projects and writing tasks (Rueda & Garcia, 1996). Consequently, the fundamental aim of constructivists is not to measure how much knowledge the students remember but rather to assess how information is organized and how much the level of students' knowledge has altered throughout the learning process (Arslan as cited in Han & Kaya, 2014). The basic idea of social constructionist theory is that problem solving is the heart of learning, thinking and development. When people solve their problems and notice the outcomes of their actions via reflecting on previous and immediate experience, they construct their own understanding (Lamon, 2007). Vygotsky (1986) made a relationship between constructivism and the theory of learning. According to him, learning is neither merely an interior practice nor an inactive shaping of behaviors. He strongly believed that children first learn by social interactions. Considering new paradigm of classroom assessment three kinds of assessment can be recognized as follows:

2.2.2.1 Assessment as Learning

Stiggins (2004) suggests that assessment as learning makes students become more responsible and active members in learning process since they can not only explore the teachers' activities purposes, but also create their own personal learning purposes. Assessment as learning is an effective way to strengthen students' metacognition in the way that they ask themselves metacognitive questions to dynamically reflect on their own improvement through informal, formal, self as well as peer assessment. Additionally, Earl and Katz (as cited in Saefurrohman, 2015) reveal when students are

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actively and critical engaged, they are able to make sense of information, relate it to their previous knowledge, and employ it for new learning. They highly hold this view that it cannot happen without monitoring and using the feedback from this monitoring in order to adjust, adapt, and make main changes in what they understand. Assessment as learning assists the students to realize their own mistakes and weaknesses and to learn from their peers in order to improve their learning (Earl, 2003).

2.2.2.2 Assessment of Learning

Summative assessment is about measuring or summarizing "What a student has grasped, and typically occurs at the end of a course or unit of instruction" (Brown, 2004, p.6). According to Earl (2003), assessment of learning in the learning process is equal to summative assessment. Assessment of learning can be utilized to realize whether the students have achieved the essential knowledge at the end the course(s) they have undertaken or not (Gipps, 2003). Earl (2003) also suggests that assessment of learning is summative assessment which plans to confirm learning and report to parents and students about students' improvement in school, usually by motioning students' relative position in comparison to other students.

Summative assessment is carried out at the end of a term or a course and is primarily used to grade students for providing information about how much students have learned and how well a course has worked and secondary to propose achievement feedback (Gipps, 2003). As Thomas (2012) points out summative assessment as traditional assessment occurs when the learning has been accomplished and provides information and feedback that sums up the teaching in addition to learning procedure. Furthermore, summative assessments are generally considered as "high stakes" assessments (Gardner, 2010). Final exams or proficiency tests are examples of summative assessment (Brown, 2004). Summative assessments are also employed to measure if a student should progress to the next grade level, to provide career guidance, or to evaluate qualifications for awards (Harlen & Gardner, 2010). Brown (2004) notes that summative assessment as traditional assessment are one-shot, formal, decontextualized, non-interactive, standardized exams timed, norm-referenced base and objective that focus on the correct answers in which students do not produce any language and raises extrinsic motivation. However, summative assessments are quick to administer and score. In addition, their scoring system is fairly objective, valid as well as reliable.

2.2.2.3 Assessment for Learning

As mentioned by Gonzales and Aliponga (2012) assessment for learning is formative assessment which feeds back to teachers to create effective learning by amending teaching and learning activities during the continuing instructional process. Formative assessment as alternative assessment provides feedback and information during the instructional process or in the middle of learning, while learning is taking place. Influential feedback notifies the students about their existing position on what they have done properly, what they accomplished incorrectly and how they can improve (Williams, 2001). Similarly, Sadler (1989) affirms that feedback provides precious and rich information not only for

