

## Implementation and Assessment Challenges in Iranian Secondary High School EFL Program

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### Abstract

Paradigm shift in language education has caused many countries including Iran to reshuffle their public EFL educational program. However, such a promising trend in Iran has entailed serious challenges, which necessitated this study aimed at collecting data from 70 teachers and 70 students to investigate the CLT challenges in terms of both teachers' pedagogical and assessment areas. A Partial Least Square Model (PLSM) addressed these two variables. The findings showed that the first three sub-traits of both CLT and testing knowledge have varying contributions to the main latent variables, respectively. Second, Friedman test indicated lack of compatibility between the respective dimensions as to the implementation of the program. Third, the post-hoc comparison tests revealed that teachers perceived CLT significantly lower than the three areas of CLT testing, knowledge of CLT tests and knowledge of developing CLT tests. Also, their knowledge of characteristics of CLT was significantly lower than their perceptions of CLT testing, and knowledge of CLT tests. However, their knowledge of the characteristics of CLT was not significantly different from that of developing CLT tests. Finally, their knowledge of techniques in CLT was significantly lower than their perceptions of CLT testing, knowledge of CLT tests, and knowledge of developing CLT tests. In sum, the Iranian public EFL program still suffers from both implementation and assessment challenges necessitating remedial teacher education program.

**Keywords:** Iranian EFL program, teachers' knowledge of CLT, summative test validity, Prospects series

### **Introduction**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), developed due to the dissatisfaction of methodologists and applied linguists with the Grammar-Translation and Audio Lingual Methods of language teaching (Maftoon, 2002), is probably the most important development in the history of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Aimed at improving students' communicative competence, CLT focuses mainly on the message rather than on the form. According to Rodgers (2001, as cited in Maftoon, 2002), "the most salient feature of CLT classroom is its realistic use of the English language" (p. 3). In other words, in contrast to traditional approaches such as Grammar-Translation and Audio Lingual Methods, CLT emphasizes communicative situations and tasks rather than grammatical forms through students' social interactions. Nunan (1991, cited in Bal, 2006) characterizes CLT classrooms as follows:

- An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language;
- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation;
- The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself;
- An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning; and
- An attempt to link classroom language learning to language activation outside the classroom. (p. 279)

At a short glance, it is revealed that English language, according to Nimehchisalem, Abbasi, Ebrahimzadeh, and Kalajahi (2015), as in many other parts of the world, is taught as an EFL in both public and private systems. Publicly, its syllabus was designed in a traditional way, putting more emphasis on grammatical rules, reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and translation skills in a highly exam-oriented context with "limited attention paid to students' listening, speaking and particularly writing skills in their actual sense" (p. 96). Privately, English is taught in private language institutes. Some students take part in these private language institutes to get prepared for international English tests and improve their communicative competence. Therefore,

"due to the shortcomings of the formal EFL program at schools to fulfill the practical needs of the learners on one hand, and the need for learning English to satisfy these communicative needs on the other, an increasing number of EFL institutes have been developed throughout the country" (Akbari, 2015, p. 395).

Obviously, the public system, suffering from so many problems (Dahmardeh, 2009; as cited in Gharbavi, 2014, p. 66), “does not equip the graduates with communicative ability in English”. Moreover, according to Akbari (2015), in line with the Iranian EFL program, till the introduction of CLT program, the teachers were highly exam-oriented in their approach and deviated from communicative purposes. As a proof, Khaniya (1990) claims that “a large number of teachers help students cope with examinations in order to preserve their reputation as good teachers” (p. 397), which held true with regard to Iranian educational system. Additionally, ELT textbooks, the “Right Path to English” ( the previous textbook series), were suggested by the Ministry of Education and widely incorporated into the public EFL program for years. The students used to be taught and assessed as set by the syllabus and the textbooks content.

