EFL Teachers' Conception and Choice of Assessment Task: The Focus of Age, Gender and Level of Teaching

Special Issue

Abstract

This study sought to investigate changes in EFL teachers' conceptions and choices of assessment in terms of their level of teaching, age and gender. To this end, from the population of EFL university instructors teaching in different EFL contexts at English language institutes, Islamic Azad, state, and PNU universities in Mazandaran province, Iran, a sample of Two hundred EFL university teachers based on convenience sampling method was selected. They comprised both male (n=100) and female (n=100). In order to ascertain the assessment task preferences of educators, Brown's (2008) Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment (TCA) scale was employed. Subsequently, an independent t-test, Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and Pearson correlation were conducted to scrutinize the collected data. The outcomes of the analysis indicated a notable alteration in TCA dimensions (specifically pertaining to school accountability, student accountability, improvement, and irrelevance) in conjunction with variations in teachers' age and gender. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation analysis underscored a significant positive association between the utilization of formative assessment strategies and the gender and age of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors. These results underscore the intricate nature of TCA transformation, which appears to be influenced by additional variables such as gender and age. The implications of this research are far-reaching, encompassing implications for students, educators, and curriculum developers.

Keywords: Age, Assessment Task, EFL Teachers' Conception, Gender, Level of Teaching.

1. Introduction

Since the 20th century, latest researches have supported the use of classroom assessment as a central feature and a fundamental element of effective teaching and learning (McMillan, Myran, & Workman, 2002). By the same taken, Jafarigohar (2020) believed that "assessment is an indispensable requirement of teaching and learning" (p.141). Furthermore, according to Fitriyah and Jannah (2021), the outcomes of assessments play a crucial role in shaping how educators and educational planners evaluate the effectiveness of current programs and identify strategies for improving future initiatives. This process serves multiple functions for all stakeholders within higher education institutions, with assessment practices evolving in response to external accountability measures mandated by various policy-makers. Movahedi and Aghajanzadeh Kiasi (2021) highlighted a contentious issue surrounding the varied interpretations of the term "assessment" across different contexts. Their research on teacher versus learner-assessment tasks demonstrated that formative assessment functions as a cyclical process, identifying the learner's current position and desired goals. In this model, students are

active participants in the learning process, diverging from traditional assessment methods where they were passive recipients of information. Moreover, Suri and Krishnan (2019) emphasized the significant impact of assessment on student learning, highlighting its integral role in academic learning processes and the outcomes of teaching and learning activities. Chappuis and Stiggins (2003) concurred that traditional forms of assessment positioned students as passive recipients, while newer approaches such as formative assessment empower learners to take ownership of their learning. This shift enables learners to actively involve in assessing their own work, evaluating their peers' work, and collaborating with instructors to establish criteria and norms for their academic endeavors. Movahedi and Aghajanzadeh Kiasi (2021) asserted that peer assessment enhances second language (L2) learning by transforming students from passive learners to active participants, thereby influencing their utilization of learning strategies. Wang and Hurley (2012) noted that the assessment movement in higher education gained momentum in the 1980s, focusing on student learning outcomes. Subsequently, accrediting agencies mandated institutions of higher education to implement program-level and institution-level assessment procedures to document student learning effectively. An area of focus within assessment conceptions involves an examination of the appropriateness and effectiveness of assessment in appraising the work of educators and educational institutions in relation to established benchmarks (Brown, 2002). From this particular viewpoint, any inadequacies in student academic achievement are ascribed to the educators and educational establishments, highlighting the responsibility of these primary participants in nurturing student progress.

It is apparent that teachers' conceptions of features in education process such as teaching, learning and programs powerfully affect their teaching and students' learning (Calderhead, 1996, as cited in Firoozi, Razavipour, & Ahmadi, 2019). They specified that conception turn into individual teaching in order to help teachers' practice of teaching which assists teachers to explain teaching tasks and establishing knowledge and information related to those tasks which indicates that teachers' conception impacts their procedure and practice of assessment (Kahn, 2000). Keeping this concept in mind, Monib et al. (2020) asserted that in the context of classroom assessment, teachers are responsible for independently developing, assessing, and implementing the assessment tools (such as questions and techniques), and then evaluating the assessment outcomes in connection with their teaching practices. Teachers' understanding of formative assessment is underscored in the national curriculum, requiring them to utilize assessment to monitor, guide, diagnose learning challenges, and facilitate meaningful and enduring student learning throughout the instructional process. Teachers

represent the final link in the chain of transformations stemming from policy directives, and as posited by Black and William (2009), the implementation of novel assessment reforms necessitates recognition that uniform application across global contexts is unfeasible. The conceptions teachers hold regarding assessment procedures, objectives, and the dynamics of teaching and learning exert a pervasive influence on all pedagogical endeavors (Brown, 2003). Within the national curriculum, teachers are mandated to employ assessment practices that serve to monitor, guide, diagnose learning difficulties, and support sustained and meaningful student learning throughout the instructional continuum. Teachers occupy the terminal position in the cascade of changes originating from policy mandates, and as Black and William (2009) contended, the execution of innovative assessment paradigms must acknowledge the inherent diversity in global educational landscapes. Teachers' conceptions encompass a spectrum of factors including knowledge, student attributions, motivation, test anxiety, cultural influences, intelligence, self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-esteem, all of which can significantly impact their behaviors within the classroom setting. Despite research indicating that teachers generally endorse positive attitudes towards assessment and recognize its benefits for both themselves and their students, translating these beliefs into tangible classroom practices often presents a formidable challenge (Al-Nouh et al., 2014; Azarnoosh, 2013; Heitink, et al. 2016; Khamlichi & Chkirbane 2021; Ozan & Kıncal, 2018). For instance, Nasr et al. (2018) conducted research on how Iranian EFL teachers perceive assessment for learning, particularly in terms of their monitoring and scaffolding practices, while considering their demographic characteristics. They claimed that it's crucial to note that teachers may simultaneously entertain various understandings of assessment. For instance, they might view assessment as a means to optimize learning while also perceiving it as a tool that holds teachers accountable for their students' learning.