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students but also for teachers. He believes that teachers utilize feedback to detect students' difficulties or problems and students use formative feedback in order to monitor their strengths and weaknesses or about how they can do something successfully. Formative assessment comprises a variety of tools that provide feedback to teachers or students to assist students learn more efficiently (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). As Stiggins (2002) puts when teachers assess for learning, they use the classroom assessment procedure and the ongoing flow of information about students in order to progress, not just to check on students learning. For an assessment to be formative, it needs feedback which specifies the presence of a 'gap' between the actual level of the work being evaluated and the required standard. It is essential in formative assessment to indicate how the work can be developed to achieve the required standard (Taras, 2005). In fact, formative assessment is interactive process within with learners are actively engaged in regular self–assessment so that they are able to watch themselves development during time (Earl, 2003). Poehner (2013) affirms that "Formative assessment also referred to as assessment-for-learning, encompasses a range of practices designed to inform teachers of learners' understanding of what has been taught (and possible need for further instruction), and may include informal classroom interactions" (p. 4).

Formative assessment is of two purposes: "Selecting or modifying Unlike traditional assessment which compares students' performances against one another, criterion referenced assessment compares the students' performances against set standards (Tanner, 2001). Brown (2004) also summarizes the characteristics of formative assessments as alternative kinds of assessment as follows: formative assessment is continuous; dynamic, long-term, untimed, free-response format, contextualized, communicative or interactive, individualized feedback and washback, criterion-referenced-base, open-ended, process-oriented, that can develop intrinsic motivation. Chappius and Chappius (2008) advocate that both the teachers and the students use formative assessment outcomes in order to make decisions about what actions to take to encourage further learning. Williams (2001) states that the most important difference between formative and summative assessment lies in their use instead of timing of the assessment; in other words, an assessment can be summative and formative simultaneously, based on their purposes. Black and William (1998) acknowledge that effective assessment is governed by on five main factors including effective feedback, pupils' active involvement, accountability, motivation and the self-esteem of the pupils and pupils' ability to access these factors. Shepard (2005) remarks that through perceptions about the present understandings of learners, formative assessment permits teachers to discover guidelines and supports for them and is a two-way process between teachers and learners to progress and increase the learners' performance. Examples of formative assessment according to Herrera, Murry, and Cabral, (2007) are diagnostic assessment; Portfolios; self-assessment; peer-assessment; performance-based assessments; questioning Interview-based assessment; play-based assessment; co-operative group assessment; dialogue journals and scaffolded essays.

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2.3 Traditional Assessment Strengths and Weaknesses

The strongest point of traditional assessments is the ease in designing and scoring. Consequently, they are time- effective and effortless to create appropriate tests. Most important of all is the issue objectivity in traditional assessments (Kwako, 2003). Apart from strengths, traditional assessment enhances competitive spirit for obtaining higher scores among a few top students; students encourage working alone and deemphasizing the collaboration as well as shared interaction among students (Helmericksas cited in Kwako, 2003).Considering affective filters, traditional assessment can raise feelings of anxiety, which is powerful enough to considerably limit their performance (Kulm, 1994). As mentioned earlier, traditional testing ways lead to rote and superficial learning since most of questions are procedural that entail speedy and unreflective responses; accordingly, students are not involved in problem solving and critical thinking. Overall, traditional assessments ask "how, when, and where" questions but hardly ever ask "why." Due to the pitfalls of summative assessment, formative assessment comes into existence as an alternative assessment in order to fill the gap and compensate the weaknesses of traditional ways (Kwako, 2003). According to a study conducted by Rezaeian, Seyyedrezaei, Barani, Seyyedrezaei, (2020), A traditional testing may have several educational, social and psychological consequences for their test takers.

2.4 Alternative Assessment Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the most important strength of alternative assessments is the extent of information that can be collected about student understanding, particularly when students are asked to explain, describe, or justify their answers since it provides an occasion for deeper insight into student understanding, support their thinking and communication. Black and William (1998) also mention the outcomes of the assessment are utilized to adapt teaching in order to meet students' needs. Alternative assessments suffer from some shortcomings. As such, they are generally more time- consuming compared with traditional assessments, not only in design but also in evaluation. The second weakness is the significant amount of knowledge needed to design alternative assessments successfully that permits for numerous points of entry, evaluates higher order thinking (Kwako, 2003).

