



EFL Teachers' Use of Classroom-Based Assessment Strategies: Assessment Purposes and Practices

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Abstract

Classroom-Based Assessment plays a fundamental role in any standards-based system of education. Unlike large-scale assessments which focus on measurement, classroom-based assessment, as the foundation for all other types of assessments, aims learning. Despite this prominence, different aspects of it have not received the due attention specifically in EFL context of Iran. To this end, this descriptive survey study sought to examine the purposes, strategies, and procedures lied behind Iranian EFL teachers' use of classroom assessment. In this study, the data were collected by involving 187 Iranian EFL teachers who completed a questionnaire (adopted from Cheng, Roger, & Hu, 2004). The results revealed that Iranian EFL teachers used assessment with mainly student-centered purposes. In assessing different skills, the teachers' use of student-administered strategies was more prominent. Finally, varying patterns were reported in their assessment procedures. They also devoted more than 20% of their class time to assessment. Such findings would raise the teachers' awareness regarding their classroom-based assessment practices as they compare teachers' assessment strategies and practices across various educational setting.

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1 Introduction

No one can deny the role assessment plays in any language learning situation. A teacher with rudimentary knowledge in language assessment is believed to be able to plan, conduct, and perform fair tests thereby making informed decisions about his/her students' language knowledge (Inbar-Lourie, 2013). This knowledge is constructed by gaining understanding of the principles of language assessment, the impact of social and cultural contexts, and perceptions of teaching and assessment (Xu, 2015). The same is true for the practice of assessment as an integral part of the class known as Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA), which has gained an unprecedented place in recent years. In

this form of alternative assessment, ongoing assessment is done to gather data and evaluate the learners' performance of tasks instead of relying on final evaluations at the end of the learning sessions (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

Classroom-based assessment focuses on "all those activities undertaken by teachers and or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 7). Of all social interactions contributing to learning and development, feedback is thought to be a fundamental construct in this type of assessment (Shepard, 2019). Without feedback, either emanating from self-reflection or from others, no learning occurs (National Research Council, 2012). The point of focus in CBA, which takes place in the course of learning, is the students' achievement or progress on a "lesson-sized learning target" thereby providing the teacher and learner with precise feedback and allowing the learners make small-step adjustments to the learning point (Brookhart, 2018, p. 36). Thereby the primal purpose of CBA is to provide teachers with accurate information to make right decisions in their moment-by-moment teaching. Airsian (1991) believes that CBA "occupies more of a teacher's time and arguably has a greater impact on instruction and pupil learning than do the formal measurement procedures" (p. 15). The reason for its effectiveness, in comparison with more formal standardized assessment, may be the immediate feedback that the teachers receive regarding their students' achievement which can help them diagnose their understanding (Hurley & Tinajero, 2001).

Unlike traditional tests, tasks and activities used for CBA are designed and administered by classroom teachers themselves with no attempt for their standardization as they are considered to be part of the ongoing flow of the classroom (Green, 2018). Likewise, formative strategies, used to elicit and respond to student thinking, are usually informal and are used in real-life problem-solving activities conducted in the classrooms rather than being conducted in test like formats. Since CBA focuses on providing direct help to the learning process at hand rather than measuring outcomes, it is mostly linked to the instructional activities and relevant research on learning (Shepard, 2019). Therefore, tests of this kind do not follow a rigid plan as the teacher makes the required adjustments when necessary.

In brief, "formative assessment is carried out during the instructional process for the purpose of adapting instruction to improve learning" (Penuel & Shepard, 2016, p. 788). Likewise, it can be considered as a set of practices that are aligned with practices intended to heighten deep learning and participation in intended discourse practices (Shepard, 2019). Crucial to its success is the interaction between the teacher and learner and the teacher's understanding and interpretation of the learner's level of performance (Stobart & Eggen, 2012). This assessment also assists teachers in finding the weaknesses and strengths in their teaching practices and encourages them to search for ways to resolve the shortcomings (Shepard, 1995).

