



Exploring the Impact of Reflection-for-Action on Iranian EFL Teachers' Language Assessment Literacy

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Abstract

In the realm of language education, the efficacy of reflection-for-action on the enhancement of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) among teachers is crucial. LAL, signifying the capability of educators to craft, manage, and decipher language tests, is an integral component of effective pedagogy. This study dives deep into its impact on English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Iran. Embracing a rigorous pretest-treatment-posttest framework, the research engaged 60 EFL educators from two renowned language institutions in central Iran. These educators were systematically segmented into experimental and control factions. Employing a meticulously crafted LAL inventory, alterations in educators' literacy were gauged. Encouragingly, both clusters highlighted an upswing in post-test scores. However, it was discernible that reflection-for-action had a more pronounced positive influence on the experimental group, especially in realms such as "Administering, Scoring, and Interpreting the Results of Assessment" and "Using Results of Assessment for Grading". Conversely, it had a minimal effect on "Recognizing Unethical Methods of Assessment. These revelations not only accentuate the potency of reflection-for-action in amplifying LAL but also illuminate pathways for the evolution of professional refinement strategies for language pedagogues.

Keywords: Reflection-for-Action, Language Assessment Literacy, refinement strategies, language pedagogy, assessment Practices

INTRODUCTION

In the quest for professional enhancement, second language (L2) educators, like professionals in various fields, seek constant progress and growth (Johnson, 2009; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Thompson, 2021). Reflective teaching stands as a recognized approach to achieving such ambitions (Farrell, 2015). It encompasses a structured process where teachers critically evaluate their instructional methodologies, underlying beliefs, and assumptions to fine-tune

their teaching techniques (Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Schön, 1983). Engaging in this self-reflection allows educators to appraise the effectiveness of their practices and their impact on student outcomes (Hatton & Smith, 1995). As a catalyst for continuous professional development, reflective teaching prompts educators to modify and amplify their methods, drawing from in-depth analyses of classroom incidents (Korthagen, 2017; Brookfield, 1995).

Simultaneously, Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) is integral to the professional

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development of language teachers (Kremmel & Harding, 2020; Popham, 2009). LAL defines the educators' ability to design, conduct, and interpret tests across varied educational settings (Fulcher, 2012). It embodies understanding of testing methods, foundational principles, and assessment protocols (Stiggins, 1991). Educators well-versed in LAL possess a holistic view of the assessment trajectory, from discerning assessed elements to ensuring the assessments' validity and reliability (Stiggins, 1991). Notably, discrepancies in LAL proficiencies among teachers can influence their pedagogical efficiency (Cumming, 2009; Cheng et al., 2004; Alkharusi et al., 2011; Tsagari & Vogt, 2017; Homayounzadeh & Razmjoo, 2021).

While both reflective teaching and LAL are paramount in language education's professional development landscape, their synergistic relationship and its implications for pedagogy and learner outcomes have attracted academic interest (Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018; Babaii & Asadnia, 2019; Lee, Goldenberg, & Williams, 2023). Nonetheless, the literature reveals a discernible void concerning reflection-for-action's effect on educators' LAL. This study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by delving into reflection-for-action's influence on EFL instructors' LAL. Anchored by the principle of reflection-for-action, which emphasizes using reflective insights to guide forthcoming educational decisions (Farrell, 2013, 2014), this research aims to equip teachers with tools to adeptly shape classroom evaluations. By exploring the nexus between reflection-for-action and LAL, this study aspires to augment the existing academic discourse, presenting novel perspectives on reflection-for-action's role in nurturing educators' assessment acumen.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

Reflective Teaching and its Evolutions

Reflective teaching has emerged as a pivotal approach in the sphere of professional development within education. Schön's (1983, 1987) foundational work distinguished between 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action', where the former represents spontaneous reflection during teaching instances and the latter involves post-instructional contemplation

to understand past experiences. Building on these notions is the more proactive 'reflection for action' approach, which focuses on using reflective insights to inform and guide future teaching endeavors (Farrell, 2013, 2014). This particular approach's potency lies in its forward-looking nature, emphasizing the importance of historical and reflective insights from the classroom in shaping upcoming pedagogical endeavors (Farrell, 2018; Killion & Todnem, 1991).

Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)

A vital dimension in language pedagogy, LAL encapsulates the competence required to design, fine-tune, and administer language evaluations, both in broad standardized contexts and individual classroom environments (Fulcher, 2012). Beyond the mechanics of assessment, LAL delves into an understanding of evaluative reasoning, emotional paradigms, and a robust sense of self-efficacy related to assessment exercises (Xu & Brown, 2016). A comprehensive grasp of LAL not only involves understanding the testing mechanics but also the foundational principles and protocols governing effective and valid assessment (Stiggins, 1991).