2.5 The Purposes of Assessment

2.5.1 The Purposes of Assessment for students

As Spiller (2009) states, the first function of assessment is diagnostic which to empower students to realize their level of competency, knowledge and understanding at the beginning of a course. The second function is feedback which refers to find out students' progress in relation to the learning outcomes of a course. Learning opportunities is the third function that provides the opportunities to develop students' mastery of ideas or practice skills and competencies through producing in writing and oral work or other forms of expression. Self-evaluation is another aim which can encourage

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students to make judgments about the quality of their own work. Boud and Falchikov (2007) also introduce preparation for longer term learning in the form of formative assessment which can be used to help students improve the capability to self-evaluate, as a central component for any future occupations. The last function of assessment is increasing motivation (Spiller, 2009).

2.5.2 The Purposes of Assessment for Teachers

By similarity, Spiller (2009) recognizes diagnostic functions of assessment for teacher; that is, teachers can use assessment tasks to discover what students bring into a course in order to make the teaching and learning responsive to students' requests or needs and build on present knowledge. Furthermore, teachers use feedback to distinguish misunderstandings, evaluate the efficiency of their teaching and make suitable modifications and adaptations. Spiller (2009) also believes that teachers can employ assessment tasks as teaching and learning tools and promote their self-evaluation though encouraging students to judge about the quality of their work and prepare for future contribution in the workforce.

III. METHODS

3.1 Participants

The study involved both English language teachers and students. Forty- three English language teachers working at three private language institutes including Irana, Abrar and Helma of Gorgan, Iran took part in this study based on convenience sampling. They were both male (N=8) and female (N=35) with a range of between less than 1 year (N=6), 1-3 years (N=10), 4-6 years (N=10) and more than six years of teaching experience (N=17) with mean score 2.8. The sample had all majored in English Language Teaching (ELT), English literature and English translation at B.A. (N= 17), M.A. (N=20), and Ph.D. (N=6) levels. Meanwhile, both male and female EFL students at advanced level who were selected based on convenience sampling from Abrar and Helma institutes in Iran. A total of 50 students were requested to participate in the study and the questionnaires were given to them the returned completed questionnaires were forty. Because there was no possibility to change or modify the teachers and students, some variables such as the age, gender of them were not controlled and investigated by the researchers.

3.2 Instruments

In order to carry out the present study and answer the research questions, the following questionnaires were utilized. One of the most well-known tools for assessing teachers' perceptions is an adapted version of the Classroom Assessment Preferences Survey Questionnaire for Language Teachers (CAPSQ-LT) by Gonzales and Aliponga (2012) includes 35 items from very rarely or never, rarely, occasionally, very frequently and always focusing on five constructs, including:

- Assessment as learning (ten items) which examines the influence of assessment on learning.

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- Assessment of learning (seven items) which investigates conducting classroom assessment to learn alternative approaches to measure learning consequences, and assess the level of competence of students at the end of an instructional process.
- Assessment for learning (six items): this level explores doing classroom assessment to provide feedback to students in order to progress their learning procedure, and make suggestions to students about how they obtain better learning strategies.
- Assessment for instruction (seven items): it examines conducting classroom assessment to boost the quality of classroom instruction, and discover influential classroom teaching methods and strategies.
- Assessment to inform (five items): this level investigates doing classroom assessment to offer information to parents about the performance of their children in school, and explores how one student accomplishes with comparison to others in a class.