Recently, global trend and public dissatisfactions have forced the curriculum developers to comply with the CLT approach. As a first initiative, the newly developed textbooks, the “ Prospect Series”, have been developed and introduced to public EFL education system in a bid to implement CLT approach. Pedagogically, the implementation of the new approach and teaching based on the Prospect Series require collaboration and help of schools to equip the classes with computers, projectors, and audio system on one hand, and well-prepared EFL teachers in terms of CLT-oriented teaching-testing knowledge on the other. Contrary to the omen initiative realized in the development and introduction of the CLT-oriented materials and changes in the educational approach among the foreign language teaching policy-makers and curriculum developers, the EFL program in the Iranian public system is still facing certain challenges. Amongst many, the status-quo of the respective teachers' knowledge of CLT and assessment system compatible with the CLT principles on one hand, and with the content, objectives and structure of the newly introduced textbooks on the other, deserve special attention.

An effective teacher, following CLT principles, is supposed to have a good command of a set of EFL/ESL teacher’s language teaching standards including:

1. **Standard I.** The ESL teacher understands fundamental language concepts and knows the structure and conventions of the English language.
1. **Standard II.** The ESL teacher has knowledge of the foundations of ESL education and factors that contribute to an effective multicultural and multilingual learning environment.

2. **Standard III.** The ESL teacher understands the processes of first- and second-language acquisition and uses this knowledge to promote students' language development in English.
3. **Standard IV.** The ESL teacher understands ESL teaching methods and uses this knowledge to plan and implement effective, developmentally appropriate ESL instruction.
4. **Standard V.** The ESL teacher has knowledge of the factors that affect ESL students' learning of academic content, language, and culture.
5. **Standard VI.** The ESL teacher understands formal and informal assessment procedures and instruments (language proficiency and academic achievement) used in ESL programs and uses assessment results to plan and adapt instruction.
6. **Standard VII.** The ESL teacher knows how to serve as an advocate for ESL students and facilitate family and community involvement in their education. [www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id &ItemID](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID).

In their study, Abbasian and Ebrahimi (2015) found that first, Iranian teachers are less reflective. Second, they possess some acceptable degree of knowledge of the standards and apply it in their teaching, but their degree of knowledge of the standards and their application do not correlate much with their reflective nature in teaching. In the same vein, Abbasian and Zare (2104) came to the conclusion that the teachers believe that they have an acceptable level of knowledge of the EFL/ESL standards and their application although they claimed that their knowledge of EFL/ESL standards and their application are beyond expectation. That is to say, the teachers significantly avoided taking a neutral or negative attitude toward their knowledge and application of EFL/ESL standards. Their conceptions of teaching and learning were derived mainly from their own learning and teaching experiences and other contextual factors. Additionally, according to Gharbavi (2014), although many teachers claim that they are CLT teachers, there are many obstacles in the way of using CLT pedagogy due to the inadequacy and lack of knowledge, training, and practice in CLT methods. So, both students and their parents claim that students are not taught communication skills to prepare them for their future career or pursuing their studies (Fazel & Aghamolaei, 2011, as cited in Gharbavi, 2014).

Similarly, teachers' testing and assessment procedures, though rarely, have also been addressed. Regarding this issue, Akbari (2015) believes that:

School authorities and parents in Iran believe that good schools are schools that generate high grades on

standardized tests. Since teachers are aware that their students' outcome is an indicator of the quality of their work, accountability purposes of assessment might dominate teachers' assessment beliefs. Although teachers are encouraged to use formative assessment during the school year, they seldom utilize this assessment type. (p. 398)

The dominance of discrete point (DP) tests and summative testing of students' learning in Iranian secondary school indicates that Iranian EFL teachers still concentrates on an incompatible approach of assessment with that of the teaching. In a nutshell, "the focus is still on students' performance on exams rather than their performance in real life situation" (p. 399). Obviously, testing or assessment system seems to suffer from validity issues.

According to Hughes (1989, as cited in Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 4), "validity in testing and assessment has traditionally been understood to mean discovering whether a test measure accurately what is intended to measure". More specifically, through the validity of a test, specific conclusions or predictions about people can be made based on obtained scores. As a matter of fact, the quality of test interpretation and its use can be clarified by test validity. According to Sartori and Pasini (2007), validity is the most significant consideration in the evaluation of tests. Based on the definition of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1985) the concept of validity refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inferences from the test scores.