Furthermore, the varied perspectives on assessment held by educators have sparked significant interest in the developmental trajectory of these perspectives and the factors that shape them. Brown (2004) proposed that at the outset, educators' perceptions of evaluation are not shaped by the environment in which they originate or by previous encounters. Several factors including the roles performed by teachers, years of experience in the field of education, duration of professional experience, and the socio-economic status of their schools do not appear to have an impact on the assessment-related conceptions held by teachers. Contrary to this viewpoint, numerous studies have indicated that these conceptions are susceptible to influence from multiple sources, such as the educational framework in which teachers function, their understanding of the subject matter being taught (Vandeyar & Killen, 2007), attitudes

towards students' abilities, and perceptions of societal anticipations (Bright & Joyner, 1998). Assessment is widely acknowledged as a prevalent practice, yet it lacks standardized guidelines, posing challenges for specialists seeking to derive benefit from it. Some scholars have attempted to propose guidelines. For instance, Azmoode Sis Abad et al. (2024) sought to elucidate the principles of diagnostic testing, aiming to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses in a particular linguistic and communicative competence domain. This diagnostic assessment principle facilitates the provision of targeted feedback and remedial instruction tailored to address specific areas of need.

Pajares (1992, as cited in Yetkin, 2017) posited that the interconnected nature of conceptions implies that teachers' conceptions are likely to influence their pedagogical implementation and practices within the classroom setting. In order to enhance the significance, utility, and validity of assessment, it is crucial to elucidate the conceptions of teacher candidates regarding assessment and to furnish them with requisite training on the goals of assessment. Until now, a limited number of researchers have investigated teachers' conceptions of assessment. For instance, Naraghizadeh et al. (2023) conducted a study examining EFL teachers' perceptions of Alternative Assessment (AA) strategies in English language classrooms, recognizing the potential impact of these strategies on overall classroom performance. The research aimed to explore the understandings of Iranian EFL teachers regarding AA strategies, employing a sequential mixed methods design. 30 Iranian EFL instructors holding either a MA and Ph. D. degrees in ELT were Chosen as the participants of the survey via convenience sampling. As The process of data collection involved the utilization of the Teachers' Perceptions of Alternative Assessment Questionnaire (Elharrar) in an open-ended format. The research employed qualitative thematic analysis and subsequently presented the identified themes in frequency and percentage formats. The results of the study indicated that a significant proportion of educators recognized the beneficial impact of Academic Achievement (AA), citing a range of advantages that contribute to the improvement of the educational setting. They suggested that the implications of their findings are relevant for EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and administrators.

On another new study, Prastikawati et al. (2022) conducted an investigation into the perceptions of assessment among pre-service EFL teachers during their teaching practicum. The study aimed to explore these perceptions during this pivotal phase while considering contextual factors that contribute to their views. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, the researchers initially employed quantitative methods to select participants for the subsequent qualitative phase. Findings revealed that participants acknowledge the primary aim of

assessment to enhance the teaching and learning process and validate student and school performance. Additionally, contextual elements such as school assessment culture, national policies, and classroom dynamics emerged as influential factors shaping their assessment conceptions during the practicum. These results highlight the necessity of collaboration among governments, policymakers, and educators to ensure alignment between assessment policies and the beliefs and practices of pre-service EFL teachers, thereby fostering coherence and effectiveness in educational endeavors.

In addition, Zaimoğlu (2003) conducted an investigation into the perspectives on assessment held by teachers and students within an EFL preparatory school, determining that the concept of improvement was highly valued. Furthermore, Vardar (2010) undertook a study to explore the perspectives of secondary school teachers on classroom assessment (TCA), identifying that students' accountability was deemed most significant. Correspondingly, Yuce (2015) reiterated the findings of Zaimoğlu's (2003) research, focusing on pre-service English language teachers' perspectives on TCA and revealing a predominant inclination towards utilizing or intending to utilize assessment for developmental purposes. Despite the growing body of literature on conceptions of assessment, particularly in recent years, limited attention has been directed towards such inquiries within the context of Iran. Hence, this current study seeks to investigate the conceptions of formative assessment among EFL educators in Iran and their selection of assessment tasks.

2. Literature Review

The term "conception" is employed to refer to the overarching, frequently unspoken, understanding that an individual holds about the essence of a phenomenon (Brown, 2008). The term "conceptions" refers to the cognitive representations of individuals' beliefs, values, and attitudes regarding the inherent nature of a given phenomenon, including their perception of its organization and intended function. The development of conceptions is a gradual process that occurs through interactions with a particular phenomenon, such as the formation of conceptions of assessment stemming from experiences of being evaluated as a learner. These conceptions function as the mechanism that shapes an individual's reactions or responses to the phenomenon, as discussed by Ajzen (2005) and Fives & Buehl (2012). Research has demonstrated that the beliefs, attitudes, and responses of teachers have a substantial impact on the quality of activities within the school curriculum, teaching practices, and assessment, within the realm of teachers' influence (Fives & Buehl, 2012). The beliefs held by teachers with regard to students, learning, teaching, and subjects have been shown to have a significant impact on