The reliability of the questionnaire is estimated to be 0.82 in the main study through Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The second instrument is Teacher Assessment for Learning Questionnaire (TAFL-Q) which is one of the most common procedures for determining teachers' perceptions regarding assessment developed by Pat-El et al. (2013). It consists of 28 items divided into two scales: (1) perceived monitoring (16 items from item 1-16) and (2) perceived scaffolding (12 items from item 17-28) on a five-point Likert scale from 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The first factor which is monitoring involves some items that deal with feedback and self-monitoring which share a typical intention to enhance learning. The second factor, scaffolding, has a number of items that refer to clarification and explanation of learning objectives and criteria and to classroom questioning, which are extensively instruction-related processes. The reliability of the sum scale computed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients is estimated to be 0.83 in the main study. In order to investigate the students' perceptions, The Student Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) with 24 items at five point Likert-scale format scaling from 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used. SPAQ contains five constructs including:

- Congruence with planned learning: Extent to which assessment tasks align with the goals, objectives and activities of the learning program.
- Authenticity of assessment: The extent to which assessment tasks feature real life situations those are relevant to the learner.
- Students' consultation about assessment: The extent to which students are consulted and informed about the forms of assessment tasks being employed.
- Transparency of assessment: The extent to which the purposes and forms of assessment tasks are well-defined and clear to the learner.
- Students' capabilities: The extent to which all students have an equal chance at completing assessment tasks. The given questionnaire was developed by Fisher, Waldrip and Dorman (2005)

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was utilized in order to answer the first research question. The reliability of the sum scale computed through Cronbach's alpha is 0.76with the sample study.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Research Question One

4.1.1 What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions towards assessment in language institutes?

The results obtained from the introductory tests of normality of the data in Table 1 reveal that *a* value of the KS Test and Shapiro-Wilk is greater than .05; therefore, the distribution of the data is normal and parametric tests can be utilized for further analysis.

Table 1. *Test of Normality*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	**df**	**Sig.**	**Statistic**	**df**	**Sig.**
TAFLQ	.096	43	.200*	.986	43	.885

Note. This is a lower bound of the true significance. a. Lilliefors Significance Correction According to Table 2, it is apparent that Iranian EFL teachers have positive perspectives towards classroom assessment which is reported to be 116.44.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of TAFLQ*

	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
TAFLQ total	43	92	138	116.44	9.430
Valid N (listwise)	43				

As can be seen from the Table 3, the study displays that monitoring of TAFLQ is higher (M = 65.91) than scaffolding scale. This suggests that teachers perceive that there is a connection between their assessment in their class with feedback and self-monitoring.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of TAFLQ Scales*

	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Scaffolding	43	41	59	50.65	4.076
Monitoring	43	51	79	65.91	6.316
Valid N (listwise)	43				

Additionally, descriptive statistics from the sixteen items under this scale demonstrate that, the mean score of item 9 in monitoring scale (I inform my students on their weak points concerning learning)

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hits the highest with mean score 5.23; What stands out in Table 4 is that item 8 (I inform my students on their strong points concerning learning) with mean score 4.19 is less than item 9. That is, Iranian EFL teachers' pay more attention to their students' weaknesses instead of their strengths. By contrast, item 26 from scaffolding scale (My students know what the evaluation criteria for their work are) gets the lowest place with mean score 3.44.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics of TAFLQ items*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TAFL Q8	43	1	5	4.19	.958
TAFL Q9	43	2	45	5.23	6.248
TAFL Q26	43	1	5	3.44	1.098
Valid N (listwise)	41				

4.2 Research Question Two

4.2.1 What are Iranian EFL teachers' assessment preferences in language institutes?

Tests of normality of the data in Table 5 provide that *a* value of the KSTest (0.06) and Shapiro-Wilk (0.012) are greater than .05; hence, parametric tests can be employed for further analysis.