A number of studies has been conducted to investigate the CBA strategies used by English language teachers and the factors which affect them in ESL/EFL settings (Cheng, Roger, & Hu, 2004; Rogers, 1991; Wilson, 1998; 2000). Previous research has indicated that the context of instruction, level of educational background, and familiarity with assessment and evaluation play a major role in the assessment practices used (Cheng et al., 2004; Cheng, Roger, & Wang, 2008; Cheng & Wang, 2007; Cizek, Fitzgerald, & Rachor, 1996). The present study was to bridge this gap by examining the EFL teachers' use of CBA strategies.

2 Literature review

Classroom-based assessment should be considered as the foundation for all types of assessments since CBA is the assessment that is most proximal to learning and is closest to the effective learning decisions that both teachers and students make (Brookhart, 2018). CBA strategies consist of clear sharing of learning goals and criteria for deciding on the high-quality work, inquiring, and other classroom rituals that help make the underlying thinking visible, integrating explicit and informal feedback with the aim of hearing other learners' viewpoints in the class, and conducting self and

peer assessment. These strategies are crucial for providing information to teachers and changing the direction and nature of classroom interactions (Shepard, 2019).

An important aspect of CBA lies in the purposes behind using it. As an early study in this domain, Brindley (1989) asked teachers to rank order the importance they attached to the assessment functions presented in the form of a list. The participants considered the functions of learner class placement and the learners' strength and weakness for planning the course as the first and second important in the list. However, providing information for outside funding parties for the purpose of accountability was found to be the least important function. Rea-Dickens and Gardner (2000) determined various CBA strategies used by teachers in the language classrooms. In particular, they found five major purposes for CBA. These purposes ranged from formative use of assessment to plan and manage teaching, summative use to assess learners' linguistic competence, giving bureaucratic feedback, checking the individual's eligibility to access mainstream curriculum, and finally providing feedback for teaching purposes.

Besides purposes, the context and teachers' level of education were found to have a relationship with CBA strategies. Cheng et al. (2004) in a series of studies analyzed the CBA strategies of ESL/EFL teachers through both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In their study, the CBA practices used by 267 EFL/ESL instructors in China, Hong Kong, and Canada were examined using a comparative survey. They tested the assessment practices of instructors in these settings in three domains of purposes, methods, and procedures of assessment and evaluation. The results of the study highlighted the complex role played by assessment in these settings, and revealed varying patterns of assessment in purposes, methods and procedures. The differences were attributed to the nature of setting, teachers' educational background, and instructional practices expected of teachers and students.

In another study, Cheng and Wang (2007) examined the grading, feedback, and reporting practices of a group of EFL/ESL teachers in Canada, Hong Kong, and China. Using interviews, they studied the teachers' practices in grading and reporting the students' achievement. The interviews specifically focused on the teachers' marking criteria, students' involvement in assessment decisions in class, and procedures in reporting the results. The results showed that despite contextual differences, the teachers mainly used their own marking criteria. They also informed their students of marking criteria beforehand. In terms of grading practices in ESL setting, analytical scoring was used, whereas in EFL settings rubrics and holistic scoring were rather used. In providing feedback, in settings in which practical issues did not cause a hindrance, individualized feedback was used but in large classes or highly-structured settings (Wang, 2017) whole class feedback was preferred. In terms of final reports, the contexts varied greatly.

In another seminal study, Cheng et al. (2008) studied the assessment practices of ESL/EFL instructors through semi-structured interviews. The study specially focused on the instructors' assessment planning, the relative importance they attached to coursework and tests, the assessment methods they employed, the sources of the assessment they used, and the time of strategy use. Based on the results, a relationship was found between the teaching context and the assessment methods used in a way that the context made different demands on the teachers. For instance, the teachers claimed that the standardized tests played a dominant role in EFL context rather than ESL in choosing the assessment methods. In other words, the assessment purposes determined the choice of assessment methods. The purposes behind each assessment method signaled the time required for that method. Overall, the nature of context and purposes of assessment, more than the teachers' views, determined the advantages or disadvantages of each assessment method. In fact, the context of teaching played a more prominent role than the teachers' characteristics (Cheng et al., 2008).