Empirical Studies

Historical research on the confluence of reflective teaching and LAL has offered intriguing insights. Pioneering works by Ashraf and Zolfaghari (2018), Babaii, and Asadnia (2019) provided initial glimpses into the potential symbiotic relationship between reflective methodologies and assessment literacy. Babaii and Asadnia (2019) utilized qualitative techniques to unveil the transformative potential of reflection, suggesting that it serves as a medium for re-evaluating and refining assessment philosophies and strategies.

Lee et al.'s (2023) exploration stands out as a significant contributor in this domain, emphasizing professional development's role in nurturing LAL skills. Their findings indicate that structured interventions enhance educators' LAL proficiency, leading to sophisticated assessment techniques that resonate with pedagogical aspirations. Yet, despite these advances, a discernible gap remains. While previous

studies have touched on the nexus between reflective teaching and LAL, there is a conspicuous lack of deep dives into the specific influence of 'reflection-for-action' on the LAL capabilities of educators. This present study endeavors to illuminate this relatively uncharted territory, exploring how 'reflection-for-action' can shape and enhance educators' LAL acumen.

METHOD

Participants

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed to gather participants, emphasizing specificity in the data collection process. Sixty EFL instructors were selectively drawn from various language training centers situated in central Iran, based on their receptiveness to participate in the research.

Table 1
Demographic Overview of Study Participants

No. of Participants	60
Gender	43 Females, 17 Males
Native Language	Persian
Major	TEFL
Degree	MA - 49, Ph.D. – 11

Initial evaluations ensured that participants met specific criteria such as advanced linguistic proficiency, a teaching experience threshold of

five years, and prior completion of a Teacher Training Course (TTC).

Materials and Instruments

This research integrated a mixed-methods framework to delve into the effect of reflection-for-action on the Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) of EFL educators. The methodology predominantly leaned on a quantitative paradigm, using a within subject, quasi-experimental design. The process included initial and subsequent assessments. Semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Clark, 2017) provided qualitative insights, augmenting the quantitative findings and offering a comprehensive view. The study utilized two main instruments: a structured questionnaire focusing on teachers' perception of assessment literacy and semi-structured interviews. These tools, when used in tandem, ensured a holistic data collection approach, enhancing the study's reliability and validity (Riazi & Candlin, 2014).

LAL Inventory

To ascertain the consistency of the LAL inventory, a preliminary study involving 25 EFL educators was undertaken. Additionally, subject matter experts in L2 pedagogy vetted the questionnaire, affirming its content validity.

Table 2
Consistency Metrics for LAL Inventory and Questionnaire

Instrument Sections	Cronbach's Alpha	Items	Sample Size
Overall Perception	.81	20	25
Choosing Appropriate Assessment Methods (CAAM)	.88	5	25
Developing Appropriate Assessment Methods	.76	5	25
Administering, Scoring, and Interpreting (ASIA)	.89	5	25
Using Results to Make Decision (URMD)	.75	5	25
Using Assessment for Grading (URAG)	.77	5	25
Communicating Assessment Results (CAR)	.80	5	25
Recognizing Unethical Assessment Methods (RUMA)	.82	5	25

Semi-Structured Interview

The interviews were meticulously crafted to extract in-depth responses concerning instructors' reflective practices. To bolster validity, domain experts reviewed the interview framework, offering crucial feedback which was duly integrated. The finalized instrument comprised ten queries, executed by a trained EFL educator

to ensure standardization.

Procedure

Prior to the research's commencement, participants underwent a comprehensive 4-day workshop elucidating core language assessment concepts. Subsequently, an orientation on reflective teaching accentuated its potential in

amplifying LAL acumen. Throughout the study, educators were actively engaged in systematic reflection stages. Under the supervision of expert mentors, these instructors navigated through six distinct reflection-focused sessions, accentuating diverse pedagogical facets. Post-intervention, participants were re-evaluated using the LAL questionnaire. The study culminated with interviews, conducted at the convenience of the educators.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, an exhaustive analysis of the Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) inventory was undertaken to illuminate the ramifications of embedding reflection-for-action within the instructional framework of Iranian EFL educators. The foundational understanding was established through descriptive statistics, encompassing metrics like means and standard deviations, which provided an initial glimpse into the distribution characteristics of the collected data.

