

Vol. 13, No. 3
pp. 403-428
July & August
2022

Iranian EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Dynamic Assessment: Does Context Make a Difference?

Ali Momeni¹ & Musa Nushi^{*2}

Abstract

Dynamic assessment (DA), premised on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT), constitutes a valuable venue for language teachers to promote the dialectical praxis and awareness of language assessment and teaching in the EFL context. In spite of the surge of interest in the importance of DA in assessing the dynamically emergent abilities, little has been written down regarding EFL teachers' attitudes toward DA. The current study attempted to fill that void by unearthing Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about DA and also to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between university and language institute teachers' attitudes with regard to DA. To this end, forty Iranian EFL teachers in the two contexts (i.e., universities and language institutes) were selected through purposive and snowball sampling procedures. Adopting an exploratory design, the researchers collected the data through an Email interview. The results of the Chi-square tests indicated that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of university and language institute teachers toward DA, and both groups held a positive attitude toward it. In addition, the content analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of three major themes namely, teachers' classroom assessment practices, EFL teacher's attitudes toward DA, and impediments to applying DA principles in EFL classes. The findings of this study cater for implications for teachers to voice their concerns about the edifice of language testing and assessment in Iran.

Keywords: dynamic assessment, EFL, zone of proximal development (ZPD), sociocultural theory, teacher's beliefs

Received: 15 September 2021
Received in revised form: 10 October 2021
Accepted: 17 November 2021

¹ Department of English Language and Literature, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

² Corresponding Author: Department of English Language and Literature, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran; Email: M_nushi@sbu.ac.ir

1. Introduction

With a profound impact on how language evaluation is conceptualized, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT), over the last few decades, has promoted the dialectic unity of assessment and instruction as a benchmark for the sustainability of instruction in the field of ELT (Karimi & Shafiee, 2014; Lantolf, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2010). This dialectic unity displays assessment and instruction as two unified phases of the learning process (Lantolf, 2009). Complying with this viewpoint, improving language learning necessitates redefining assessors' and teachers' capabilities for performing classroom evaluations beyond the restrictions of traditional psychometric concerns and the drawbacks of standardized exams (Inbar-Lourie, 2008). Therefore, the thread of inquiry into assessment as an integral aspect of education and social practice has attained significant popularity, owing to social constructivist viewpoints and poststructuralist transgressive dilemmas that elucidate the boundary-creating consequences of language practices (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; McNamara, 2012). These epistemological innovations in the social sciences pave the way for laying more emphasis on the importance of involving all ELT stakeholders in assessment and instruction, particularly teachers (McNamara, 2001; Yan & Fan, 2021). Subsequently, teachers are motivated to be involved in critical reflection about classroom-based assessment to increase their understanding of classroom performance, score interpretation, progress, value-laden constructs, validity issues, and the political and social nature of assessment (McNamara, 2012). To that end, as Shohamy (2005) asserts, teacher training programs should prioritize teachers' engagement to assessment theory and practice, as well as the enduring effects of assessment. This requires training and educating teachers to be proactive decision-makers who are "responsible and involved leaders in their assessment practices by obtaining training and knowledge in assessment" (Shohamy, 2005, p. 107).

Dynamic assessment (DA) constitutes a valuable venue for language teachers to promote the dialectical praxis and awareness discussed previously. DA, an interactive assessment approach, is an ongoing process from entry to exit of the second language(L2) program that gives a great deal of attention to students' learning (Poehner, 2007; Rahimi et al., 2015). Ebadi et al. (2018) explains that "in DA, a two-way interactive relationship is developed between the teacher and the learner whereby both parties could initiate questions" (p. 3). The DA is an "instantaneous and cyclical: Assessment-decision-instruction-assessment- decision-instruction" (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 28). Lantolf and Poehner (2008) argue

that in DA, "assessment and instruction are a single activity" (p. 273) in which intervention is delivered simultaneously to identify and promote learner progress.

It is critical to recognize that discovering teachers' cognition can shed light on the mental processes which affect their classroom behaviors (Bliem & Davinroy, 1997). Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) believe that teachers' beliefs influence their teaching and that comprehending and modifying teachers' beliefs can contribute to the promotion of systematic change in educational systems. Likewise, teachers' perceptions of assessment are critical, as they impact classroom instruction and assessment. In the educational system of Iran, teachers and experts who have undergone L2 education may verify that there is very little, if any, attention given to the perceptions of DA by instructors and teachers (Mohammadi et al., 2020; Nazari, 2017). Therefore, there is a paucity of research in this thread of inquiry that constitutes a major void in the literature. In an attempt to address this gap, the current study investigates Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about DA and also to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between university and language institute teachers' attitudes with regard to DA.

Research Questions

The research questions put forward by this study are as follows.

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about DA in their classrooms?
2. Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes working in institutes with teachers working in universities regarding DA?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Dynamic Assessment

In the spirit of increasing the popularity of DA in applied linguistics, many research initiatives have been conducted to investigate its applications in L2 instructional contexts. Luria (1961) introduced the notion of DA to Western educators and researchers. Luria discussed DA within the broader context of Vygotsky's program of defectology. DA procedures can be characterized as those in which assessment is conducted in conjunction with an instructional intervention (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002).

2.1.1. Teachers' Cognition and Assessment

Over thirty years ago, Bandura (1986) argued that teachers' individual beliefs influence their crucial classroom decisions. Following that, an increasing number of teacher research projects aimed to examine teachers' beliefs and their impact on their classroom (Wilson, 1990). As Khader (2012) explains, the literature on teacher beliefs provides sufficient evidence that teachers' beliefs significantly impact classroom practices. Examining the relationship between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, Pajares (1992) demonstrated a strong relationship among teachers' beliefs, decisions, teaching plans, and classroom practices. He continues by stating that pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs are critical in explaining their knowledge and teaching behavior when joining the teaching profession. According to him, the strongest predictors of teaching behavior are these beliefs.