To aid learning, formative assessment should be based on a coherent learning model (Penuel & Shepard, 2016). McNamara (2001), asserting the social dimensions of assessment, believes that research on teachers' classroom assessment practices should be conducted in classrooms to gain a complete picture of the experience of assessment between teachers and students. Xu and Liu (2009), acknowledging the paucity of research in teachers' CBA practices and lack of understanding of

practices used by teachers, contend that classroom assessment practices should be studied in socio-cultural contexts due to the interactive nature of these practices. Likewise, in a case study, Wang (2017) studied the classroom assessment methods used by an experienced university instructor in China using a variety of qualitative methods of classroom observation, discourse analysis, and teacher and student journal keeping. The findings revealed that the teacher used a variety of classroom assessment practices in her class. Besides using some recognized classroom assessment practices, she used a large number of unrecognized practices in her classroom activities. These incidental activities were contingent on the learners' performances in the class. The analyses showed that these practices were useful for the students' progress and their attainment of course objectives.

Popham (2013) concluded that the teachers' approaches to assessment are influenced by their previous education in assessment, values and beliefs about student learning, their assessment knowledge, and the available assessment policies. In addition, teachers' assessment decisions involve an amalgamation of teachers' knowledge, experiences, values, beliefs they hold of instruction, the interaction of these attributes and the context of teaching and learning (McMillan, 2003).

A brief look at the literature on English language teaching reveals that CBA has not received the due attention in comparison with the attention it has received in general education. Unlike extensive definitions and conceptualizations of purposes of teachers' classroom assessment practices, few research studies have been conducted on the teachers' actual practices. Considering the above discussions, the present study specifically attempted to find answers for the following research questions.

(RQ1) What purposes do Iranian teachers have in administering their assessment in EFL classes?

(RQ2) What are the methods Iranian EFL teachers use to assess their students in the class considering the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking?

(RQ3) What procedures do Iranian EFL teachers use to assess their students in their classes?

3 Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of the present study were 187 Iranian EFL teachers with 123 females (65.8%) and 64 males (34.2%). Their age ranged from 20 to above 50 years old; 31 of them (16%) were between 20 to 25, 116 participants (62%) were between 26 to 35 years old, and the rest were above 35. With regard to their educational backgrounds, 138 (73.8%) held MA, 24 of them (12.8%) had a PhD and the rest were bachelors. As for their familiarity with assessment and evaluation, 101 (54%) had completed a course on assessment and evaluation, 44 (23.5%) had attended a course in which assessment and evaluation topics were dealt with, 16 (8.6%) had completed a workshop on assessment and evaluation, and only 26 of them (13.9%) had attended neither a course nor a workshop on assessment.

Regarding their teaching experience, 89 of them (47.6%) had below six years of teaching experience, 43 (23%) had between six to ten years of experience, and 55 of them (29.4%) had more than ten years of teaching experience. The teacher participants had been teaching various courses. To be more specific, 70 of them (38.3%) had taught undergraduate courses, 13 (7.1%) graduate courses, 50 of them (27.3%) had taught both graduate and undergraduate courses, and 50 of them (27.3%) taught neither graduate nor undergraduate courses.

3.2 Instrumentation

The questionnaire used for the present study was adopted from the study by Cheng et al. (2004). This questionnaire consisted of four major parts, illustrating the major constructs of the classroom-based assessment. These include background information of teachers, purposes of assessment and evaluation, methods of assessment and evaluation, as well as procedures of assessment and evaluation. Cheng et al. (2004) believed that they had constructed it based on previous studies on CBA.