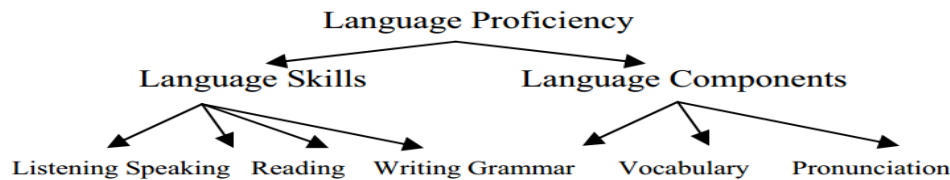
More directly, Razmjoo (2011) , running a content analysis of the Iranian English test of public schools, showed that different language components are tested in discrete items within every limited context of language use. According to Razmjoo, although the aim of English textbooks used in Iranian private institutes is to develop all language skills in the learners, specifically speaking and writing skills, they are not included in the tests, probably due to the problems and difficulties that they have in administration and scoring. Furthermore, the tests seem to focus mostly on the students' reading comprehension skills and knowledge of vocabulary and grammar as the need for getting passing scores on the tests. Thus, it can be concluded that the EFL testing program in the Iranian public school system does not represent the communicative language ability model proposed. In the same vein, Razmjoo (2011) states that "the elements of CLT are not represented and practiced in the tests constructed by the Iranian

testers” (p. 94), and the public and private schools do not differ to a great extent in terms of testing system and neither of the tests taps all the CLT components. In general, they suffer from the following shortcomings:

- Neither of the two tests is as accurate a reflection of the real situation as possible. They, therefore, are not context-specific.
- Both tests are quantitative rather than qualitative. They follow the behaviorist view that learning takes place through habit formation. As such, they do not reveal the quality of the testee’s language performance. (p. 95)

According to Razmjoo (2011), in Iranian education system most of the class time is spent on teaching and the multiple-choice, wh-questions, reading comprehension, fill-in-the-blanks, and true-false items are the most prevalent test formats. These types of tests just focus on language accuracy, evaluation of students’ knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures, and their reading ability in the textbooks. Therefore, teachers fail to combine communication skills which are important in evaluating students’ real use of the language knowledge in their tests. Kiany, Mahdavy, and Ghafar Samar (2011) mention that since the tests cover reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar, “teachers main tasks are: providing Persian equivalents for new words, translating the text, making the students translate, explaining grammar, and making students do written exercises at home, and finally giving feedback on the accuracy of their answers...” (p. 464). Moreover, “the use of discreet- point, paper and pencil test, decontextualized test items reduce the communicative qualities of sample tests which shows total mismatch between the instructional approach of the teachers and their assessment practices” (Punitha Gopal & bin Embi, 2014, p. 359). Basically these types of tests do not include all the language components which are needed in the communicative language tests and assessing students’ speaking and listening ability are totally ignored in the tests.

In a bid to address the mentioned shortcomings, Razmjoo (2011) proposed the model which Iranian test constructors and designers top use it while preparing items for both Iranian public and private schools, as represented in Figure 1.



*Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.1: A Proposed Language Proficiency Model for the Iranian Context*

Incorporating CLT program into Iranian public EFL courses has raised various concerns. Amongst them, one may refer to the Iranian public sector EFL teachers' knowledge of CLT principles and their perceptions towards these principles. Rationally, teacher's knowledge determines teachers' in-action. The second main concern with the Prospects Series-aligned tests and testing is the dominance of a chaotic atmosphere. According to Ghorbani (2009), "the highly standardized national tests force both teachers and learners to focus only on structural or formal grammatical features of English since these are the ones needed to perform well in the exams" (p. 131). There is then a concern that the tests designed either centrally or mainly by the teachers do not still watch or represent the context and objectives of the newly introduced textbooks. In other words, the tests suffer from various validity concerns since measuring students' communication ability in real life contexts and constructing CLT tests are different from testing students' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Thus, the degree of match between the course content and the content of a test is under the question.

Given the stated status quo, the assumption is that the teachers are neither well-prepared nor educated to meet the objectives set in the newly suggested textbooks as their status of CLT-based teaching-testing knowledge is not satisfactorily compatible with each other. So, they are not valid enough in-action in terms of teaching and more specifically in terms of developing valid assessment mechanisms in the form of summative tests. Hence, to gain insights regarding the status and nature of CLT-based teaching and testing in Iran, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: What is the Iranian EFL teachers' status and nature of CLT-based teaching and testing knowledge like?