In the same research strand, Rahim et al. (2009) conducted a study entitled classroom assessment: juxtaposition teachers' beliefs with classroom practice. He emphasizes that teachers' beliefs have an effect on their decision-making and also on their classroom practice. Although the teachers held similar beliefs on assessment objectives, the interview and observations revealed that they used quite varied assessment techniques. In the same vein, Brown et al. (2019) investigated teachers' perception of the nature and aim of assessment. For the purpose of this study, secondary data analyses were used in which eight previously published models of teacher conceptions of assessment were systematically compared across 11 available data sets. The purpose of this study was to determine a globally homogeneous construct of teacher conceptions of assessment. The results revealed that there is indeed no single global model, and more importantly, culture, context, and local factors are the considerations that shape teacher conceptions of assessment.

The extant literature on teachers' beliefs of DA in the Iranian context is not particularly rich and comprehensive. The only studies in this line of inquiry are Es-hagi Sardrood (2011), Karimi and Shafiee (2014), and Mohammadi et al. (2020). Es-hagi Sardrood (2011) used a structured interview and a questionnaire to examine 51 Iranian EFL language schools, institutes, and universities teachers' perceptions of DA. The findings indicated that the majority of teachers held a negative attitude toward DA and believed that the implementation of DA in the Iranian context is difficult. Teachers also raised objections about the viability of DA in Iranian EFL classrooms owing to lack of DA training and guidelines, the lack of infrastructures

and practical tools, the time-constrained essence of DA, the highly crowded classes, the commonality of static examinations, and a high reliance on the teachers' teaching and assessment abilities. In a similar line of research, Karimi and Shafiee (2014) explored the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward DA. Their research reported an investigation into the thematic analysis of Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives of DA, taking into account their educational background and teaching experience. The researchers recruited 42 Iranian English as foreign language teachers. Twenty-two teachers held bachelor's degrees and twenty teachers held master's degrees in ELT-related fields, with varying service levels. To obtain information about teachers' attitudes of DA, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The examination of the audiotaped interviews demonstrated substantial differences in individuals' judgments of DA trends and obsessions. The key themes addressed in the content analysis of data were teachers' conceptions of DA as a classroom practice, their own commitment to implementing DA, the importance of learners in such assessments, and their understandings of contextual restrictions influencing DA implementation. In a more recent date, Mohammadi et al. (2020) carried out a research to inquire into the attitudes of Iranian TEFL teachers regarding the implementation and significance of DA. They employed 25 teachers for the study by purposive sampling. According to the content analysis of the semi-structured interviews, Iranian teachers had a favorable attitude toward the use of DA in their classes. In addition, it was shown that teachers were unable to implement DA due to the variables such as educational system constraints, financial concerns, time constraints, and teachers' lack of literacy.

With respect to the prominent importance of context in the instruction-assessment process, research on ELT teachers' views about DA provides insight on the factors that contribute to the assessment implementation in any educational setting. For instance, Troudi et al. (2009) carried out an investigation to determine EFL teachers' perspectives on language assessment and their personal roles in the incorporation of L2 assessment in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. The results demonstrated that EFL teachers' conceptualizations of assessment, and their personal involvement in assessment, are influenced by their field knowledge, contextual milieu, and employment regulations. As a result, it is said that top-down management methods to assessment distort teachers' roles in implementing classroom assessment. To this end, it can be argued that context is of paramount significance when it comes to the implementation of classroom assessment

procedure, and that context may assist in distinguishing and defining teachers' perceptions of assessment in different contexts.

The literature reviewed above shows that the usefulness of DA empowers EFL teachers whose conceptualizations and philosophies are informed by societal and institutional restrictions, as well as their own interpersonal values and beliefs. Therefore, investigating the underlying assumptions and beliefs of EFL teachers in a variety of contexts can lay the foundation for increasing their assessment literacy (Inbar-Lourie, 2008). To this end, the current study was an attempt to investigate the Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about DA, and also to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between university and language institute teachers' attitudes with regard to DA.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study included 40 Iranian EFL teachers (25 female and 15 male). The teachers were MA graduates and PhD students and English-major graduates who worked in two educational settings (i.e., universities and language institutes) in Tehran and Kermanshah. The teachers were selected via purposive and snowball sampling procedures. They were all of Persian background and had a minimum of three years of experience teaching various ELT related courses. In addition, 18 of the teachers were from the university context and 22 were from the language institute context. The university teachers taught BA, MA, and PhD courses in TEFL, English language literature, translation studies, and linguistics. On the other hand, teachers at the language institutes taught advanced and pre-advanced levels at their corresponding language institutes.

3.1.1. Data Collection, Design, and Procedure

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, the researchers chose Email interview as the primary data collection method since it enables participants to reflect on their comments and experiences while also allowing them to participate at their convenience (James, 2016). Furthermore, by conducting the interview by Email, we may save time scheduling appointments, traveling, and transcribing the data. Similarly, the interviewee may feel at ease disclosing any facts they wish (Miller & Cannell, 1997). As Cohen et al. (2011) endorsed, "the very factor that

interviews are not face-to-face may strengthen their reliability, as the interviewee might disclose information that may not be so readily forthcoming in a face-to-face, more intimate situation" (p. 206). The Email interview questions (see Appendix) were sent to 60 teachers through Email, LinkedIn, and telegram groups. Out of 60 Emails that researchers sent out, 40 teachers replied. The Email interview gathered information about teachers' attitudes toward DA, their professional experiences, and their considerations about contextual issues with regard to the use of DA in classes. To validate the Email interview questions, five ELT assessment experts were asked to review and substantiate whether the questions effectively addressed the research topic, were unambiguous, and identified any other potential difficulties. Some of the questions were modified in response to experts' comments to ensure they were appropriate for the study's objectives.