As they had piloted it, no piloting was conducted in the present study. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be 0.73. The first section of the questionnaire inquired about the respondents' background information. In the second section, it sought the purposes the participants had behind their CBA practices. In the third section, their methods of assessing language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening were inquired. The last section dealt with the respondents' procedures of assessment including their sources of items, methods of giving feedback to learners, and total amount of time they spent on assessment in their classrooms. The respondents were asked to skip the skills they were not teaching currently. The whole questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

3.3 Data collection procedure

This study was to find out EFL teachers' purposes, methods, and procedures of their classroom assessment. To collect data, an electronic version as well as a hard copy of the questionnaire on CBA was distributed. The questionnaire was adopted from Cheng et al. (2004). The electronic version of the questionnaire, created by Google Forms, was e-mailed to the teacher participants. They were asked to read the instructions and on a voluntary basis fill out the questionnaire. They were asked to just answer based on their current teaching practices and experiences and to skip the parts they were not teaching. The collected questionnaire data were then entered into a Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) file for further analyses. Descriptive analyses were conducted on the data to answer the research questions.

4 Results

4.1 Purposes of assessment

This section elaborates on the purposes for which teachers assess their students. For better categorization, these purposes have been grouped by the 3 constructs of student, instruction, and administration-centered strategies. In student-centered strategies, the primal purpose of assessment is student learning. The instruction-centered ones aim to ameliorate teaching and instruction. The administration-centered strategies are concerned with meeting the formal requirements. Table 1 below summarizes the participants' responses in this regard.

Table 1
Purposes of assessment and evaluation

Purposes	Yes	%	No	%
Student-centered				
1 Obtain information on my students' progress	183	97.9	4	2.1
2 Provide my students feedback as they progress	179	95.7	8	4.3
3 Diagnose strengths and weaknesses in my students	178	95.2	9	1.1
4 Motivate my students to learn	175	93.6	12	6.4
5 Make my students work harder	170	90.9	17	9.1
6 Determine the final grades for my students	145	77.5	42	22.5
7 Formally document growth in learning	134	71.7	53	28.3
8 Prepare my students for standardized tests	116	62.0	71	38.0
Instruction-centered				
9 Plan my instruction	174	93.0	13	7.0
10 Diagnose strengths and weaknesses in my teaching	169	90.4	18	9.6
11 Group my students for instruction purposes in my class	139	74.3	48	25.7
Administration-centered				
12 Provide information to central administration (school, etc.)	150	80.2	37	19.8

13	Provide information to an outside funding agency	35	18.7	152	81.3
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A. Student-centered purposes: As can be seen in Table 1, above 90% of the teachers used assessment in their classes for students' achievement purposes like obtaining information on progress, providing feedback, diagnosing strength and weaknesses, motivating students, and urging them for hard work, all with the aim of enhancing student's learning. The most frequently used strategies in this category is using assessment for obtaining information on the students' progress and providing students with feedback. The three remaining strategies in this category engage with meeting formal requirements like assigning grades or having formal records of the students' progress throughout the course or preparing them for the standardized tests.

B. Instruction-centered purposes: As the results show, over 90% of the teachers use assessment for their own development as a teacher and planning their own teaching. The least frequently used strategy in this category is making groups of students for instructional purposes.

C. Administration-centered purposes: The strategies in this category are concerned with the teachers' assessment of their students to report to outside administrative bodies. This practice may be done as a formal requirement in some contexts. As the results reveal, over 80% of the teachers exercise this. In Iran, this practice is a necessity in many situations like universities or school settings, although in many private language institutes it is not followed. The next strategy is reporting to outside funding agencies. This is the least frequently reported purpose of assessment as only 19% of the teachers reported using it.

4.2 Assessing language skills

This section reports the teachers' strategies, in particular instructor-made assessment strategies, student-administered assessment strategies, standardized methods, in the assessment of various skills. Based on this categorization, instructor-made assessment methods are designed and administered by the instructors themselves, while student-centered ones directly urge students' participation in the assessment process in the class (Cheng et al., 2004). In standardized methods, a standardized version of a test is used to assess a language skill.

4.2.1 Assessing reading skills

Table 2 below shows the teachers' use of strategies in the assessment of reading.