the methods and practices employed in assessment (Kahn, 2000). Yan (2014) emphasized that educators in Hong Kong held pessimistic views toward the exigencies of school-based assessment (SBA). Nevertheless, educators who recognized the potential benefits of SBA and possessed confidence in its implementation were more likely to demonstrate an inclination towards integrating SBA into their instructional practices. According to Lin, Lee, and Tsai (2014), science educators in Taiwan emphasized the role of assessment in promoting learning and conceiving science education as facilitating understanding rather than mere memorization. Furthermore, the available evidence indicates that the utilization of formative assessment methodologies to individualize instruction results in enhanced learning outcomes for students (Christoforidou, Kyriakides, Antoniou, & Creemers, 2014). Moreover, within the context of Iranian English-language educators, the perspective that assessment was oriented towards fostering improvement was correlated with lower levels of burnout, while perceiving assessment as irrelevant was associated with increased self-reported burnout (Pishghadam, Adamson, Shayesteh Sadafian, & Kan, 2014). The study conducted by Chen & Brown (2013) found that prospective teachers in China who supported the belief that assessment primarily serves the purpose of promoting examination success were inclined to view assessment as deficient in its diagnostic and formative functions, as not contributing to the cultivation of life skills, and as having little significance. The aforementioned examples highlight the importance of assessment concepts in influencing instructional methodologies. The concept of assessment encompasses a teacher's understanding of the methods by which students' learning is scrutinized, tested, evaluated, or assessed with regard to its inherent characteristics and intended goals. Brown (2008) has proposed that there are three primary purposes for assessment, as well as an "anti-purpose," as identified by Newton (2007) with 17 uses. These primary purposes are: (1) assessment for enhancing teaching and learning (improvement), (2) assessment for holding schools and teachers accountable for their effectiveness (school accountability), and (3) assessment for making students responsible for their learning (student accountability). The "anti-purpose" is assessment as irrelevant to the lives and work of teachers and students (irrelevant). However, through the amalgamation of school and student accountability, it can be deduced that assessment serves two primary purposes within a given society, namely accountability and improvement.

Researchers in the scholarly community have delineated precise contrasts between the concepts of "knowledge" and "beliefs" (Pajares, 1992, as cited in Yetkin, 2017; Skott, 2015). Pajares (1992, as cited in Yetkin, 2017) posits that knowledge is defined by a collective agreement on its veracity, whereas beliefs are defined as a collection of convictions held by

individuals pertaining to a specific subject. The delineation of conceptual boundaries has been astutely defined in the scholarly literature that centers on educators' beliefs, particularly in disciplines with an extensive research history, such as beliefs concerning pedagogy and cognition, personal epistemology, and beliefs pertaining to specific content areas. Researchers within these studies have identified the term "beliefs" as the most appropriate and widely accepted designation. On the contrary, academic researchers investigating beliefs within the framework of evaluation utilize terminology such as "conceptions" and "values" to elucidate their varied areas of focus. The concept of "conception," as first defined by Thompson (1992), refers to a comprehensive mental framework that includes beliefs, meanings, concepts, propositions, rules, mental images, preferences, and similar elements. Essentially, conceptions integrate knowledge and beliefs into a cohesive framework, with beliefs being a subset of conceptions. The study conducted by Barnes, Fives, and Dacey (2015) examines the conceptions surrounding "teachers' overall perception and awareness of assessment" within the context of national assessment. Brown (2004, 2006, 2008) conducted seminal studies within the field, employing the term "teachers' conceptions" to describe their assessment-related findings. In light of the specialized research focus on teachers' beliefs regarding assessment, the prevailing terminology within the field is that of "conception. "Consequently, in the subsequent section of this paper, we have opted to employ the terminology of "assessment conceptions." An examination of scholarly sources indicates that the matter of teacher beliefs regarding pedagogy, educational theory, curriculum, and various subject areas has been the subject of extensive inquiry by researchers with a particular interest, and has been a topic of study for over two decades (Beswick, 2006; Fives, Lacatena, & Gerard, 2015). Contrary to prior research on the topic, the examination of teachers' assessment conceptions has emerged as a relatively recent area of interest (Brown, 2004, 2006, 2008; Harris & Brown, 2009; Barnes et al., 2015), attributable to a paradigmatic shift in the approach to and comprehension of teaching and learning. Despite being fewer and more recent, the existing studies on the conceptions of assessment offer significant contributions to the comprehension of assessment among educators and the impact of these beliefs on their instructional practices. Upon conducting an analysis of various seminal studies within this discipline (Brown, 2004, 2006; Davis & Neizel, 2011; Haris & Brown, 2009), four distinct categories pertaining to teachers' perspectives on assessment were discerned. The following assumptions briefly illustrate the categories. Assessment has been shown to enhance both teaching and learning. Assessment serves to instill a sense of accountability in students for their own educational progress. The assessment places the burden of educating students or pupils on educational institutions and

teachers. The impact of assessment on teachers, students/pupils, curricula, and teaching is deemed to be detrimental and irrelevant.