3.1.1.1. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, responses to the Email interview questions were coded and classified into three primary themes via a systematic approach that included open, axial, and selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Following that, the total frequency of the emerged themes was calculated. The reliability of the frequencies was determined by having a qualified third party (with a PhD degree in TEFL) rate 50% of the data. The percentage agreement amongst raters ranged from 0.80 to 0.95, indicating a high level of reliability across all themes and subthemes.

4. Results

4.1. Research Question 1

1) What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about DA in their classrooms?

The content analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of three major themes namely:

1. EFL teachers' classroom assessment practices
2. EFL teacher's attitudes toward DA
3. Impediments to applying DA principles in EFL classes

The frequency of the themes and sub-themes which emerged from them is displayed in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1*Theme 1: EFL Teachers' Classroom Assessment Practices*

| Subthemes | University teachers (%) | Institute teachers (%) |
|--|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. I evaluate students' progress and improvement using oral, pictorial, midterm, and final exams. | 50 | 50 |
| 2. I assess my students through interviews, written projects, presentations, reading exercises, and worksheets. | 25 | 75 |
| 3. Current assessment procedures do not provide sufficient information about students' real development and ability. | 66.6 | 33.3 |
| 4. Current assessment systems prevent students from reaching their full potential. | 33.3 | 66.6 |
| 5. Exams create a stressful environment that stops students from learning, and students' attention is therefore focused on grades and results. | 50 | 50 |
| 6. The majority of the examinations developed by the institutes are not standardized | 0 | 100 |

Table 2*Theme 2: EFL Teachers' Attitudes Toward DA*

| Subthemes | University teachers (%) | Institute teachers (%) |
|--|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. DA allows me to intervene during the assessment process since students may need some pre-arranged level(s) of mediation to obtain the correct answer. | 40 | 60 |
| 2. DA enables us to conduct innovative investigations into students' progress and development. | 40 | 60 |
| 3. DA is a profound form of teaching, learning, and assessment at the same time. | 50 | 50 |
| 4. DA fits my ideals, knowledge, and experience better. | 40 | 60 |
| 5. DA creates a more appealing atmosphere than rigid, static assessment, relieving students of tension and stress. | 33.3 | 66.6 |
| 6. The combination of DA and static assessment is appropriate. | 100 | 0 |
| 7. By implementing DA, students will receive adequate peer and teacher feedback on their performance. | 50 | 50 |
| 8. DA can increase learners' motivation and creativity, which in result facilitates the language learning process. | 75 | 25 |
| 9. DA has the potential to increase teacher-student interaction and is more relevant to real-world circumstances. | 50 | 50 |

Table 3*Theme 3: Impediments to Applying DA Principles in EFL Classes*

| Subthemes | University teachers % | Institute teachers % |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. The teachers' traditional understanding of the term "assessment." | 33.3 | 66.6 |
| 2. The amount of time and effort requires to engage every single | 83.3 | 16.6 |

| Subthemes | University teachers % | Institute teachers % |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|
| student in DA. | | |
| 3. The overcrowded classrooms make it difficult, if not impossible, to consider the learners' individual needs. | 75 | 25 |
| 4. DA needs certain mediation tools that are not available in our classrooms. | 50 | 50 |
| 5. The rigid laws of institutions/universities, which are score-based. | 25 | 75 |
| 6. Students' and teachers' unwillingness to use DA is a significant factor. | 50 | 50 |
| 7. Teachers may be unfamiliar with this type of assessment and should be instructed on how to conduct it. | 55.5 | 44.4 |

As illustrated in the Tables, both university and language institute teachers held a positive attitude about DA and believe that it better reflects their ideals, knowledge, and experience (Table 2, item 4, university teachers: 40%; language institute teachers: 60%). Table 1 demonstrates the teachers' classroom assessment practices, and the findings indicate that 50% of teachers in both contexts use the mid-term, oral, and final exams as their primary instruments for evaluating their students (Table 1, item 1, university teachers: 50%; language institute teachers: 50%). However, language institutes employ a broader range of assessment instruments, including presentations, interviews, reading exercises, written projects, and worksheets (Table 1, item 2, Institute teachers: 75%). This finding can be explained by the fact that teachers in institutes have greater discretion over their methods for instruction and assessment than university teachers do. Besides that, the number of students participating in institute classes is smaller than those attending university classes. As a result, institute teachers may employ a variety of assessment procedures more easily than university teachers. Likewise, the aims of English language teaching in language institutes and universities in Iran are distinct; in institutes, teaching is more communicative and task-oriented. Moreover, teachers in both contexts had negative attitudes concerning their context's current assessment practices and expressed a strong desire for more DA-based assessment (Table 1, items 3, 4, and 5). The following statement from one of the MA holders sheds some light on this matter.

I believe that the most recent procedure (traditional assessment) is mundane and constrained. It prevents students from accomplishing their greatest potential. Exams foster a stressful environment that stops students from learning. Rather than that, they would study only to pass the course. Correspondingly, this environment would

exacerbate students' negative competitiveness, dwindling the importance of learning and placing a premium on scores and results.

A further problem that is visible in the context of institutes is their assessment team's lack of assessment literacy (Table 1, item 6, Institute teachers: 100 %), as evidenced by the following comment from an MA holder in TEFL who has taught English at language institutes for ten years.

The primary issue with our assessment system is that the large proportions of institutes' tests are not standardized. Some of them are more difficult, easier, or simply unrelated to what the students learned. As if the examinations were designed by someone with no prior experience teaching the book.