Table 2

Strategies for assessing reading

Assessment strategies	Yes	%	No	%
Instructor-made (N=177)				
1 Short answer items	123	69.5	54	30.5
2 True/False items	118	66.7	59	33.3
3 Multiple-choice items	112	63.3	65	36.7
4 Matching Items	104	58.8	73	41.2
5 Sentence completion	103	58.2	74	41.8
6 Interpretive items	86	48.6	91	51.4
7 Cloze items	80	45.2	97	54.8
8 Editing a piece of writing	56	31.6	121	68.4
9 Forms to fill in	50	28.2	127	71.8
Student-administered (N=177)				
10 Oral interviews/questioning	156	88.1	21	11.9
11 Student summaries of what they read	150	84.7	27	15.3
12 Self-assessment	120	67.8	57	32.2

13	Peer assessment	117	66.1	60	33.9
14	Read aloud/dictation	110	62.1	67	37.9
15	Student portfolio	59	33.3	118	66.7
16	Student journal	37	20.9	140	79.1
Standardized methods (N=177)					
17	Standardized reading test	127	71.8	50	28.2

A. Instructor-made strategies: As the table shows, between 50 to 70% of the participants mostly use objective tests to assess reading. These include short answer, true/false, multiple choice, matching, and sentence completion items. Other items in this category are used even less frequently, like interpretative and cloze items, which are used by less than 50% of the teachers. The least frequently used items in this category are editing a piece of written text and completing a form.

B. Student-administered strategies: In this category, strategies of oral questioning and summaries strike the highest attention (90% of the teachers have reported using them). Nearly 70% of the teachers use self and peer assessment. The strategy of asking students to read aloud a written text or dictation is also used by slightly more than 60% of the teachers. The least frequently used strategy, among the strategies in this category, is keeping portfolios (30%) and journals (20%).

C. Standardized strategies: As the results in this category indicate, nearly 72% of the teachers use standardized tests of reading to assess students.

4.2.2 Assessing writing skills

This section focuses on the teachers' use of writing strategies in the classroom. Table 3 shows these results as reported by the participants of the study.

Table 3
Strategies for assessing writing

Assessment methods		Yes	%	No	%
Instructor-made (N=155)					
1	Short essay	126	81.3	29	18.7
2	Editing a sentence or paragraph	101	65.2	54	34.8
3	Multiple-choice items on grammatical errors	60	38.7	95	61.3
4	Long essay	56	36.1	99	63.9
5	True/false items	54	34.8	101	65.2
6	Matching items	51	32.9	104	61.7
Student-administered (N=155)					
7	Peer assessment	102	65.8	53	34.2
8	Self-assessment	98	63.2	57	36.8
9	Student portfolio	70	45.2	85	54.8
10	Student journal	54	34.8	101	65.2
Standardized methods (N=155)					
11	Standardized writing tests	102	65.8	53	34.2

A. Instructor-made strategies: The most frequently used strategy in assessing writing is asking students to write short essays, as claimed by 80% of the teachers. Nearly 65% of the teachers ask the students to edit a piece of writing. The least frequently used strategies in this category are the use of objective tests of writing (40%) like matching, true/false, multiple-choice items, and use of long essays.

B. Student-administered strategies: In this category, peer and self-assessment are used by above 60% of the teachers. Only 45% of the teachers ask their students to prepare a writing portfolio, and nearly 34% ask students to keep a journal.

C. Standardized strategies: As the table shows, nearly 66% of the teachers use standardized tests of writing to test their students' writing ability.

4.2.3 Testing speaking and listening skills

Table 4 summarizes the participants' use of strategies for assessing speaking and listening.

Table 4

Assessing speaking and listening

Assessment methods		Yes	%	No	%
Instructor-made (N=179)					
1	Prepare summaries of what is heard	121	67.6	58	32.4
2	Take notes	103	57.5	76	42.5
3	Multiple-choice items following listening to a spoken passage	100	55.9	79	44.1
Student-administered (N=179)					
4	Oral interviews/dialogues	172	96.1	7	3.9
5	Oral discussion with each student	167	93.3	12	6.7
6	Oral presentation	159	88.8	20	11.2
7	Oral reading and dictation	128	71.5	51	28.5
8	Retelling a story after listening to a passage	124	69.3	55	30.7
9	Providing an oral description of an event or thing	119	66.5	60	33.5
10	Public speaking	117	65.4	62	34.6
11	Peer assessment	116	64.8	63	35.2
12	Self-assessment	110	61.5	69	38.5
13	Following directions given orally	79	44.1	100	55.9
14	Giving oral directions	54	30.2	125	69.8
Standardized tests (N=179)					
15	Standardized listening test	126	70.4	53	29.6
16	Standardized speaking test	102	57.0	77	43.0