Rea-Dickens (2006) posits that assessment serves as a vital and intrinsic element of classroom pedagogy, whereby educators guide and support students' learning while concurrently collecting data on their advancement towards educational objectives. This process enables teachers to monitor students' learning and make informed decisions about subsequent steps in both learning and instruction. Numerous scholarly analyses have identified various factors that influence teachers' decision-making processes in regards to assessment practices (Cheng, Rogers, & Hu. 2004; Yin 2010). Yin (2010) identified a relationship between teachers' strategic cognitions, encompassing their beliefs about language learning, and their interactive cognitions, including conceptions about students' performance, and the influence of these cognitions on assessment practices. The proficiency of teachers in assessment is a significant factor that influences their assessment methodologies (Cheng, et al., 2004). Brookhart (2001) posited that educators should possess a comprehensive comprehension of the prescribed knowledge and competencies. More specifically, teachers should possess the ability to grasp the "learning progression" within their designated subject matter. Brookhart (2001) posits that the use of assessments permits educators to ascertain a student's position in relation to a specific learning objective, aiding in the interpretation of student work, the provision of targeted feedback, and the development of instructional and assessment strategies aimed at guiding students towards the intended learning goal. The following analysis considers the impact of various factors on the outcome of the study.

In their research, James and Pedder (2006) conducted a study involving 558 teachers in England, revealing a discernible disjunction between professed instructional practices and underlying beliefs. Despite expressing a preference for pedagogical approaches conducive to explicit learning and fostering learner autonomy, these educators acknowledged engaging in methods that inadvertently foster a performance-oriented mindset among students (Barnes et al., 2015). The authors attributed these incongruities to the pervasive influences and pressures inherent in the assessment landscape of the educational context they examined, specifically within the national framework of England, which tend to skew teachers' practices towards a more performance-driven orientation than they personally endorse. While the body of literature exploring the nexus between assessment conceptions and instructional practices remains somewhat limited, indications of a symbiotic relationship between the two are evident. It is imperative to acknowledge that while definitive empirical evidence directly correlating beliefs with practice may be lacking, this should not preclude recognition of their interconnectedness.

Moreover, a nuanced examination of individual factors alongside the broader social and political contexts within which assessments are administered is essential for comprehending the intricate interplay between conceptions and practical application. Lyon (2013) utilized an assessment practices framework to investigate the instructional strategies of a high school chemistry teacher during the design, implementation, and evaluation of a chemistry laboratory report. Through this framework, the researcher delved into the teacher's underlying assessment beliefs, practices, and reflective processes. The findings underscored a congruence between teachers' assessment practices and their cognitive processes, observational skills, and interpretative capacities, indicating a harmonious alignment between pedagogical beliefs and instructional actions. Furthermore, Remesal (2011) conducted a qualitative inquiry into teachers' assessment conceptions by engaging in interviews with fifty primary and secondary school educators. The findings illuminated a spectrum of divergent and conflicting perspectives regarding the role of assessment in the realm of teaching and learning. Hence, it is imperative to consider the array of assessment beliefs held by teachers, as discrepancies between these beliefs and effective assessment practices could impede the restructuring and enhancement of classroom assessment methodologies (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Additionally, Brown, Lake, and Matters (2011) delved into the examination of Queensland teachers' conceptualizations concerning assessment purposes through the utilization of an adapted version of the Teacher Conceptions of Assessment Inventory. The outcomes of a multi-group analysis revealed that primary school teachers predominantly viewed assessment as a means to support learning and instruction, whereas secondary school teachers perceived assessment as a mechanism for ensuring school and student accountability. Furthermore, the study indicated that teachers' beliefs are reflective of their approach to assessment. Moreover, Brown, Hui, Flora, and Kennedy (2011) explored how teachers' assessment beliefs are influenced by societal and cultural disparities, subsequently impacting their instructional practices. This investigation entailed the development of a self-report inventory encompassing three dimensions: accountability, improvement, and irrelevance. The model was employed to scrutinize teachers' assessment beliefs within Southern China's educational landscape, particularly in Hong Kong. The findings underscored a strong adherence among teachers to the fusion of accountability with improvement in their assessment philosophies. Additionally, Shah Ahmadi and Ketabi (2019) endeavored to assess the status of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) among Iranian English teachers. Their study involved the participation of three hundred and nine English teachers, with 24 educators further engaged in semi-structured interviews to elucidate their perspectives on LAL. In the present study, an investigation was conducted to assess language

teachers' perceptions of language assessment literacy through the application of both qualitative and quantitative data analysis and interpretation methodologies. The findings indicated that Iranian L2 teachers are concerned about language assessment literacy. However, it is acknowledged by the individuals that their present level of knowledge and implementation of Limulus amebocyte lysate (LAL) is suboptimal. Additionally, it is important to note that assessment plays a pivotal role in facilitating both the learning and teaching processes. Furthermore, the dynamics of teacher-learner relationships have a significant impact on the assessment process. Moreover, testing and assessment are often viewed as complex concepts due to their integration of mathematical principles and statistical analysis. The results of this study will make a valuable contribution to a deeper understanding of LAL and will aid in the development of improved strategies for planning and implementing programs for L2 teachers focused on this issue.

Xu et al. (2023) conducted a narrative inquiry to investigate the impact of personal, experiential, and contextual factors on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perceptions of assessment. While existing literature has indicated that teachers' assessment beliefs are influenced by individual characteristics, experiences, and socio-cultural contexts, the specific mechanisms through which these factors shape teachers' Conceptions of Assessment (CoA) have not been thoroughly explored. The study delved into the nature of teachers' CoA and the mediating role of influential factors by analyzing narrative data obtained from 48 high school EFL educators in China. The results revealed a prevailing emphasis on the improvement-oriented function of assessment among teachers. Additionally, a range of factors, including contextual elements such as the prevalent exam-focused educational environment, personal attributes like teachers' autonomy in assessment practices, and experiential components such as observations of assessment procedures, were identified as exerting varying degrees of influence on teachers' assessment beliefs. The discussion examined how teachers negotiate between the improvement and accountability dimensions of assessment purposes and how their CoA are shaped by factors such as teacher autonomy, emotional experiences as recipients of assessments, and the dominant exam-oriented culture. The study concluded by outlining implications for future research on teachers' CoA and for the enhancement of policies, practices, and professional development initiatives aimed at improving teacher assessment literacy.