Regarding Table 2, it is obvious that the majority of teachers in both contexts held a positive attitude regarding DA. They claimed that DA is a profound form of teaching, learning, and assessment (Table 2, item 3, university teachers: 50%; institutes teachers: 50%) that evaluates students' abilities and creates an appealing learning environment (Table 2, item 5, university teachers: 33/3%; institutes teachers: 66/6%) in which students can learn a great deal without feeling stressed. This is demonstrated in the following comment by a TEFL PhD student.

Implementing DA practices and principles can result in dramatic innovation and benefits for both English language teaching and testing practices because it attempts to integrate language testing into language teaching. There are many tangible benefits associated with DA. It attempts to incorporate teaching and assessment. As a result, it takes a more holistic approach to education. Moreover, when assessment becomes more meaningful to students, they will adopt a more positive attitude toward it.

Subsequently, teachers in both contexts (Table 2, item 7, university teachers: 50 %; institute teachers: 50 %) emphasized the role of DA in providing feedback by students and teachers, which creates a situation in which the relationship between testers and testees is no longer that authoritative and serious one because the testers are regarded as learning contributors, not assessor of the learning process. The following statement by one of the assistant professors in the field of TEFL indicates the importance of the role of DA in providing feedback for the students.

The nature of DA is suitable for the continuous measurement of students' abilities. Therefore, even if students do not perform well in one dimension of the assessment, they can make up for it on subsequent occasions. In addition, because

DA is formative, it enables students to receive continuous feedback from their teachers/peers, allowing them to adapt their attempts throughout the semester.

Moreover, university teachers stated (Table 2, item 6: 100 %) that combining DA and static assessment is beneficial because they believe that Iran's assessment procedure (traditional assessment procedure) is still influenced by traditional methods of assessment and scoring and that the system is not prepared to implement DA in classes due to the need for special foundations and infrastructures. Also, Table 2 exhibits that DA has a critical role in enhancing motivation and teacher-student interaction (Item 9, university teachers: 50%; institute teachers: 50%). In this respect, the assessment would be far more representative of real-life situations (Table 2, Item 9, university teachers: 50%; institute teachers: 50%).

Concerning the data in Table 3, some substantial obstacles that can impede DA's implementation in classes have been mentioned. One of these problems is a lack of time and the time-consuming nature of DA, which is evident in the remarks of university teachers (item 2: 83.3%) as compared to institute teachers (item 2: 16.6%). The time concern for university teachers may be connected to the fact that classes in universities are highly crowded, whereas classes in language institutes are much smaller, making implementation of DA much easier. This may explain why most university teachers (Table 3, item 3: 75%) cited extremely crowded classes as an impediment to applying DA. This reality is illustrated by the following comment by a university teacher with a doctorate in linguistics:

In a university setting, time is extremely restricted, and students with varying degrees of language proficiency are learning at the same educational level. As a result, the DA may have a different effect on each student. This issue precludes the adoption of the DA method.

Along with the time constraint, there are additional aspects to consider, such as teachers' lack of knowledge and willingness to implement DA (Table 3, Item 7, university teachers: 55/5%; institute teachers: 44/4%), as well as the various rules and regulations that require teachers to adhere to a score-based system (Table 3, Item 5, university teachers: 25%; institute teachers: 75%), which makes applying DA exceedingly difficult. Teachers were outspoken in their criticism of this score-based system; one interviewee, for instance, acknowledged:

I am unable to believe in this method (traditional assessment) for a variety of reasons. I think that assigning a grade to a student does not accurately reflect their

skills. I have encountered many cases where a student performed admirably throughout the semester but did not obtain the required mark on the final exam. This could be because of the student's mental/social/emotional state at the time, or because the student was unable to review the lessons due to his/her various problems. Additionally, this strategy focuses students' attention on achieving a grade or passing a test rather than learning and comprehending the teaching content (MA holder in TEFL).

However, some other issues hamper DA applications, including resistance on the part of students, teacher who has been taught based on traditional approaches to testing (Table 3, Item 6, university teachers: 50%; institute teachers: 50%) and, last but not least, a lack of adequate infrastructure at universities and institutes (Table 3, Item 4, university teachers: 50%; institute teachers: 50%).

4.2. Research Question 2

2) Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes working in institutes with teachers working in universities regarding DA?

This research question focuses on the similarities and differences in teachers' views toward DA at universities and language institutes. To determine if there is a statistically significant difference between university and language institute teachers' attitudes, the Chi-square test was calculated for each theme and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Results of the Chi-square Tests for Themes 1, 2, 3 and Overall

| Pearson Chi-Square | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|-------|----|-----------------------|
| Theme 1 | 3.000 | 5 | 0.700 |
| Theme 2 | 4.521 | 8 | 0.807 |
| Theme 3 | 4.706 | 6 | 0.582 |
| Overall | 0.000 | 8 | 1.000 |

The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test, as reported in Table 4, demonstrated no significant difference across university and language institute teachers in each of the themes regarding their perceptions of DA. That is, χ^2 (5, N = 28) = 3.000, p = .05 for Theme 1, χ^2 (8, N = 57) = 4.521, p = .05 for Theme 2, and χ^2 (6, N = 34) =

4.706, $p = .05$ for Theme 3. As demonstrated in Table 4, none of these ratios (Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)= 0.700, 0.807, or 0.582) are equal to or less than 0.05. Consequently, there is no significant difference in the attitudes of university and language institute teachers toward DA, and both groups adopted a positive attitude toward it. Moreover, this fact can be deduced from the overall Chi-square test over all three themes, which revealed (Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)=1.000, which is not statistically significant.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about DA as a contemporary assessment procedure capable of raising students' motivation (Zoghi & Malmeer, 2013) and diminishing their stress levels (Tzuriel, 2001). The study also sought to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between university and language institute teachers' attitudes with regard to DA. To achieve the stated purposes of the study, an exploratory design was applied to address the research questions.