A. Instructor-made strategies: In this category, nearly 68% of the teachers ask the students to prepare summaries of what is heard. Slightly more than 50% of the teachers use note-taking and multiple-choice tests following a listening passage.

B. Student-administered strategies: As can be seen in table, oral interviews and discussions are used by slightly more than 90% of the teachers. The next is using oral presentations. Oral reading and dictation and retelling a story after listening to a passage are used by nearly 70% of the teachers. Providing oral descriptions of events and public speaking are used by 65% of the teachers. The participants have used the two strategies of peer and self-assessment by 64 and 61% respectively. The least frequently used ones in this category are following and giving oral directions as used by 44 and 30% of the teachers respectively.

C. Standardized strategies: Standardized listening tests have been used by 70% of the teachers, and only 57% of the teachers have used standardized speaking tests.

4.4 Procedures of assessment and evaluation

In this section, the sources the teachers use for the items, the type of feedback they provide, methods of providing final report, and the amount of time they spend on assessment and evaluation are reported.

4.4.1 Sources of assessment items

Table 5 shows the resources the teachers use for the development of items and student assessment. These sources range from items developed by teachers themselves, to mandated items developed by institutions and schools, and items found on the internet and other published resources.

Table 5
The sources of items

Sources of items used		Yes	%	No	%
1	Items from published textbooks	138	73.8	49	26.2
2	Instructor's own items	117	62.6	70	37.4
3	Items found on the Internet	101	54.0	86	46.0
4	Items from mandated syllabuses/curricula	82	43.9	105	56.1
5	Items prepared together with other teachers	66	35.3	121	64.7
6	Other published test items	55	29.4	132	70.6

As the results show, teachers are more inclined to use items of the published textbooks rather than using their own items. They are also willing to use items found on the internet as well as the mandated items. The last resources used by the teachers are the test items prepared by other teachers and professionals.

4.4.2 *Methods of providing feedback to learners*

Teachers communicate the results of their assessment to their students both during the course and through the final reports at the end of the course. Table 6 below shows the ways the teachers use to report their assessment.

Table 6
Methods of providing feedback

Type of feedback used		Yes	%	No	%
During the Course					
1	Written comments	117	62.6	70	37.4
2	Verbal feedback	95	50.8	92	49.2
3	Total test score	76	40.6	111	59.4
4	Conference with student	37	19.8	150	80.2
5	A letter grade	29	15.5	158	84.5
6	Checklist	31	16.6	156	83.4
7	Teaching diary/log	15	8.0	172	92.0
Final Report					
1	Total test scores	128	68.4	59	31.6
2	Written comments	117	62.6	70	37.4
4	Checklist	45	24.1	142	75.9
5	Letter grades	39	20.9	148	79.1
6	Conference with students	12	6.4	175	93.6
7	Teaching diary/log	12	6.4	175	93.6

During the Course Feedback: Based on the results, teachers use diverse methods with varying proportions in providing their learners with feedback during the course. For instance, 62% use written comments, 50% give verbal feedback, and 40% use total scores as feedback. Nearly 20% use conferencing with each student to give them feedback. Letter grades and checklists are used by nearly 15% of the teachers. The least frequently used strategy is keeping a diary or log to determine the students' progress.

Final Reports: Nearly 70% of the teachers report the students' total test scores. Written comments are also used by above 60% of the teachers. Slightly more than 20% of the teachers use checklists and letter grades to report the students' performance. Holding a conference with each student and keeping a log or diary are among the least frequently used strategies.

Time Spent on Assessment: This section presents the time teachers spend on preparing assessment, collecting the assessment information, scoring the responses, and reporting the assessment results (Table 7).