The ensuing exploration delved into the inferential statistical analysis, where the reverberations of reflection-for-action on Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) were unveiled. A robust pretest-treatment-posttest design enabled a dissection of LAL scores, juxtaposing the experimental and control groups at pretest via independent samples t-test. Subsequently, paired samples t-tests were employed to track shifts within each group from pretest to post-test, with the statistical significance demarcated at $p < .05$. Laying bare the multi-dimensional effects, specific facets of the LAL inventory were meticulously scrutinized. This dedicated scrutiny shed light on the diverse influences of reflection-for-action across discrete assessment scenarios.

Amidst the pursuit of analytical rigor, the

study's credibility was fortified through a triangulation approach. The deployment of both original and translated LAL inventory versions, coupled with member checking, concretized the robustness of the research findings, attesting to their alignment with participants' perspectives. In a conscious effort to neutralize potential researcher bias, a reflexive analysis strategy was adroitly executed. Through a continual cycle of peer evaluations and introspective reflections, the interpretative process was rendered impartial and unbiased.

Elevating ethical considerations, the study's ethical compass was unwavering. The ethical conduct was underscored by the aegis of institutional review board (IRB) approval, substantiating the ethical uprightness, safeguarding participant rights, and preserving data confidentiality.

In synthesis, the data analysis phase seamlessly intertwined the descriptive and inferential statistical investigations, the meticulous sub-level examination, the triangulation protocol for bolstering credibility, the reflexive analysis to maintain interpretative fidelity, and the steadfast commitment to ethical principles. These methodological threads coalesced harmoniously to present a comprehensive narrative elucidating the intricate interplay between reflection-for-action and Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) within the realm of Iranian EFL educators.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to unveil the patterns of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) among Iranian EFL educators before and after their exposure to the reflection-for-action treatment. The descriptive statistics for the initial and subsequent administrations of the LAL inventory are summarized in Table.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for the LAL Inventory (First & Second Administrations)

Standard Scenario	Administration	Mean	SD
S1	First	2.53	.50
S1	Second	3.72	.25
S2	First	2.78	.25
S2	Second	4.00	.59
S3	Second	2.75	.65
S3	First	4.17	.31
S4	Second	2.67	.46
S4	First	4.00	.40
S5	Second	2.22	.57
S5	First	4.10	.47
S6	Second	2.30	.48
S6	First	3.92	.48
S7	Second	2.45	.87
S7	First	2.75	.60
Total First	First	2.52	.29
Total Second	Second	3.80	.17

The impact of reflection-for-action was most pronounced in Standard Scenario 3, "Administering, Scoring, and Interpreting the Results of Assessment," followed by Standard Scenario 5, "Using Results of Assessment for Grading." Conversely, the impact was less evident in Standard Scenario 7, "Recognizing Unethical Methods of Assessment." It is noteworthy that the participants' overall performance exhibited an upward trend in the second administration, signifying enhanced assessment literacy.

Additionally, substantial enhancements in participants' performance were observed in

Standard Scenarios 3 and 5, specifically related to "Administering, Scoring, and Interpreting the Results of Assessments" ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.39$) and "Using Results of Assessment for Grading" ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.40$).

Inferential Statistics

To evaluate the normality of data distribution for both the initial and subsequent administrations of the LAL inventory, a Shapiro-Wilks test was employed. The results of this assessment are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4
Shapiro-Wilks Test of Normality (First & Second Administration)

Administration	Group	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	df	Sig
First	Reflection-for-action	.972	20	.792
Second	Reflection-for-action	.946	20	.311

Paired samples t-tests were conducted to rigorously compare participants' assessment literacy at the outset of the study with their

subsequent test scores during the second administration. The results of these paired t-tests are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5
Results of Paired T-Test

Standard Scenario	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
S1	-1.18	.000
S2	-1.21	.000
S3	-1.41	.000
S4	-1.33	.000
S5	-1.88	.000
S6	-1.61	.230
S7	-0.30	.000
Total	-1.27	.000

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts yielded recurrent themes, offering deeper insights into participants' perceptions

and experiences. The common themes that emerged from the interview data are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6
Common Themes Extracted from the Content of the Interview