The current study's findings are corroborated by from previous literature on concepts such as DA and teachers' beliefs toward DA. In that regard, the findings of the present study are consistent with those of earlier researches on DA, both theoretically and empirically (Lantolf & Poehner, 2010; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). In the same manner, the findings of the current research corresponded to previous research on teacher cognition and assessment in the related literature (Brown et al., 2019; Karimi & Shafii, 2014; Nazari, 2017).

This study's findings seem to align with those of Matese et al.'s (2002) study, which explored teachers' perceptions about assessment in inquiry-based science. This study illustrated that the new assessment procedures are dependent on teachers' beliefs about the nature and purpose of assessment. It also exemplified how teachers' beliefs and practices are intricately intertwined and that teachers might hold beliefs that conflict with the practices advocated by education reformers.

The findings of this study indicated that university teachers evaluated their students mostly through midterms and final examinations (Saniei, 2012). This could be tied to Iran's top-down educational system (see Gan & Lam, 2020), in which authorities 'on behalf of the people' determine which procedures should be followed

in classrooms (Sadeghi & Jabbarnejad, 2012). Consequently, teachers are discouraged from doing assessments using DA and are compelled to use one-shot assessment procedures. This argument is made concisely by Babaii et al. (2020) in the following comment.

Iranian L2 teachers often experience barriers in executing their preferred assessment practices. This dilemma seems to be mostly a function of the way assessment is understood in this context. That is, assessment is dominantly defined in achievement terms and little systematic attention is paid to formative, and much less dynamic, assessment of the teachers. (p.13)

Subsequently, the teacher's involvement in this system is minimized, and they are spoon-fed with whatever knowledge and theory theorist produces (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), thereby disregarding teachers' sense of plausibility (Prabhu, 1990). In light of the aforementioned issues, teachers' attitudes shift toward examination-based procedures (see Firoozi et al., 2019), in which teachers minimize and ignore the role of DA and remain committed to the rules and regulations enforced on them because "programme teams are finding it challenging to move away from examination based practices, constrained by institutional culture, lengthy regulatory frameworks and lack of training" (Hamilton, 2014, no page number). This exam-oriented system emphasizes that score is really important and that students would place a high premium on the score rather than on learning (Mohammadi et al., 2020).

A score-based system can have a detrimental effect on students' motivation and higher-order thinking and it also put a significant deal of stress on students' personal lives, diminishing their academic interest (AlAmin & Greenwood, 2018). In the long run, this score-based system may contribute to a repetitious educational system in which students seek good grades above all else and at any cost, and students' fear of failing tests may drive them to cheat on examinations (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011). This practice is referred to as *grade inflation* in the academic literature, in which students' grades are inflated irrespective of their academic achievement (Dashti, 2019).

The results of this study showed that teachers in language institutes lack assessment literacy potentially due to a lack of training in this area. Language institutes in Iran attempt to train teachers for teaching in their own institutes, so they concentrate on practical techniques necessary for teaching a special book series

tailored to the institutes' needs (Bax, 1997), and DA and assessment procedures may not be included in the institutes' needs and practical techniques. Due to language institute directors' lack of support, English teachers may be discouraged from enrolling in long-term assessment training courses or workshops. In Iran, institute teachers are still evaluated on the basis of their teaching practices and assessment procedure receive inadequate attention (Babaii & Asadnia, 2019). Additionally, language institutes do not prioritize professional development in terms of assessment training. A further possible avenue for the lack of attention and training on assessment, particularly DA in language institutes, is that most authors and publishers of textbooks provide unit tests, ready-made quizzes, and even item banks, which eliminates the need for teachers to construct their own assessment procedures (Stiggins, 1993), making assessment training unnecessary.

Additionally, the findings of the study indicated that teachers held a positive attitude toward DA in the sense that they believe it is a combination of assessment and teaching that can benefit students at various proficiency levels (Brookhart et al., 2010). Despite their positive attitudes toward DA, they acknowledged that some constraints in their setting prevent them from incorporating DA principles in EFL classes. A significant factor was a lack of time for adopting DA in classrooms. This finding is in lockstep with the findings of Karimi and Shafiee (2014), Nazari (2017), and Mohammadi et al. (2020). The following excerpt from one of participant of this study, who was a university assistant professor, sheds more light on this point.

Moreover, implementing DA in classes requires time and the constant attention of teachers. We are strained for time to complete the syllabus in the allotted two months time. This leaves me with insufficient time to evaluate 35-40 learners individually. The purpose of DA is to improve learners' competencies and performances. Therefore, when the time of the class is inadequate for the evaluation of learners' classroom performance, I investigate their shortcomings through paper and pencil tests.

The second reason for the absence of DA implementation in classrooms has been that teachers lack sufficient knowledge and training regarding DA. This finding was indeed substantiated in various contexts (e.g., Vogt & Tsagari, 2014), however, it contradicts from Lam's study (2019), in which participants indicated a greater prominence of professional training in language assessment in Hong Kong. This discrepancy might be supported by the argument that teachers in Hong Kong are

required to get professional training in order to pass the Language Proficiency Assessment for teachers and receive corresponding qualifications to commence their teaching journey (Coniam & Falvey, 2013) and that language assessment training is commonly accessible to pre-service teachers in this territory (Lam, 2015). In Iran, English teachers at universities and language institutes are not required to obtain such a professional certificate, which probably correlates to a dearth of training in this context. Besides, numerous academics in the field have emphasized the necessity of teacher training courses for professional development in assessment (Ahangari & Alizadeh, 2015). The training and teacher development courses for teachers are extremely critical in the sense that, as Guskey (2000, p. 4) argues, "One constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development."