Table 7

Time spent on assessment

	% of the total amount	Frequency	%	Cumulative percentage
1	Less than 10	6	3.2	3.2
2	11–15	30	16.0	19.3
3	16–20	22	11.8	31.0
4	21–30	47	25.1	56.1
5	31–40	36	19.3	75.4
6	40 or more	46	24.6	100.0

As can be seen, more than 50% of the teachers devote more than 20% of their time on assessment.

5. Discussion

This study examined EFL teachers' use of CBA strategies in terms of purposes, strategies, and procedures of assessment. The purposes of assessment concentrated on the student, instruction, and administration-centered strategies. Assessment strategies of different language skills were also analyzed in three categories of student, instructor-made, and standardized testing. Furthermore, the assessment procedure was examined, focusing on the sources teachers used for item development, the type of feedback they provided both during and after the course, as well as the amount of time they devoted for assessment.

As only few studies have been conducted on CBA strategies EFL teachers employ in their classrooms (Wang, 2017), references are made to the studies conducted by Cheng et al. (2004, 2008; Cheng & Wang, 2007) as they compared the ESL and EFL settings with regard to CBA strategies thereby providing a yardstick to compare the EFL setting of Iran with them. In a series of studies, Cheng et al. examined the CBA strategies of teachers in ESL and EFL contexts through qualitative and quantitative research designs (Cheng et al., 2004; Cheng et al., 2008; Cheng & Wang, 2007). The settings included ESL setting of Canada as English-dominant, Mandarin-dominant EFL setting of China, and bilingual setting of Hong Kong (Cheng et al. 2004).

The first section of the questionnaire examined the purposes behind the teachers' use of CBA. Based on the findings, assessment was first conducted with the purpose of enhancing students' learning either through gaining information on the students' progress or using assessment for diagnostic purposes. The next purpose of assessment was using it for the teachers' own development and as a tool either for planning or monitoring their own teaching. The third purpose was related to providing information to outside parties. The first strategy in this category was providing information to central offices, which is mostly a formal requirement in some universities and college settings. The least frequently used strategy was providing information to outside funding agencies. Overall, Iranian EFL teachers used assessment largely for enhancing student learning or their own enhancement as teachers. Different results were reported for teachers in Canada, Hong Kong, and China. In Canada and Hong Kong like Iran, teachers used more student-centered purposes and more frequently reported their assessment to central agencies while in the EFL context of China teachers

used assessment mainly for instructional purposes. In China unlike Iran, teachers used the assessment results to plan their instructions mainly for preparing their students for standardized tests. This can be as a result of paucity of standardized tests for tertiary or college EFL learners in Iran. Hereupon, Iranian setting resembles ESL contexts than EFL context of China.

The second part of the study was to determine different strategies used in the assessment of language skills. In analyzing teachers' assessment of reading, student-administered strategies were used more frequently than other strategies. In particular, the strategies of oral interviews and students' summaries of what is read were higher in frequency than other strategies. The next frequent strategy was using standardized tests to assess reading. The use of teacher made tests was moderate. The last in this category was the use of portfolio and journals. The use of reading strategies had different patterns in the three settings. In Canada and Hong Kong, the most common strategies were student summaries of what is read and short answer items, while in China traditional objective tests were more frequently used. The use of students' portfolios and journals were more common first in Canada, then in Hong Kong and last in China. In this category, different patterns were observed for Iranian teachers. Like ESL settings, student-centered strategies were used more frequently and unlike EFL settings traditional assessment practices were not used. Likewise, unlike ESL settings, portfolios and journals were not used.

As for writing, the student-centered strategies were used more frequently than the other strategies. Instructor-made items of short essays and editing a piece of writing were used more frequently than other strategies like long essays or objective tests of writing. The use of peer and self-assessment was moderate. The least frequent strategies were the use of portfolio and journal writing. The same pattern of writing strategy use was followed in the three settings as the strategies of writing shorts essays and editing a piece of writing were more common than the other strategies. In Canada, they were more frequent, then in Hong Kong and last in China.