Table 5. *Tests of Normality*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
CAPSQ	.130	43	.065	.931	43	.012

Note. a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

It is obvious from descriptive statistics of CAPSQ in Table 6 that assessment as learning has the highest mean, which is estimated to be 38.28. The second place is taken by assessment for instruction with mean score 28.98. Assessment of learning has the third mean, which is equal to 27.33. Perhaps the most striking finding is allocated to assessment for learning which gets the fourth place with mean score 24.28 and opens room for discussion. Lastly, the mean sore of assessment to inform is measured to be 17.33.

Table 6. *Descriptive Statistics of CAPSQ*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Assessment as Learning	43	20	50	38.28	6.318
Assessment of Learning	43	19	35	27.33	3.847
Assessment for Learning	43	14	30	24.28	3.725
Assessment for Instruction	43	16	84	28.98	9.780
Assessment to Inform	43	6	25	17.33	4.745

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Valid N (listwise)	43

The subsequent table documents the mean sores of 35 items. It is apparent that item 28 under assessment for instruction scale (In my teaching practice, I do classroom assessment to identify better learning opportunities for students in class) occupies the first place with comparison to the other items (M= 5.07). As mentioned before, assessment for instruction scrutinizes conducting classroom assessment to enhance the quality of classroom instruction, and explore influential classroom teaching methods and strategies. By contrast, items 31(In my teaching practice, I do classroom assessment to rank students based on their class performance to inform other school officials and 35(In my teaching practice, I do classroom assessment to supply information to other teachers, schools, employers regarding students' performance in class) which are under assessment to inform with mean sore 3.16 have the lowest means. Assessment to inform studies doing classroom assessment to propose information to parents about the performance of their children in school, and explores how one student accomplishes with comparison to others in a class.

Table 7. *Descriptive Statistics of CAPSQ Items*

	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
CAPSQ28	43	2	55	5.07	7.845
CAPSQ31	43	1	5	3.16	1.290
CAPSQ35	43	1	5	3.16	1.588
Valid N (listwise)	43				

4.3 Research Question Three

4.3.1 Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment preferences and their perceptions towards assessment?

H0: There is no significant relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment preferences and their perceptions towards assessment.

It seems that one of the most important findings of this research is in line with this question. As illustrated in this table, Correlation between teachers' assessment preferences and their perceptions towards assessment is significant (r =.730, n = 43, p =. 000, .000<0.05).

Table 8. *The Correlation between CAPSQ and TAFLQ*

		CAPSQ	**TAFLQ**
CAPSQ	Pearson Correlation	1	.730**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	43	43
TAFLQ	Pearson Correlation	.730**	1

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	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	43	43

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4 Research Question four

4.4.1 What are the Iranian EFL students' perceptions about classroom assessment in language institutes?

First of all, in order to ensure the normality of data, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) Test and Shapiro-Wilk were used. As Table 9 illustrates, 0.51≥ 0.05 for SPAQ since α value of both KS Test and Shapiro-Wilk is greater than .05, it is concluded that the data distribution is normal.

Table 9. *Test of Normality*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			**Shapiro-Wilk**		
	Statistic	**df**	**Sig.**	**Statistic**	**df**	**Sig.**
SPAQ	.119	40	.156	.975	40	.518

Note.a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 10 shows that the average mean score of all students' perceptions of assessment from language institutes is reported to be 87.70. It is apparent that Iranian EFL students have positive perspectives towards classroom assessment.

Table 10. *Descriptive Statistics of SPAQ*

	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
SPAQ	40	64	111	87.70	10.011
Valid N (listwise)	40				

As indicated in Table 11, SPAQ consists of the five constructs including Congruence with Planned Learning (CPL), Assessment Authenticity (AA), Students' Consultation about Assessment (SCA), Transparency of Assessment (TA), and Students' Capabilities (SC). According to Table, students perceived the authenticity of assessment higher (M = 21.03) than the other four constructs. The result proposes that students see a connection between their assessment in their class and their daily life activities which is one of the main features of authenticity. The second place is taken by CPL with mean score 18.95. TA is the third scale with mean sore 17.97. SCA and SC have occupied the fourth and fifth place with mean sores 15.35 and 14.40 respectively.