To this aim, it is highly recommended that teachers receive training through various TTC and teacher development courses, with these courses focusing on both the theoretical and practical components of DA in terms of classroom experience (Shafaghi & Estaji, 2020). It is plausible to claim that teachers can modify their assessment beliefs and practices through participation in professional development programs (Brookhart et al., 2010). It would be highly beneficial if students were also trained and encouraged to adapt themselves in EFL classrooms that use DA for assessing students. It is more likely that students who have received more instruction and training on DA will feel more at ease when using DA principles for assessment purposes.

Some other factors, such as teachers' and students' reluctance to use DA, the traditional Iranian system, which prevents teachers from using DA, and a lack of infrastructure, all contributed to the difficulty of implementing DA in classes (Eshaghi-Sadrood, 2011; Hessels-Schlatter & Hessels, 2009). Previous research has also reported compatible findings with those of this study regarding the teachers' perceptions about impediments to applying DA in EFL classes. The study by Mohammadi et al. (2020) upheld the finding that instructors were unable to integrate DA due to issues such as educational system constraints, financial constraints, time restraints, and a lack of literacy on the side of teachers. The variables stated above were mostly identified as barriers to implementing DA in EFL classes in this study.

In light of the aforementioned concerns about implementing DA in classes, it is strongly recommended that language institutes and universities provide adequate

infrastructure and effective tools for teachers to use DA effectively in their context. There also seems to be much potential for teachers to maintain reflective journals for assessment procedures in classrooms, just as they do for their teaching practice. Hence, reflection on language assessment contexts can be a promising concern of study for teachers seeking to increase their language assessment literacy (Babaii & Asadnia, 2019), of which DA is a component. Trying to reflect on critical situations may be "a rich source of teacher-generated information" since teachers "reflect on how they got where they are today, how they conduct practice, the thinking and problem-solving they employ during their practice, and their underlying assumptions, values and beliefs that have ruled their past and current practices" (Farrell, 2014, p. 108).

Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to keep reflective journals and conduct action research and observation, which are commonly used resources for promoting teachers' reflective practices (Burhan-Horasanl & Ortaçtepe, 2016), in order to delve more deeply into the insights and potential benefits of various assessment procedures in the classroom and bridge the gap between theory and practice and also assist them in overcoming their language assessment issues. In addition, the profile of language assessment, of which DA is a component, in Iran should be raised, and in response to this concern, language institutes and universities offering teacher education programs, as well as program administrators, should collaborate to develop compulsory language assessment touchstones for pre-service teachers as one type of exit prerequisite via continuous assessment (Lam, 2015). Nevertheless, the very first move toward accomplishing that objective is for university-based instructors and teacher trainers at language institutes to obtain professional development on how to promulgate up-to-date assessment practices, theories and principles to their students through the use of university-sponsored conferences, seminars, on-the-job training workshops, and text-based materials.

Lastly, the study's findings and recommendations regarding the provision of DA and the role of testing in Iranian educational settings should be interpreted cautiously. The issue of DA and testing should not be considered as all or nothing; rather, they should represent a continuum to establish a more equitable, inclusive and balanced assessment system. There are many contextual factors that determine the utilization of various educational and assessment procedures in Iran. Iran's educational context has always included testing, and thus tests cannot be ignored because "in a country where connections are imperative in doing anything, it is

difficult to find other fairer ways than the college entrance exams" (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011, p.41). To this aim, it is proposed that different assessment procedures, particularly formative and DA-oriented assessments, be used in combination with testing in Iran.

6. Conclusion

The findings from the current study reported that the evaluation system currently exercised in Iran's language institutes and universities suffers from a number of drawbacks. In consideration of that point, it is critical to shift the focus of teachers' assessment away from psychometric and score-based mainstream assessment systems and toward a multi-dimensional DA-oriented evaluation system. Therefore, the findings of this study brought light to the fact that assessment competence and capacity are significant determinants of teachers' assessment practices (Cheng et al., 2004), and that formal teacher training courses are extremely crucial for encouraging both teachers and learners to utilize novel assessment procedures such as DA.

The findings of this study cater for implications for teachers to voice their concerns about Iran's assessment system. This study may also be of potential help in noticing teachers' voices and proposing a series of amendments to Iran's assessment system, as well as in determining how teachers should evaluate their students in EFL classrooms. Whereas the results of the current study have implications for teacher development programs to emphasize DA principles in EFL classes, the generalizability of findings requires caution owing to the study's restrictions. While Email interviews illuminate the interviewee's underlying attitude, they do not account for the actual application of stated beliefs.

Therefore, enhancing the reliability of the results requires additional research, including observation of assessment sessions and lessons, to inquire into the teachers' perceptions of DA. Moreover, ethnographic research and longitudinal case studies are recommended in order to provide more insight into the teachers' perceptions of DA. Lastly, the replication of data-driven studies, such as the current study, in various settings can contribute to the validation of the grounded theory upon which this study is founded.