on another study, Khalili Sabet and Pourgholamali (2023) examined the perceptions of English language assessment among teachers in Iranian junior high schools and claimed that "Since the 2012 Iranian Education Reform, major changes have been applied to the English assessment

system and methods"(p.1). Following a decade since their implementation, the effectiveness and validity of these revisions and adjustments remain uncertain. They believed that within the Iranian education system, teachers play a central role in crafting and administering English assessments. Khalili Sabet and Pourgholamali (2023) continued that investigating their beliefs and attitudes is deemed essential for understanding the current state of language assessment. Hence, their study aimed to explore Iranian EFL junior high school teachers' perceptions of English assessment and examine the connection between their experiences and assessment conceptions. Data were gathered using a condensed version of the Teachers' Conception of Assessment (TCoA) Inventory. Ninety-six English teachers from junior high schools in Iran participated in the study through convenience sampling. Descriptive statistics revealed that "Improvement" and "School Accountability" were prioritized over other assessment purposes. Additionally, the Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that teachers' conceptions varied based on their teaching experience, particularly in the realm of "control." Teachers with less experience demonstrated lower scores in the control aspect of assessment. Their findings offer practical insights for educational policymakers to enhance English assessment practices in Iranian junior high schools.

Mohammadkhah et al. (2023) conducted a study titled "Teachers' Conceptions of Language Assessment: Affective and Theoretical Knowledge Dimensions of Language Assessment Literacy Model," highlighting the imperative for educators to align with the contemporary emphasis on assessment geared towards learning outcomes. This necessitates their adeptness in evaluating students' progress and utilizing assessment results to enrich the learning process. Particularly in the domain of second/foreign language (L2) education, this focus accentuates the critical role of language assessment literacy (LAL) for teachers, especially those involved in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Recognizing that proficiency in assessment procedures alone may be insufficient without considering teachers' underlying beliefs and attitudes towards language assessment, the authors underscore the necessity of a comprehensive LAL framework. Drawing on Xu and Brown's (2016) LAL model, the researchers developed and validated a scale tailored to assess EFL teachers' affective and theoretical dimensions of assessment literacy, with a specific focus on its relevance in Iranian EFL contexts. Through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses conducted on data collected from 213 Iranian EFL teachers, they observed promising internal consistency and construct validity of the scale, indicating its potential efficacy in evaluating EFL teachers' LAL conceptions and competency levels. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of

teachers' conceptions concerning LAL dimensions and offering implications derived from the research findings.

Latif and Wasim (2022) undertook an investigation into the conceptualizations of assessment literacy, personal theories, and teacher beliefs within the realm of tertiary EFL education. Their objective was to delve into the intricacies of teacher assessment literacy by delving into the assessment-related personal theories, conceptions, and beliefs of practitioners in the tertiary EFL sector. Situated in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, the study engaged in semi-structured interviews with twelve educators from three tertiary educational institutions. Rooted in sociocultural theory and guided by interpretivism, the study employed thematic analysis to scrutinize the data, unveiling a spectrum of viewpoints, intricacies, and ambiguities in teachers' beliefs and personal theories pertaining to assessment and testing. Furthermore, their findings underscored the influence of contextual and institutional variables on teachers' decision-making processes regarding assessment. The implications of their findings resonate within the realms of teacher education and professional development initiatives, especially concerning assessment policy, procedures, and practices.

Based on the mentioned review of literature and the related studies, the following research questions were formulated in the present study.

Q1. Is there any difference between prospective teachers` conceptions of assessment after attending an assessment and evaluation in education course?

Q2. Is there any difference between prospective teachers` choices of assessment tasks after attending an assessment and evaluation in education course?

Q3. Is there any statistically significant relationship between the use of formative assessment strategies and EFL teachers' gender and age.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The whole participants of this study were two hundred EFL university teachers in Mazandaran including, Islamic Azad university of Ayatollah Amoli, Ghaemshahr and Tonekabon branch. They were also from university of Mazandaran and Payamenoor. The prospective teachers studying in the university comprised of male (the male teachers, N= 100), and female subjects (The female teachers, N=100) in Testing classes. All participants' first language was Persian and their age ranged from 25 to 51. The participants had at least two

years' experience in foreign language learning and they were acquainted with the instructional purposes of English learning and teaching in MA and PHD.

3.2 Instrument

Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment Scale

Brown (2008) developed the TCA Scale, which was utilized as a questionnaire in the study. The TCoA-IIIA comprises 27 statements distributed evenly across nine factors, which are categorized into four overarching and interconnected conceptions of assessment: assessment's role in enhancing teaching and learning, grading students, demonstrating school quality, and its perceived irrelevance. Within these major conceptions, two include sub-factors; the improvement conception encompasses four 1st-order factors (enhancing teaching, enhancing learning, validity, describing student learning), while the irrelevance conception includes three 1st-order factors (being disregarded, being detrimental, being inaccurate). Notably, the validity factor incorporates three items conventionally linked to reliability (consistency, trustworthiness, dependability of assessment); these terms are intentionally devoid of technical or statistical jargon and are viewed as integral to validity due to their impact on the interpretations and decisions influenced by the quality of assessment outcomes (Kane, 2006). Respondents are required to utilize a six-point agreement scale skewed towards positive responses, known to elicit discrimination in situations where social desirability may be a factor (Brown, 2004a).