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Table 11. *Descriptive Statistics of Five Scales*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CPL	40	12	25	18.95	2.782
AA	40	8	28	21.03	4.943
SCA	40	10	20	15.35	2.527
TA	40	10	22	17.97	3.385
SC	40	9	20	14.40	2.799
N (listwise Valid)	40				

As it can be seen from Table 12, from the six items under authenticity scale, the mean score of SPAQ11 (I can show others that my learning has helped me do thing) is the highest with mean score 4.15. Additionally, SPAQ 17(I am told in advance when I am being assessed) hits the lowest mean estimated to be 3.10.

Table 12. *Descriptive Statistics of Items 11 and 17*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SPAQ11	40	2	5	4.15	.893
SPAQ17	40	1	4	3.10	1.033
Valid N (listwise)	40				

As shown in Table 13, 18 students out of 40 strongly agreed and only 1 of them disagreed. It can be concluded that the majorly of students suppose that their learning has helped them do thing.

Table 13. *Descriptive Statistics of SPAQ11*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Neutral	10	25.0	25.0	27.5
	Agree	11	27.5	27.5	55.0
	Strongly Agree	18	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

By contrast, descriptive statistics of SPAQ17 in Table 14 present that 4 students were strongly agreed and 7 students out of 40 were disagreed. Apparently, they are not informed about when they are being assessed in advance.

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Table 14. *Descriptive Statistics of SPAQ17*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Disagree	7	17.5	17.5	27.5
	Neutral	10	25.0	25.0	52.5
	Agree	19	47.5	47.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to Ministry of Education (2006), it is essential for teachers not only to have a clear understanding and become aware of different types of language tools but also to utilize each of the tools and processes appropriately. Furthermore, teachers can employ information to get their students involved in goal setting as well as self-assessment based on the feedback. Thompson (1992) argues that teachers` thinking about different matters of pedagogical procedures such as teaching, learning, and curricula extremely influences how they teach and what learners may learn. More importantly, convincing evidence has confirmed that beliefs and perceptions can impact teaching even more than experience and socioeconomic context; consequently, they require further attention (Griffiths, Gore, & Ladwig, 2006). During the pandemic, the sustainable assessment has been given outstanding attention since educational disruption around the world has raised concerns on students' self-regulated learning and their sustainable improvement (Giovannella, 2021).

With respect to the first research question, the present study was designed to explore what Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions are towards assessment. In general, it was found that they had positive perceptions towards assessment and the results obtained from two scales displayed that monitoring of TAFLQ occupied higher place than scaffolding scale. This suggests that teachers perceive that there is a connection between their assessment in their class with feedback and self-monitoring. As stated by Alberta Learning (2002), the main objectives of ESL assessment are to detect learners' strengths and weaknesses, to regulate instruction to build on students' strengths and lessen their weaknesses, to monitor the efficiency of instruction, to provide feedback to students, their parents or sponsors, and to decide about the improvement of students to the next level of the program. Additionally, monitoring student progress can assist teachers to collect evidence of how a student processes, approaches, and finalizes tasks during time. According to Petchprasert (2012), feedback is an indispensable part of language learning and teaching that affects students' learning and achievement. Gass and Selinker (2008) also say that interactional feedback is considered as a significant source of information for learners since it can provide information about their success or

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lack of success of their utterances and gives further opportunities to concentrate on production or comprehension.