RQ2: Are the dimensions of Iranian EFL teachers' CLT-based teaching and testing knowledge significantly compatible with each other?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study included two main groups of Iranian English teachers and Junior High School students. The teachers' groups consisted of 30 male and 40 female Iranian Junior High School English teachers holding BA (40 teachers) and MA (30 teachers) in TEFL or Translation Studies who were involved in teaching the Prospect Series at least for two years. Meanwhile, a sample of 70 students was also interviewed as to the testing and assessment quality.

### **Instrumentation**

To investigate the research questions, two instruments were employed:

*Questionnaire:* A researcher-made questionnaire, comprised of 52 items, concerned with teachers' knowledge of teaching and testing CLT and summative testing was designed, checked in terms of content validity by four experts in language testing and education, and then employed for the main purposes. The questionnaire measured six latent variables: teachers' perceptions of CLT (items 1-10), knowledge of the characteristics of CLT (items 11-20), knowledge about techniques to be used in CLT (items 21-30), teachers' perceptions of CLT testing system (items 31-35), knowledge of the characteristics of CLT testing (items 36-47), and knowledge to develop summative testing (items 47-52).

*Semi-structured interview:* an interview with open-ended questions probing in-depth understanding of the teachers' knowledge of teaching - testing CLT and summative testing was prepared. It was also used to reflect the students' ideas about on-going English language test format and content at the end of semester in Iranian Junior High Schools. The interview consisted of four main macro-points, drawn from the literature in language testing (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 2006) which were checked following the expert advice on validity principles. However, in the process of the interview, some on-the-spot elaborations and or sub-questions were raised to collect comprehensive data:

1. The extent to which the teachers possess CLT knowledge.
2. The extent to which the testing and teaching systems match.
3. The extent to which the test contents match the textbooks contents.



4. The extent to which the testing system measures the communicative ability.

**Procedure**

First, the questionnaire was distributed to 70 male and female Iranian English teachers who volunteered to participate in this study for collecting quantitative data. Second, to collect the qualitative data, 50 Junior High School English teachers and 70 Junior High School students attended the semi-structured interview. The interview with each participant took about 8-10 minutes.

**Design**

Given the nature of the variables, purpose and the research questions, this study was conducted in the light of mixed methods research in the sense that the variables posed through the first research question were addressed more descriptively, while those addressed through the second research question were investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively.

**Results*****Research Question One: CLT-based Teaching-Testing Knowledge Status***

The first research question addressed the status and nature of teachers' CLT-based teaching and testing knowledge as to implementing the Prospects Series. To do so, a Partial Least Square Model (PLSM) was used to show the relationships between two major latent variables of this study; Knowledge of Teaching-Testing CLT and Knowledge of Summative Testing. Each of the two major latent variables was measured through three minor latent variables which in turn were measured using different number of items (Figure 2).

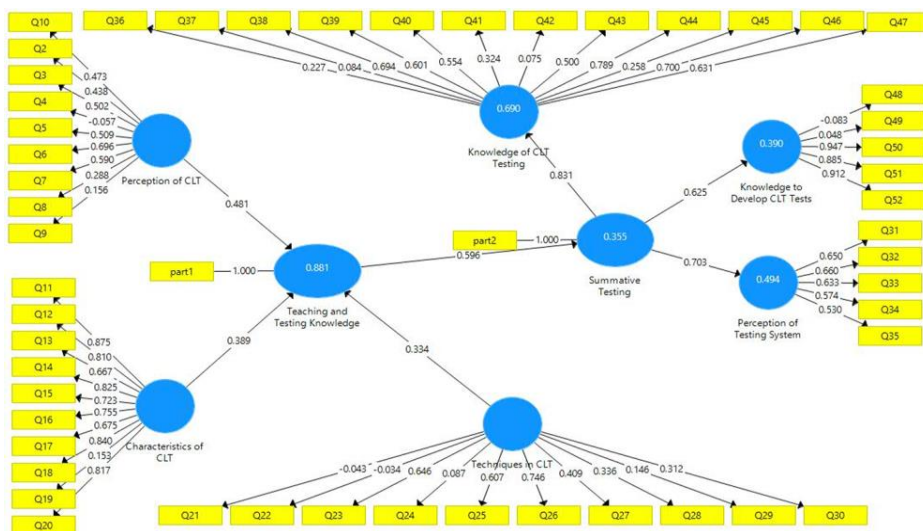


Figure 2: Relationships between Dimensions Knowledge of Teaching and Testing CLT and Knowledge of Summative Testing