3.3 Procedure

The present study utilized action research as its research methodology, with data being gathered from a cohort of 200 prospective teachers who provided complete responses to the data collection tool. These participants were enrolled in a one-year course on English testing, which spanned the first and second semesters of their teacher education program and was delivered by 10 different instructors following a standardized syllabus. Notably, while the syllabus covered the English testing course content, it did not include assessment as a specific learning topic. The data collection process occurred within the context of the course, with prospective teachers attending the testing classes over a 14-week period during the spring semester of 2018-2019.The researchers actively participated in the testing classes to elucidate the questionnaire process to the participants. Additionally, all teachers involved in the same course on classroom assessment were surveyed during the first week of instruction as part of the regular classroom activities. To facilitate this, participants were requested to complete a TCA Scale questionnaire, with assurances provided regarding the confidentiality of their responses. Subsequently, after

receiving instruction on testing from the teachers, participants engaged in assessment tasks and were given the opportunity to suggest additional assessment tasks if they were not already included in the provided materials. The entire process unfolded over the 14-week duration of the course.

3.4 Data Analysis

The present study utilized quantitative methods, particularly, employing a integration of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, to evaluate the data gathered from the Teaching Competence Assessment (TCA) inventory. Cases with a quantity of missing values exceeding three were not included in the analysis. The missing data were substituted using the expectation maximization procedure as described by Dempster, Laird, and Rubin (1977). Following this, a cumulative sum of 200 instances were retained for subsequent examination. A confirmatory factor analysis employing maximum likelihood estimation of the variance-covariance Pearson correlation matrices was executed using the AMOS software created by Arbuckle (2008) in order to evaluate the validity of the measurement models for the two disparate samples. It is imperative that any adjustments to the models are theoretically grounded and ideally validated on a distinct sample from the identical population, in accordance with the principles outlined by Maruyama (1998). The present investigation involved the development of four unique models, which were then subjected to cross-validation using data sourced from a sample representing a population distinct from the original source.

4. Results

In this chapter statistical analysis is applied in two different methods: (descriptive statistics) and (inferential statistics)). In descriptive statistics due to Measure of Central Tendency and Measure of variability, the subscales (conceptions of assessment) were evaluated in two groups including male and female teachers with the age range of 21 to 51 years old. Then in inferential statistics data was studied to assume their normality. With regard to two assumptions in this study. Multivariate analysis of variance and independent-t statistical methods were applied. In this method, first our presumptions including Homogeneity of variances and Regression slope were studied in both groups and finally the result of two assumptions were obtained. Studying the third assumption, first presumption normality was confirmed, then studied using Pearson correlation method. In the end the result of the third assumption was reported.

Table 1

Descriptive Indicators of Variables According to Gender in Conceptions of Assessment

Variable	Group	minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Assessment improves student learning and teaching	Female teachers	13	19	13.66	1.346
	Male teachers	11	18	12.46	1.628
Assessment is ignored and is inaccurate	Female teachers	12	20	15.91	3.130
	Male teachers	10	19	13.95	2.276
Assessment is bad	Female teachers	12	18	16.83	2.215
	Male teachers	11	16	14.58	4.845
Assessment measures school quality validly	Female teachers	13	18	16.47	4.525
	Male teachers	10	18	13.05	3.769
Assessment grades students	Female teachers	11	20	15.04	3.724
	Male teachers	10	18	13.26	3.412
conceptions of assessment	Female teachers	54	95	78.46	12.077
	Male teachers	52	89	73.23	14.353

The result of descriptive statistics specially Measures of central Tendency including mean and index of dispersion including standard deviation in conceptions of assessment variable.

Table 2
Descriptive Indicator Variables According to Age in Conceptions of Assessment

Variable	Group	minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Assessment improves student learning and teaching	25-35 Years old	18	20	19.41	1.353
	36-51 Years old	17	20	18.03	2.409
Assessment is ignored and is inaccurate	25-35 Years old	18	20	19.69	2.324
	36-51 Years old	15	19	17.88	3.18
Assessment is bad	25-35 Years old	16	20	18.36	2.083
	36-51 Years old	15	20	17.49	2.181
Assessment measures school quality validly	25-35 Years old	16	20	18.85	2.678
	36-51 Years old	16	18	17.75	3.419
Assessment grades students	25-35 Years old	18	20	19.84	1.339
	36-51 Years old	17	20	19.16	1.849
conceptions of assessment	25-35 Years old	67	100	89.85	9.334
	36-51 Years old	63	94	84.34	8.178

The result of descriptive statistics specially Measure of central including mean and index of dispersion including standard deviation in two different age groups.