Apart from monitoring scale, scaffolding as the second construct plays noticeable roles in language classes. Bruner (1990) notes that in second language acquisition, the term 'scaffolding' refers to the linguistic support which is provided by an expert namely instructor, tutor, or even a more proficient or knowledgeable peer to a learner. Wood (as cited in Bliss, Askew, & Macrae, 1996) similarly confirms that teaching is complex, challenging and delicate activity since the teacher's mission is not only to convey facts and information but also to initiate learners into ways of conceptualizing and thinking. Meanwhile, he suggests that effective teaching requires contingent control of learning. Contrary to expectations, this study revealed that Iranian EFL teachers paid more attention to students' weakness rather than their strengths which was a bit disappointing and raised a very important question which is needed to be researched and answered by investigators through constructivism' point of view since the present findings are unable to uncover the hidden reasons behind this controversial issue.

The findings reported in the case of the second research question suggested that assessment as learning which examines the effect of assessment on learning has selected by teachers as the first preference which is in consistent with Han and Kaya (2014). As mentioned before, assessment as learning is considered as an impressive way to strengthen students' metacognition and occurs when students monitor themselves and are responsible for their own learning; in other words, Iranian EFL teachers give priority to this issue and provide environment as well as opportunity for their students to achieve it in their classes (Stiggins, 2002). Perhaps the most worrying finding was that assessment for learning which refers to formative assessment was the fourth preferences for Iranian EFL teachers. The main factor in assessment for learning is providing feedback to students in order to progress their learning process, and help students about how they acquire more effective learning strategies (Gonzales & Aliponga, 2012). As Jones (2005) states, through assessment for learning learners become aware of their improvement to empower themselves and to take the essential action to progress their performance. Jones (2005) also mentions that teachers are in charge of creating learning opportunities where learners can improve at their own speed. Therefore, assessment for learning strategies should be applied in such a way that quality of feedback, which is provided to learners aid them to become more capable learner in order to achieve new levels of achievement and reach their complete potential.

Assessment to inform which took the lowest place suggested that offering information about the performance of students to parents, other teachers or employers by EFL Iranian teachers was not satisfactory. As Mellouk (2007) states, assessment is one of the pedagogical standards of teacher as a leader which has received little attention from both trainers and teachers. He also believes that the language teacher's responsibility is not limited to the classroom context or classroom management,

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but should be extended to his/her environment. Williams-Boyd (2002) argues that no effective leadership occurs without teachers' contribution; hence, teachers should engage the family in the work of the classroom and the school in order to enhance collaborative relationships. That is, an EFL competent teacher understands the role and power of the community in education and develops and maintains collaborative relationships with colleagues, administrators, parents/tutors, and the community to support students' learning and well-being (Mellouk, 2007). Moreover, it appears that teachers' perceptions can shape their preferences and they see the world of teaching with different lenses. Their beliefs towards monitoring as a way to provide feedback or scaffolding in order to clarify and explain learning purposes can have effect on their assessment favorites in their classes (Pat-El et al., 2013). Overall, the study paves the way to better understand Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and their preferences on assessment in language institutes. It seems that the present data highlight the importance of teachers' perceptions and their preferences on assessment to help them to develop and find new ways of better understanding of assessment in Iranian contexts. Based on a reached conducted by Farhady and Tavassoli (2021), teachers with high language assessment knowledge designed longer tests with more diverse sections and tasks. They believe that teachers need a reasonable and enough knowledge of assessment to assess their students' achievement (Farhady & Tavassoli, 2018; Tavassoli & Farhady, 2018).

The results obtained from the descriptive analysis also revealed that students perceived the authenticity of assessment higher than the other scales which is broadly supports the work of Mussawy (2009). Some outcome is contrary to that of Mussawy (2009) found; While, the present results present that item 11 (I can show others that my learning has helped me do thing) has the highest mean and item 17 (I am told in advance when I am being assessed) hits the lowest mean, Mussawy's research (2009) shows that item 6 (I am asked to apply my learning to real life situations) and item 8 (I find my class assessment tasks are relevant to what I do outside of school)take the highest and lowest place respectively. That is, Iranian students see an association between their assessment in their English class and their daily or real life activities in real as well as meaningful context. Mainly social constructivism proposes that knowledge and social reality are created via interactions between people and mostly through discourse (Brown, 2007). The principal foundation of Vygotsky's (1986) account of mind is that contrasting with animals; human mental functioning is not solely governed by biological instinct and straight response or reaction to environmental stimuli but is shaped via participation and involvement in culturally organized functions with other people. In other words, the world of humans is culturally and socially mediated. Vygotsky's (1986) also believes that through interaction with other individuals, we are able to improve the means to control rudimentary psychological activities such as perception, attention, as well as memory. Consequently, authenticity is supported to be as an important feature of language assessment by literature. Furthermore, according to Mussawy (2009), transparency of assessment has been selected as the lowest scale among the five scales. On the other hand, this study indicates that students have marked their