Furthermore, a Partial Least Square Model (PLSM) was run to probe the validity of the summative tests developed for the Iranian secondary school assessment system of EFL program (based on Prospect series). First, the Knowledge of Teaching-Testing CLT was measured through three sub-traits (i.e., CLT perceptions; Knowledge of CLT characteristics and CLT techniques). The results are as follows:

1) As Table 1 shows, the first major latent variable addressed through ten (1-10) items focusing on the teachers’ perceptions s of CLT, had varying contributions ranging from weak, moderate to strong contributions to the teachers’ Knowledge of Teaching-Testing CLT.

Table 1

*Items’ Contribution to Teachers’ Perceptions s of CLT*

| Item | Loading | Quality         |
|------|---------|-----------------|
| 1    | ---     | No contribution |
| 2    | .473    | Moderate        |
| 3    | .438    | Moderate        |
| 4    | .502    | Large           |
| 5    | -.057   | Weak            |
| 6    | .509    | Large           |
| 7    | .696    | Large           |
| 8    | .590    | Large           |
| 9    | .288    | Weak            |
| 10   | .156    | Weak            |

2) The second major latent variable, teachers' knowledge of characteristics of CLT addressed through ten other items, as indicated in Table 2, had mainly large contributions to the teachers' Knowledge of Teaching-Testing CLT.

Table 2  
*Items' Contribution to Characteristics of CLT*

| Item | Loading | Quality |
|------|---------|---------|
| 1    | .875    | Large   |
| 2    | .810    | Large   |
| 3    | .667    | Large   |
| 4    | .825    | Large   |
| 5    | .723    | Large   |
| 6    | .755    | Large   |
| 7    | .675    | Large   |
| 8    | .840    | Large   |
| 9    | .153    | Weak    |
| 10   | .817    | Large   |

3) As Table 3 shows, the third major latent variable, that is, teachers' knowledge of CLT techniques, to be used in a communicative class enjoyed similar picture as presented in Table 1, ranging from weak, moderate to strong contribution to the teachers' Knowledge of Teaching-Testing CLT.

Table 3  
*Items' Contribution to Teachers' Knowledge of CLT Techniques*

| Item | Loading | Quality  |
|------|---------|----------|
| 1    | -.043   | Weak     |
| 2    | -.034   | Weak     |
| 3    | .646    | Large    |
| 4    | .087    | Weak     |
| 5    | .607    | Large    |
| 6    | .746    | Large    |
| 7    | .409    | Moderate |
| 8    | .336    | Moderate |
| 9    | .146    | Weak     |
| 10   | .312    | Moderate |

In sum, the result, displayed in Table 4, revealed that the three variables of knowledge of teaching and testing CLT (perceptions of CLT,

knowledge of characteristics of CLT, and techniques to be used in CLT) had moderate contributions to their latent variable.

Table 4  
*Dimensions of Teaching and Testing Knowledge*

| Item                                | Loading | Quality  |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Perceptions of CLT                  | .483    | Moderate |
| Knowledge of Characteristics of CLT | .389    | Moderate |
| Techniques to be used in CLT        | .334    | Moderate |

Second, teachers' knowledge of summative testing was measured through three sub-traits (i.e., knowledge of characteristics of CLT testing, perceptions of CLT testing system and knowledge to develop CLT tests).

The results are as follows:

- 1) The first major latent variable, teachers' knowledge of characteristics of CLT testing, had large contribution to the teachers' knowledge of summative testing (Table 5).