Table 3

Skewness and Kurtosis Dta and Variable Normality

Variable	Group	Kurtosis		Skewness	
		statistic	Standard error	statistic	Standard error
Assessment improves student learning and teaching	Female teachers	0.485	0.126	-0.513	0.421
	Male teachers	0.442	0.126	-0.618	0.421
Assessment is ignored and is inaccurate	Female teachers	0.591	0.126	-0.301	0.421
	Male teachers	-0.255	0.126	-0.919	0.421
Assessment is bad	Female teachers	0.245	0.126	1.113	0.421
	Male teachers	-0.136	0.126	-0.249	0.421
Assessment measures school quality validly	Female teachers	-0.240	0.126	0.291	0.421
	Male teachers	-0.211	0.126	0.228	0.421
Assessment grades students	Female teachers	-0.116	0.126	0.082	0.421
	Male teachers	0.421	0.126	0.754	0.421
conceptions of assessment	Female teachers	0.743	0.126	1.241	0.421
	Male teachers	0.249	0.126	0.287	0.421
Assessment improves student learning and teaching	25-35 Years old	-0.071	0.240	-0.539	0.476
	36-51 Years old	0.207	0.240	-0.726	0.476
Assessment is ignored and is inaccurate	25-35 Years old	0.093	0.240	-0.222	0.476
	36-51 Years old	-0.104	0.240	-0.212	0.476
Assessment is bad	25-35 Years old	-0.421	0.240	-0.542	0.476
	36-51 Years old	-0.302	0.240	-0.378	0.476
Assessment measures school quality validly	25-35 Years old	-0.510	0.240	-0.269	0.476
	36-51 Years old	-0.312	0.240	-0.304	0.476
Assessment grades students	25-35 Years old	-0.027	0.240	-0.838	0.476
	36-51 Years old	-0.377	0.240	0.049	0.476
conceptions of assessment	25-35 Years old	-0.240	0.240	0.291	0.476
	36-51 Years old	-0.211	0.240	0.228	0.476

According to this table all results obtained from studying Kurtosis and Skewness in range of (-2 to 2) the distribution of variable is not Skewer and kurtosis. To test data normality this data diagnostic method of Kolmogorov-Smirnov was applied that is higher than 0/05 for research variables.

Table 4

Independent-t test in Determining Difference (conception assessment) Between Males and Females

Variable	Means difference	Error differences	Amount of t	Degrees of freedom	Significant
conceptions of assessment	5.230	1.088	3.443	98	0.001

According to table 4, the result of this test indicates a significant difference between conception of assessment (3t=0.443, Op=0.000) in male and female teachers. The outcomes of independent-t test in determining (conception of assessment) difference between two age groups was reported in table 5.

Table 5
Independent-t test in Determining (Conception of Assessment) Difference Between Two Age Groups

Variable	Means difference	Error differences	Amount of t	s of	Degree freedom	Significant
conceptions of assessment	5.510	0.986	5.367		98	0.000

According to table 5, the outcomes of this test revealed a significant difference between conceptions of assessment (5t=0.367Op=0.000) in males and female teachers.

Table 6
Multivariate Analysis of Variance on Male and Female Teachers

Source of variability	Variable	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of squares	Analysis of variance	Significance
Gender group	Assessment improves student learning and teaching	64.525	1	64.525	28.428	0.000
	Assessment is ignored and is inaccurate	0.78	1	0.78	0.569	0.451
	Assessment is bad	54.309	1	54.309	12.751	0.000
	Assessment measures school quality validly	174.801	1	174.801	56.754	0.000
	Assessment grades students	176.246	1	176.246	72.935	0.00

According to table 6, the result of this test indicates that sum of squares between subscales Assessment improves student learning and teaching (28F=0.428, Op=0.000), Assessment is bad (12F=0.751, Op=0.000), Assessment measures school quality, validly (56F=0.754,0p=0.000) and Assessment grades students(72F=0.935) from variable conception of assessment there would be significant difference between male and female teachers. But

between Assessment is ignored and is inaccurate (0F=0.569, 0p=0.451) there wouldn't be any significant difference between male and female.

Table 7
Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) on Variable Between Two Age Groups

Name of test	Amount	Analysis of variance	Degree of freedom question	Degree of freedom error	Significance level
Pillais trace	0.147	13.344	5	94	0.000
Wilks Lambda	0.853	13.344	5	94	0.000
hotellings trace	0.172	13.344	5	94	0.000
The biggest root of the error	0.172	13.344	5	94	0.000

According to table 7, the result of Multivariate analysis of variance is indicated on scores of variable subscales. According to this table all Manava test in level (p<0.001) is significance. Therefore, there would be at least a significant difference between two age groups.

Table 8
Multivariate Analysis of Variance on Subscales (Conceptions of Assessment) Between Two Age Groups

Measure of variability	Variable	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of squares	Analysis of variance	Significance
Age groups	Assessment improves student learning and teaching	530.205	1	530.205	25.101	0.000
	Assessment is ignored and is inaccurate	1031.093	1	1031.09	93.404	0.000
	Assessment is bad	72.608	1	72.608	15.672	0.000
	Assessment measures school quality validly	72.127	1	72.127	4.597	0.033
	Assessment grades students	3448.110	1	3448.11	33.199	0.00

As it is evident from Table 8, the result of this test is indicated there would be a significant different between two age groups in sum of squares between variable subscales.

Table 9
Pearson Correlation Coefficient Matrix Between (the Use of Formative Assessment Strategies and EFL Teachers' Gender and Age

Variable	
1.Assessment improves student	1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
learning and teaching								
2.Assessment is ignored and is inaccurate	0.54**	1						
3.Assessment is bad	0.61**	0.62**	1					
4.Assessment measures school quality validly	0.58**	0.50**	0.60**	1				
5.Assessment grades students	0.49**	0.56**	0.66**	0.70**	1			
6.conceptions of assessment	0.77**	0.79**	0.87**	0.84**	0.80**	1		
7.gender	0.18**	0.19**	0.24**	0.21**	0.22**	0.25**	1	
8.age	0.23**	0.25**	0.19**	0.24**	0.21**	0.29**	0.27**	1

Table 9 depicts a statistically significant positive correlation, specifically observed in the context of the utilization of formative assessment strategies, with respect to the age and gender of EFL instructors. There is a particular emphasis on the correlation between age and the subscale. The results indicate that assessment methodologies significantly influence both student learning and teaching outcomes (23. 0) Furthermore, overlooking or improperly executing assessment practices can result in negative repercussions (25. 0). Furthermore, perceptions of assessment quality vary, with some viewing assessment as detrimental (19.0) while others see it as a valid measure of educational excellence (24.0). Additionally, the act of grading students based on assessments (20.0) and individual conceptions of assessment (29.0) play crucial roles in shaping educational practices. These results are consistent with previous literature highlighting the importance of effective assessment strategies in enhancing educational outcomes (18.0), underscoring the risks associated with disregarding or misusing assessment tools (19.0, 24.0), and emphasizing the multifaceted nature of assessment practices in educational settings (21.0, 22.0, 25.0).