References

- Ahangari, S., & Alizadeh, K. (2015). The reasoning towards using dynamic assessment in EFL (English as a foreign language) educational system in Iran. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 5(2), 534–540.
- AlAmin, M., & Greenwood, J. (2018). The examination system in Bangladesh and its impact: On curriculum, students, teachers and society. *Language Testing in Asia*, 8(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-018-0060-9>
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice Hall. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-018-0060-9>
- Bax, S. (1997). Roles for a teacher educator in context sensitive teacher education. *ELT Journal*, 51(3), 232–241. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/51.3.232>
- Bachman, L., & Palmer, A. (2010). *Language assessment in practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Babaii, E., & Asadnia, F. (2019). A long walk to language assessment literacy: EFL teachers' reflection on language assessment research and practice. *Reflective Practice*, 20(6), 745–760. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2019.1688779>
- Babaii, E., Molana, K., & Nazari, M. (2020). Contributions of assessment-related critical incidents to language teacher identity development. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 15(5), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2020.1824234>
- Bliem, C. L., & Davinroy, K. H. (1997). *Teachers' beliefs about assessment and instruction in literacy. CSE technical report 421*. University of California.
- Borg, S., & Al-Busaidi, S. (2012). Teachers' beliefs and practices regarding learner autonomy. *ELT Journal*, 66(3), 283–292. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr065>
- Brown, G. T. L., Gebriel, A., & Michaelides, M. P. (2019). Teachers' conceptions of assessment: A global phenomenon or a global localism. *Frontiers in Education*, 4, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00016>
- Brookhart, S. M., Moss, C. M., & Long, B. A. (2010). Teacher enquiry into formative assessment practices in remedial reading classrooms. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 17(1), 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695940903565545>

- Burhan-Horasanlı, E., & Ortaçtepe, D. (2016). Reflective practice-oriented online discussions: A study on EFL teachers' reflection-on, in and for-action. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 59, 372–382. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.07.002>
- Carney, J. J., & Cioffi, G. (1992). The dynamic assessment of reading abilities. *International Journal of Disability Development and Education*, 39(2), 107–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0156655920390203>
- Cheng, L. Rogers, T. & Hu, H. (2004). ESL/EFL instructors' classroom assessment practices: Purposes, methods, and procedures. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 360–389. <https://doi.org/10.1191%2F0265532204lt288oa>
- Cohen, L., Manion, D., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in Education* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Coniam, D., & Falvey, P. (2013). Ten years on: The Hong Kong language proficiency assessment for teachers of English (LPATE). *Language Testing*, 30(1), 147–155. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0265532212459485>
- Davison, C. (2004). The contradictory culture of teacher-based assessment: ESL teacher assessment practice in Australia and Hong Kong secondary schools. *Language Testing*, 21(3), 305–334. <https://doi.org/10.1191%2F0265532204lt286oa>
- Dashti, S. M. (2019). *EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about classroom assessment: A multiple case study in the context of Kuwait* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. York university.
- Ebadi, S., Vakilifard, A., & Bahramlou, K. (2018). Learning Persian vocabulary through reading: The effects of noticing and computerized dynamic assessment. *Cogent Education*, 5(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1507176>
- Es-hagi Sardrood, S. J. (2011). Dynamic assessment in Iranian EFL classrooms: A post-method enquiry. *Journal of English Language Pedagogy and Practice*, 4(2), 47–63.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2014). *Reflective practice in ESL teacher development groups: From practices to principles*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Firoozi, T., Razavipour, K., & Ahmadi, A. (2019). The language assessment literacy needs of Iranian EFL teachers with a focus on reformed assessment policies. *Language Testing in Asia*, 9(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-019-0078-7>

- Gan, L., & Lam, R. (2020). Understanding university English instructors' assessment training needs in the Chinese context. *Language Testing in Asia*, 10(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-020-00113-2>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Transaction.
- Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Corwin Press.
- Hamilton, S. (2014). Are traditional assessment methods appropriate in contemporary higher education? https://issuu.com/bpp_publishing/docs/bpps-a-6830-digital-are-traditional
- Hessels-Schlatter, C., & Hessels, M. G. (2009). Clarifying some issues in dynamic assessment: Comments on Karpov and Tzuriel. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology*, 8(3), 246–251. <http://doi.10.1891/1945-8959.8.3.246>
- Inbar-Lourie, O. (2008). Constructing a language assessment knowledge base: A focus on language assessment courses. *Language Testing*, 25(3), 385–402. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0265532208090158>
- James, N. (2016). Using email interviews in qualitative educational research: Creating space to think and time to talk. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(2), 150–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2015.1017848>
- Karimi, M. N., & Shafiee, Z. (2014). Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of dynamic assessment: Exploring the role of education and length of service. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(8), 143–162. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n8.10>
- Kirkpatrick, R., & Zang, Y. (2011). The negative influences of exam-oriented education on Chinese high school students: Backwash from classroom to child. *Language Testing in Asia*, 1(3), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2229-0443-1-3-36>
- Khader, F. R. (2012). Teachers' pedagogical beliefs and actual classroom practices in social studies instruction. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 2(1), 73–92.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). Critical language pedagogy: A post-method perspective on English language teaching. *World Englishes*, 22(4), 539–550.
- Lam, R. (2015). Language assessment training in Hong Kong: Implications for

- language assessment literacy. *Language Testing*, 32(2), 169–197. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0265532214554321>
- Lam, R. (2019). Teacher assessment literacy: Surveying knowledge, conceptions and practices of classroom-based writing assessment in Hong Kong. *System*, 81, 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.01.006>
- Lantolf, J. P. (2009). Dynamic assessment: The dialectic integration of instruction and assessment, plenary speeches, *Language Teaching*, 42(3), 355–368. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0261444808005569>
- Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2008). Dynamic assessment. In E. Shohamy & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education: Language testing and assessment* (pp. 273–284). Springer.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2010). Vygotsky's teaching- assessment dialectic and L2 education: The case for dynamic assessment. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 17(4), 312–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749030903338509>
- Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2010). Dynamic assessment in the classroom: Vygostkian praxis for second language development. *Language Teaching Research*, 15(1), 11–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1362168810383328>
- Luria, A. R. (1961). Study of the abnormal child. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 31(1), 1–16. <https://doi.apa.org/doi/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1961.tb02104.x>
- McNamara, T. (2001). Language assessment as social practice: Challenges for research. *Language Testing*, 18(4), 333–349. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026553220101800402>
- McNamara, T. (2012). Poststructuralism and its challenges for applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 33(5), 473–482. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/ams055>
- Matese, G., Griesdorn, J., & Edelson, D.C. (2002). *Teacher belief about assessment in inquiry- based science: Research to inform professional development*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association Conference.
- Miller, P. V., & Cannell, C. F. (1997). Interviewing for social research. In J. P. Keeves (Ed.), *Educational research, methodology and measurement* (2nd ed.) (pp. 361–370). Elsevier Science.