Table 5  
*Items' Contribution to Teachers' Knowledge of CLT Testing*

| Item | Loading | Quality  |
|------|---------|----------|
| 1    | .227    | Weak     |
| 2    | .084    | Weak     |
| 3    | .694    | Large    |
| 4    | .601    | Large    |
| 5    | .554    | Large    |
| 6    | .324    | Moderate |
| 7    | .075    | Weak     |
| 8    | .500    | Large    |
| 9    | .789    | Large    |
| 10   | .258    | Weak     |
| 11   | .700    | Large    |
| 12   | .631    | Large    |

- 2) The second major latent variable, the teachers' perceptions of CLT testing system, had large contributions to the teachers' knowledge of summative testing (Table 6).

Table 6  
*Items' Contribution to Teachers' Perceptions of CLT Testing System*

| Item | Loading | Quality |
|------|---------|---------|
| 1    | .650    | Large   |
| 2    | .660    | Large   |
| 3    | .633    | Large   |
| 4    | .574    | Large   |
| 5    | .530    | Large   |

3) The third major latent variable, teachers' knowledge to develop summative testing, had large contributions to the teachers' knowledge of summative testing (Table7).

Table 7  
*Items' Contribution to Teachers' Knowledge to Develop CLT Tests*

| Item | Loading | Quality |
|------|---------|---------|
| 1    | -.083   | Weak    |
| 2    | .048    | Weak    |
| 3    | .948    | Large   |
| 4    | .885    | Large   |
| 5    | .912    | Large   |

As displayed in Table 8, the three variables of knowledge of summative testing(i.e. knowledge of characteristics of CLT testing, perceptions of CLT testing system and knowledge to develop CLT tests) had large contributions to their latent variable.

Table 8  
*Dimensions of Summative Testing*

| Item  | Loading | Quality |
|---|---------|---------|
| Knowledge of Characteristics of CLT Testing | .831    | Large   |
| Perceptions of CLT Testing System           | .703    | Large   |
| Knowledge to Develop CLT Tests              | .625    | Large   |

Statistically speaking, it can be claimed that the Iranian teachers' have an acceptable level of knowledge of CLT summative testing while their teaching and testing knowledge of CLT together enjoy a moderate position.

As a triangulating effort, a semi-structured one-on-one interview was conducted with 70 students to investigate their ideas about on-going English language test format and content at the end of the semester in Iranian Junior High Schools to verify the areas of validity failure on the summative tests developed for the Iranian secondary school assessment system of EFL

program (based on the Prospects Series). As displayed in Table 9, the analysis of the provided data revealed eight main themes, indicating a range of frequency mainly above %50 (i.e., %57-%89) except for two cases (i.e., % 41 and %47, respectively).

Table 9  
*Students' Ideas about On-Going English Language Test Format and Content*

| <b>Extracted Themes</b>  | <b>%</b> |
|--|----------|
| Students have clear understanding of test items.   | 89       |
| Test items the same way as in the class they exercise.   | 70       |
| Test items take the relative importance of all skills into consideration .                                     | 41       |
| There is correspondence between what students taught in the class and what they are tested on.                 | 64       |
| Test items resemble real language use to check students' performance in authentic and communicative contexts . | 47       |
| Test items are relevant to the course book content .   | 57       |
| There is an overall match between the test items and related teaching materials.                               | 59       |
| Test items are at the students' proficiency level.   | 83       |

The students' perceptions and evaluations of the testing procedure relatively endorse those of the teachers' themselves. However, the test samples by themselves have to be empirically evaluated to verify the validity in practice.

### ***Research Question Two: CLT-based Teaching-Testing Knowledge Compatibility***

The non-parametric Friedman test was run to probe the second research hypothesis to know if the Iranian EFL teachers' teaching and testing knowledge dimensions required for the implementation of the new system of EFL program based on the newly developed textbooks series (the Prospects) are compatible. For this purpose, the EFL teachers' mean ranks on the perceptions of CLT, characteristics of CLT, techniques in CLT, perceptions of CLT testing system, knowledge of CLT testing and knowledge to develop CLT tests were compared.

As showed in Table 10 and Figure 2, the results of the Friedman test indicated that there were significant differences between the EFL teachers' knowledge of CLT versus its testing system and the EFL teachers'

knowledge on CLT and its testing system were not compatible. Thus, the second null-hypothesis was rejected.