In testing speaking and listening, student-administered strategies were again more frequently used. In this category, the strategies of oral interviews, discussions, and oral presentations were used more than other strategies. The strategies in the instructor-made category were used moderately. Some of these strategies were traditional tests of speaking and listening, like listening to a piece of listening and choosing the correct answers or note taking. Based on the results, the use of standardized listening tests was higher than speaking tests. This pattern was more or less followed by the teachers in the three settings as student-centered strategies of story retelling and oral presentations were higher than other strategies. One noticeable difference was the use of objective tests of listening and speaking, which was more prevalent in China than the two other settings.

The final section dealt with the assessment procedure. Regarding the type of items used by language teachers to assess their students, items derived from the published textbooks and developed by the teachers themselves were the most frequent types. Other resources for item development were used with lower frequency, like using internet sources or working together to develop items. In comparison with the three settings, almost all teachers in Canada reported using their own items. The same pattern with lower frequency was followed by teachers in Hong Kong and then in China. Chinese teachers also heavily relied on print sources and other available resources for their items while in Hong Kong and Canada, they less relied on these sources.

Providing learners with feedback, during and at the end of the course, was also analyzed in two sections of the questionnaire. In the case of during-the-course feedback, the strategies of written comments and verbal feedback were among the most prevalent ones. In Canada and Hong Kong, oral feedback was the most frequent but Chinese teachers less frequently used it. Regarding the end of the term feedback, the use of total scores and written comments was the most frequent. Total scores are reported as feedback in almost all teaching and learning situations in Iran. As for end of the term feedback, Canadian and Chinese teachers like Iranian teachers used total test scores as feedback while letter grades were used more frequently in Hong Kong. Iranian teachers rarely used the strategies of diaries and conferencing, while in Canada these strategies were highly used. These two strategies were not used in China and Hong Kong either. The total time spent on assessment

received diverse answers; however, most teachers spent more than 20% of their time on assessing their learners. The time spent on assessment in the other three settings has been the same, approving the results found in the present study.

The differences and similarities observed in the results of this study and other studies can be attributed to some factors. The first important factor is the context of instruction. Previous research has indicated that the context of instruction can play a major role in the assessment practices teachers choose (Cheng et al., 2008; Cizek, Fitzgerald, & Rachor, 1996). The next factor is the teachers' educational background as teachers with stronger educational backgrounds act more autonomously in their assessment practices, more develop items, and use various assessment criteria for their own classes (Cheng et al., 2004; Cheng & Wang, 2007). The third factor is the feasibility of assessment practices. Some practical factors render some strategies useless like providing better quality feedback, which is reduced to whole class verbal feedback due to large class size or use of traditional tests or using portfolios and journals (Cheng & Wang, 2007). Besides, McMillan (2003) has claimed that teachers' assessment decisions involve an amalgamation of teachers' knowledge, experiences, values, beliefs they hold of instruction and the interaction of these attributes and the context of teaching and learning. As teachers are granted more freedom in their contexts, they devote more time for administering better quality assessments (Cheng et al., 2004).

6. Conclusion

All in all, Iranian language teachers' assessment practices are mostly aimed toward student-centered rather than instruction and administered-centered purposes. In assessing language skills, they also tend to use more student-centered strategies. However, they tend not to use traditional assessment practices in their classes. This may be due to the low structured nature of language teaching in Iranian context (Wang, 2017), teachers' strong educational background, and the absence of any compulsory standardized test. It can also reveal the teachers' assessment knowledge and freedom in choosing their own assessment practices. This finding is contrary to the findings of an EFL setting like China and it is more comparable to ESL settings. Iranian teachers follow different patterns than other settings for providing feedback or in using portfolios and journal. These concerns necessitate studying the topic comprehensively to better shed light on the reasons. Examining CBA through qualitative measures like class observations, interviews or teacher journals might be far better alternatives to questionnaire inquiries. In brief, research in this domain is highly required as the subject of CBA and the way it promotes EFL teachers' assessment practices and leads to their professional development has not received the merit it deserves in various educational contexts.

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