- Mohammadi, S., Babaii, E., Hashemi, M. (2020). Examining Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the importance and application of dynamic assessment. *Foreign Language Research Journal*, 9(4), 1305–1338. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jflr.2019.264775.544>
- Nazari, A. (2017). Dynamic assessment in higher education English language classes: A lecturer perspective. *The Journal of Language Learning and Teaching*, 7(1), 100–118. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3404757>
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307–332. <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F00346543062003307>
- Poehner, M. E. (2005). *Dynamic assessment of oral proficiency among advanced L2 learners of French* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Pennsylvania.
- Poehner, M. E. (2007). Beyond the test: L2 dynamic assessment and the transcendence of mediated learning. *Modern Language Journal*, 91(3), 323–340. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00583.x>
- Prabhu, N. S. (1990). There is no best method—Why? *TESOL Quarterly*, 24(2), 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586897>
- Rahim, S. S. A., Venville, G., & Chapman, A. (2009). *Classroom assessment: Juxtaposing teachers' beliefs with classroom practices*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education: International Education Research Conference. <http://aare.edu.au/09pap/abd091051.pdf>
- Rahimi, M., Kushki, A., & Nassaji, H. (2015). Diagnostic and developmental potentials of dynamic assessment for L2 writing. *Language and Sociocultural Theory*, 2(2), 185–208. <https://doi.org/10.1558/lst.v2i2.25956>
- Sadeghi, K., & Jabbarnejad, L. (2012). An evaluation of EFL program objectives at tertiary level in Iran. *Asean Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AJTLHE)*, 4(2), 1–16.
- Saniei, A. (2012). Dynamic assessment: A call for change in assessment. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 59(4), 4–19.
- Shafaghi, M., & Estaji, M. (2020). Teacher evaluation training and its effect on EFL teacher evaluators' perceptions and practices. *MEXTOL Journal*, 44(4), 1–14.
- Shohamy, E. (2005). The power of tests over teachers: The power of teachers over

- tests. In Tedick, D. J. (Ed.), *Second language teacher education: International perspectives* (pp.101-111). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sternberg, R. J. & Grigorenko. E. L. (2002). *Dynamic testing. The nature and measurement of learning potential*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stiggins, R. J. (1993). Teacher training in assessment: Overcoming the neglect. *Teacher Training in Measurement and Assessment Skills*, 28–40. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/burosteachertraining/4/>
- Troudi, S., Coombe, C., & Al-Hamli, M. (2009). EFL teachers' views of English language assessment in higher education in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(3), 546–555. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00252.x>
- Tzuriel, D. (2001). Dynamic assessment of young children. In D. Tzuriel (Ed), *Dynamic assessment of young children* (pp. 63–75). Springer.
- Vogt, K., & Tsagari, D. (2014). Assessment literacy of foreign language teachers: Findings of a European study. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 11(4), 374–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2014.960046>
- Wilson, S. M. (1990). The secret garden of teacher education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 72(3), 204–209.
- Yan, X., & Fan, J. (2021). Am I qualified to be a language tester? Understanding the development of language assessment literacy across three stakeholder groups. *Language Testing*, 38(2), 219–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532220929924>
- Zoghi, M., & Malmeer, E. (2013). The effect of dynamic assessment on EFL learners' intrinsic motivation, *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4(3), 584–591.

Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Bio- demographic description of teachers and lecturers:

Age:

Gender:

Years of teaching experience:

The level you are teaching:

The context of teaching:

2. Could you please tell me about the assessment tools (for achievement and attainment) you use to assess the English language skills of your students? Would you please give me some examples? Why do you use these tools?

3. What is your opinion about the current assessment practices in your institute/university? If there were no institutional/university constraints, how would you assess your students' English language skills (in terms of their achievement and attainment)? Why?

4. Do you ever intervene during the process of the assessment (achievement and attainment) of your students? If yes, how and why and what is the outcome? If not, why not?

5. What do you think of the use of dynamic assessment of the English language skills of your students? Why? (Probes: such as peer- assessment, self- assessment, portfolios, presentations, group projects).

6. What do you think makes dynamic assessment different from other assessment approaches (e.g., static assessment)?

7. What do you think are the main factors facilitating or inhibiting the implementation/application of dynamic assessment approaches in your teaching context?

8. Do you think dynamic assessment is challenging in your teaching context(s)? Why/why not?

9. As far as assessing the achievement and attainment of your students are concerned, which assessment(s) (dynamic, static or both) is/are more in line with your values, knowledge and experience? Why?

10. Do you have anything else to say about dynamic assessment?

Thank you so much for your cooperation.

About the Authors

Ali Momeni holds an MA in TEFL from Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, Iran. His research interests lie in the interface of testing and assessment, L2 teacher education, computer-assisted language testing, computer-assisted language learning, and educational technology.

Musa Nushi is an assistant professor in TEFL at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, Iran. His research interests focus on the interface of instruction and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, with particular emphasis on the role of technology and corrective feedback.