Table 10  
Friedman’s Test; EFL Teachers’ Teaching and Testing Knowledge

|                            | Mean Rank | Chi-square | Df | P    |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------|----|------|
| Perceptions of CLT         | 3.74      | 81.216     | 5  | .000 |
| Characteristics of CLT     | 4.44      |            |    |      |
| Techniques in CLT          | 3.65      |            |    |      |
| Perceptions of CLT Testing | 2.10      |            |    |      |
| Knowledge of CLT Tests     | 2.81      |            |    |      |
| Develop CLT Tests          | 4.26      |            |    |      |

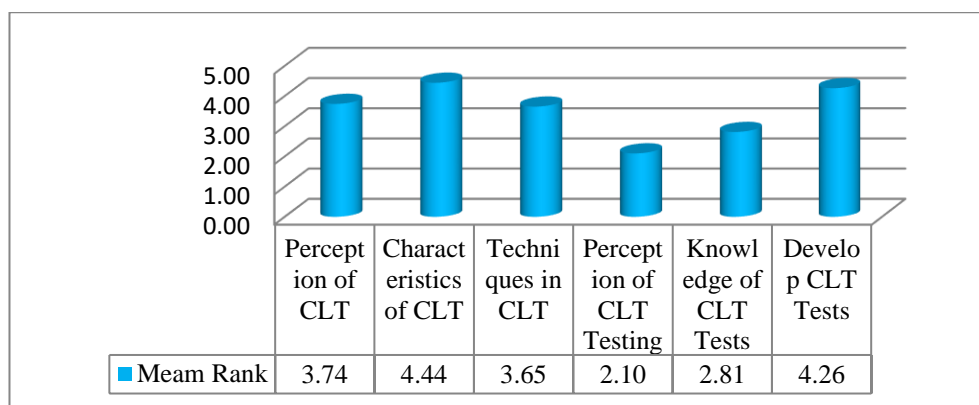


Figure 2: Friedman’s Test: EFL Teachers Teaching and Testing Knowledge

Furthermore, the results of the post-hoc comparison tests displayed in Table 11 indicate that the teachers’ perceptions of CLT were significantly lower than their perceptions of CLT testing, knowledge of CLT tests and knowledge of developing CLT tests. Also, their knowledge of characteristics of CLT was significantly lower than their perceptions of CLT testing, and knowledge of CLT tests. However, their knowledge of characteristics of CLT was not significantly different from the knowledge of developing CLT tests. Finally, the knowledge of techniques in CLT was significantly lower than their perceptions of CLT testing, knowledge of CLT tests, and knowledge of developing CLT tests.

Table 11  
*Post-Hoc Comparison Test of Friedman Results*

| Teaching               | Vs.   | Testing                    | Z     | Asymp. Sig.<br>(2-tailed) |
|------------------------|-------|----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| Perceptions of CLT     | <...> | Perceptions of CLT Testing | -5.76 | 0.000                     |
| Perceptions of CLT     | <...> | Knowledge of CLT Tests     | -3.86 | 0.000                     |
| Perceptions of CLT     | <...> | Develop CLT Tests          | -2.95 | 0.003                     |
| Characteristics of CLT | <...> | Perceptions of CLT Testing | -5.41 | 0.000                     |
| Characteristics of CLT | <...> | Knowledge of CLT Tests     | -5.07 | 0.000                     |
| Characteristics of CLT | <...> | Develop CLT Tests          | -1.35 | 0.176                     |
| Techniques in CLT      | <...> | Perceptions of CLT Testing | -5.34 | 0.000                     |
| Techniques in CLT      | <...> | Knowledge of CLT Tests     | -2.72 | 0.006                     |
| Techniques in CLT      | <...> | Develop CLT Tests          | -2.79 | 0.005                     |

### Discussion

Following the paradigm shift in Iranian public EFL program from the conventional form oriented syllabus to CLT-based trend, policies and practices were set to be aligned with the theoretical orientations. To this end, appropriate materials under a textbook series called the Prospects and Visions have been incorporated into the system. However, major concerns as to the teachers' qualifications and the pedagogical applications are prevalent, which inspired the motive behind this study. Therefore, this very study was designed to follow double interrelated purposes: 1) the Iranian EFL teachers' status and nature of CLT-based teaching and testing knowledge, and 2) the compatibility of the dimensions of their CLT-based teaching and testing knowledge.