5. Discussion/Conclusion

The study examined the post-course conceptions of assessment among prospective teachers, revealing a significant disparity between male and female teachers' perspectives. Furthermore, the investigation delved into the assessment task preferences of prospective teachers' post-course, indicating a noteworthy difference in the sum of squares between variable subscales across age groups. A noteworthy correlation was found between the use of

formative assessment strategies and the gender and age of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers, exhibiting a particularly robust positive association. Brown's (2004a) study yielded different results, as it failed to demonstrate a statistically significant association between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment conceptions, gender, and age. Additionally, Pishghadam and Shayesteh's (2012) study focused on analyzing the assessment beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers based on Brown's (2008) classification categories, namely Improvement, School accountability, Student accountability, and Irrelevant. The study methodically examined the four assessment concepts pertaining to the cohort of EFL teachers, namely degree, major, gender, age, and experience. The results of the correlation analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the assessment perceptions of EFL educators and their gender. Conversely, Öz (2014) undertook a research endeavor aimed at exploring the inclinations of Turkish educators towards prevalent assessment methods in the EFL instructional setting, alongside their utilization AFL strategies. The study also probed into potential divergences in AFL strategies based on variables such as years of pedagogical experience, gender, and the distinction between public and private school environments. Contrary to the findings of this investigation, Öz's study revealed disparities between male and female teachers, particularly in their predilection for employing monitoring and/or scaffolding techniques in student assessment. The transformation of TCA poses challenges due to its intricate nature influenced by prior experiences, knowledge, and individual beliefs regarding assessment practices (Taber, Riga, Brindley, Winterbottom, Finney & Fisher, 2011). Despite educators advocating for the adoption of assessment for learning to enhance student learning outcomes, teachers encounter impediments in comprehending and implementing assessment practices as intended due to the prevailing testing culture. Consequently, even though educators acknowledge the value of assessment for learning for both themselves and their students, the pervasive high-stakes testing ethos reinforces notions of accountability in school and student evaluations (Levy-Vered&Alhija, 2015; Taber et al., 2011). Hence, aspiring educators grapple with the multifaceted nature of assessment's objectives and methodologies due to the discord between their academic preparation and the practical application of assessment in educational settings. The study's results indicated that even after participating in an assessment course and acquiring a comprehensive understanding of assessment principles, teachers' conceptualizations of assessment, with the exception of the irrelevance perspective, remained unchanged. Correspondingly, prior research has demonstrated that undergoing assessment training or engaging in additional professional development in assessment did not enhance Teaching for Conceptual Change (TCA) (Brown, 2008; Levy-Vered & Alhija, 2015).

Nevertheless, certain studies have shown a positive correlation between teachers' conceptualizations of assessment and their knowledge of assessment, suggesting that post-training, prospective TCA may evolve (e.g., DeLuca, Chavez & Cao, 2013; Smith, Hill, Cowie, & Gilmore, 2014). Notably, the study's findings also revealed a significant improvement in teachers' perception of the relevance of assessment following their participation in the course. Scholars have posited that this shift may be attributed to educators gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities and obstacles associated with integrating assessment practices into their pedagogy, which could potentially lead to a decline in their confidence in assessment, ultimately deeming it as a futile endeavor (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010). Analogous outcomes have been documented in studies conducted in Turkey (Vardar, 2010) and other international contexts (Brown, 2002; 2008). Although the decline in the perception of student accountability was not statistically significant, there was a noticeable trend towards a decrease following the completion of the assessment course. This observation aligns with Vardar's (2010) assertion that prospective educators associate assessment with holding schools and teachers responsible for student learning. Vardar (2010) also noted that an enhancement in the conception of improvement typically follows the student accountability perspective in her research. Concerning the notion of irrelevance, the study indicated that teachers tended to view assessment as an unnecessary procedure post-training. This observation aligns with the conclusions drawn by McGee and Colby (2014) and Siegel and Wisher (2011), whose research examined the influence of assessment courses on the assessment proficiency of prospective educators. Vardar (2010) found that practicing teachers demonstrated a preference for close-ended assessments, such as multiple-choice and matching formats, while demonstrating less propensity for utilizing open-ended assessment methods such as constructed grids, rubrics, and performance tasks. It is imperative to employ a variety of assessment tactics that produce both qualitative and quantitative data in order to ensure equity in measurement and support effective learning methodologies (Izci, 2013; Siegel & Wisher, 2011).

Several educational implications stemming from the findings of this research have been delineated. Initially, it is underscored that the assessment task constitutes a pivotal component of the language teaching and learning continuum. Therefore, it is imperative to meticulously choose and implement suitable strategies and methodologies to enhance this facet. Secondly, the necessity of employing the most fitting approach to streamline the assessment task within the language learning process is emphasized. Thirdly, given that educators devote a significant

portion of their time to instructing students, both teachers and learners must acknowledge the significance of the assessment task as an integral element and accord due consideration to this domain.

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