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capabilities of assessment as the lowest one. Students' capabilities refer to the extent to which all students are given the same chance at completing assessment tasks. Consistent with the literature, this research found that participants perceived item 24 (when I am confused about an assessment tasks, I am given another way to answer) has the lowest score. These findings are rather disappointing and debatable because it postulates that students are less likely given an alternative way to answer a question when they are puzzled and teachers do not scaffold students during doing assessment. Regarding item 2 in congruence with planned learning scale, results proposes that assessment measures what students understand is higher than item 1 which is assessment in English class tests what they memorize. It is a good news since it implies that students perceive assessment as a measure of understanding instead of memorizing. The current data are not in agreement with Mussawy (2009) findings who reported mean score of item 1 is higher than item 2. Rust (2002) points out that influential assessment is meaningful and transparent; in fact, transparent assessment can support students' learning. In the case of transparency, Mussawy (2009) has suggests that students are not clear about on what they are being assessed, what the teachers' expectations are and how the assessment will be marked. By contrast, I found that Iranian students are less aware of the time of assessment. In terms of students' consultation, results specify that students are not highly positive toward it and they cannot say how they will be assessed. This finding is not consistent with the previous literature; unfortunately, this finding is rather difficult to interpret because it is impossible to uncover the probable reasons behind it with the present data.

Overall, this study strengthens the idea that to uncover students' perspectives towards assessment can be effective in promoting teaching in English classes (Rajabi,2015) . Their standpoints can highlight both teachers' and students' strengths and weaknesses in order to help them to overcome their problems and difficulties in real contexts. Meanwhile, the current data highlight the importance of feedback as well as their students' views regarding its different aspects. The results of this research also support the idea that authentic assessment is of great importance in the minds of students; thus, it cannot be overlooked by teachers. As Poehner (2008) asserts, "Assessment consequences – for individuals, institutions, and society – have emerged as a topic of great concern as research has pointed increasingly towards the political agendas behind many assessment initiatives and the adverse effects of mandated assessments on educational systems" (p.23). The issue of assessment is an intriguing one which could be usefully explored in further research and this research has thrown up some new ideas in need of further investigation. Namely, the study should be repeated using mixed method design in order to discover the students' perspectives not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively to support the data or explore new thoughts. It would be interesting to assess the relationship of the level of degree and gender with students' perspectives. Due to the fact that more information on assessment would help us to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter. Despite these promising results, there are still some unanswered questions regarding assessment.

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Consequently, further research should be undertaken to investigate the teachers' perceptions and their preferences qualitatively in order to uncover some possible challenges and difficulties in the field of language assessment in Iran. The further work is also required to employ other methodological approaches such as interview to provide new insights since more information on assessment would help us to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter in the near future. therefore, in order to generalize the finding for larger groups, the research should have involved more participants. Another possible problem is that these results may not be applicable to other participants as well as settings and they are only limited to Iranian EFL teachers and Iranian context. Hopefully, these findings add to a growing body of literature on assessment and encourage other researchers to do an innovative research in this field.

Declaration

I declare that this manuscript is original and has not been submitted to any other journal for publication

Transparency Statements

I affirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. Any additional data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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I report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Consideration

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