To address the purposes, a Partial Least Square Model (PLSM) and non-parametric Friedman test were, along with an interview, were run. The findings supported the existence of an acceptable level of knowledge of CLT summative testing, but a moderate level of the integrative knowledge of teaching and testing. Such a trend indicates the teachers' knowledge in theory and claim as to the compatibility with the principles of CLT and an index of theory-based validity (Weir, 2005). However, posterior validity of the tests developed and administered to address and meet the recently introduced textbooks requires empirical endeavors.

Many results of this study support the findings of the studies done on test content validity (Amiri; Birjandi, 2015; Jamilfar, Heidari, & Chalak, 2014; Nakamura, 2006, & Razmjoo, 2011). They have attempted to examine the content validity of tests and teachers' knowledge of teaching-testing CLT and the result revealed that tests have enough validity. Furthermore, the content representativeness and relevance in test items are



of high importance and the perceptions of teachers related to course material representativeness was moderate to high. However, the results are also contrary to the studies done on content validity (e.g., Delgado-Rico, Carretero-Dios & Ruch, 2012; Razmjoo & Heidari Tabrizi, 2010) which showed that the tests are “invalid, and non-standardized with lots of problems in terms of principles of testing in general and test construction in particular” (Razmjoo, 2011).

Furthermore, the result of this study proved that, first, the components of the developed summative test for Iranian Junior High School highly contributed to the validity of the test while teachers had a moderate teaching and testing knowledge. Therefore, the tests developed for the Iranian Junior High School enjoy a moderate validity which may practically be due to “the traditional way of language testing in many schools which remains practical and fails to integrate communication skills that are important in evaluating students’ real use of the language knowledge” (Punitha Gopal & bin Embi, 2014) or due to the teachers’ limited knowledge about the concept of validity. Moreover, test developers have little attention to the elements of language testing, specifically communicative language testing while constructing the tests and there is a little correspondence between the materials taught in the class and what the students are tested on. Thus, there is usually mismatch between validity theory and practice.

Second, there were significant differences between the EFL teachers’ knowledge of CLT versus its testing system. Incompatibility in these two areas may be due to the teachers’ limited knowledge and training in CLT which leads to teachers’ having difficulties in implementing CLT-based practices in the classroom thus, Iranian Junior High School English teachers need to have some in-service courses in CLT. Furthermore, teachers should pay attention to the fact that CLT concentrates mainly on classroom activities and the main purpose of this approach is developing students’ four skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) in a communicative context. Teachers also should be aware that CLT is not focusing only on the learners’ reading ability and their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary among all language components as the requirement for obtaining passing scores on the tests; although they are necessary for effective communication, the role of communication should not be ignored. Moreover, the teacher-made tests, constructed by the Iranian English teachers, are not an accurate reflection of the real-life situation. Therefore, some of the basic principles of language testing are not incorporated into the

process of constructing the test that is in sharp contrast with CLT testing (Bachman, 1990) and communicative language tests.

Third, Iranian English teachers are not well trained in CLT, so they need well-structured training programs to receive pre-service and in-service training to deal with the changes brought in EFL course books and methodologies. Therefore, Iranian education system should train or re-train English language teachers in CLT by conducting in-service teacher education programs and teach them how to use CLT and the role of teachers in communicative language teaching to facilitate communication process and act as independent participant in their classroom.

Fourth, the teacher-made tests in Iranian Junior High School do not accurately check the students' performance in real-life situations due to the lack of test items which resemble direct and communicative contexts. Furthermore, most of the tests are made in traditional styles and the role of communication is largely ignored. Moreover, the students stated that test items are to some extent similar to the course book content and what they exercise in the classroom, so there is a moderate correspondence between what they receive in the class and what are tested on.

The findings imply for the teachers to be aware of their position in terms of familiarity with the ESL standards, knowledge CLT-based approach and CLT-based testing as their contributions to each other have turned them into unitary concept and construct. Curriculum developers are also given insights so that they pay due practical attention to EFL teacher education aligned with the current public EFL paradigm in order to fill the gap between the two macro variables required to warrant effective EFL teachers.

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