Themes	Summaries
Understanding of Language Assessment Principles	Deeper understanding of fundamental principles. - Emphasis on dynamic and responsive assessment practices. - Viewed principles as adaptable and responsive.
Skills Acquired or Improved	Conducting real-time formative assessments. - Designing reflective assessment tasks. - Providing constructive feedback. - Using rubrics effectively.
Utilizing Assessment Principles for Planning and Design	Alignment with specific learning objectives. - Consideration of class context. - Emphasis on validity and reliability. - Incorporation of real-scenarios.
Application of Knowledge to Enhance Assessments	Designing project-based assessments. - Creating assessments with real-world relevance. - Adapting assessments based on student feedback. - Use of technology for assessment improvement.
Challenges in Implementing Reflection for Action	Resistance to change among students. - Time constraints for in-depth reflection. - Adapting technology for reflection. - Addressing biases in assessment.
Alignment of Assessments with Learning Objectives	Ensuring assessments align with objectives. - Adapting assessments to different learning styles. - Promoting fairness and inclusivity. - Considering cultural and social aspects.
Impact on Confidence in Implementing Assessment Strategies	Increased confidence through a solid understanding. - Emphasis on real-time reflection and adaptability. - Integrating student-centered approaches.
Changes in Students' Performance or Motivation	Improved overall performance. - Increased motivation and engagement. - Shift towards viewing assessments as opportunities for growth.
Specific Situations Where Reflection for Action Improved Practices	Addressing student struggles in real-time. - Modifying assessments based on feedback. - Improving the clarity in assessment rubrics. - Enhancing inclusivity and fairness.
Enhancement of Overall Language Assessment Literacy	Enriched knowledge of terminology and concepts. - Expanded toolkit for designing effective assessments. - Proficiency in assessment design and communication.
Transparency and Effective Communication	Emphasis on transparency and clear communication. - Fostering metacognition among students. - Alignment with curriculum and learning goals.
Holistic Perspective on Language Assessment Principles	Adapting assessments for different learners. - Considering timeliness and relevance. - Involving students in co-creating assessments.

The thematic analysis of the interview contents revealed that the responses covered multiple themes, which reflected the multi-dimensional nature of the effects of the training workshop on teachers' assessment practices.

DISCUSSION

Effects of Reflection-for-Action on LAL

The study's primary goal was to investigate the impact of reflection-for-action on Iranian EFL teachers' Language Assessment Literacy

(LAL). The results of the paired t-tests revealed a substantial improvement in participants' assessment literacy scores following the intervention. Specifically, scenarios related to "Administering, Scoring, and Interpreting the Results of Assessments" and "Using Results of Assessment for Grading" exhibited notable enhancements. This observation aligns with prior studies (Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018; Babaii & Asadnia, 2019) highlighting the symbiotic relationship between reflective practices and assessment literacy.

Role of Reflection-for-Action in Shaping Assessment Practices

The qualitative analysis of interview data delved into the impact of reflection-for-action on teachers' assessment practices. Participants reported that the reflective process prompted deeper evaluation of assessment strategies, encouraged student involvement in assessments, and improved their comprehension of assessment principles. Additionally, reflection-for-action empowered teachers to design more effective assessment tasks, provide targeted feedback, and incorporate innovative assessment methods, substantiating the tangible benefits of reflective practices in teaching contexts.

Comparison with Literature

The study's outcomes resonate with broader discussions on the potency of reflective practices in enhancing teaching efficacy and professional development. The heightened assessment literacy observed aligns with Farrell's (2008, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2019) assertion about the role of reflective practice in promoting ongoing growth. Furthermore, this study advances the literature by specifically examining the effects of reflection-for-action on assessment literacy, addressing a previously identified research gap.

The findings reinforce the broader discourse on reflective teaching's ability to elevate instructional approaches. The improved assessment literacy post-reflection-for-action intervention reaffirms prior research indicating that reflective practices contribute to professional growth and pedagogical effectiveness (Johnson, 2009; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Thompson, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study validates the efficacy of reflection-for-action in augmenting Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) among Iranian EFL teachers. The observed enhancement in assessment literacy underscores the value of integrating reflective practices into teacher training programs. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on reflective teaching and its reciprocal influence on assessment literacy, enriching discussions on effective pedagogical strategies in language education.

This study aimed to explore the impact of reflection-for-action on Iranian EFL teachers' Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) and to investigate the role of reflection-for-action in shaping teachers' assessment practices. The findings highlight the significant positive effects of reflection-for-action on teachers' assessment literacy and instructional approaches. Reflective practices have emerged as a valuable tool in enhancing professional growth and instructional effectiveness in language education.

This study contributes to the literature by elucidating the reciprocal relationship between reflection-for-action and assessment literacy. The observed improvements in participants' assessment literacy underscore the value of incorporating reflection-for-action into teacher training programs. Furthermore, the qualitative insights garnered from interviews shed light on the practical benefits of reflective practices in shaping assessment strategies and promoting student engagement.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study have meaningful implications for teacher development and instructional design in language education. The enhanced assessment literacy resulting from reflection-for-action suggests that incorporating reflective practices into pedagogical training can empower teachers to design more effective assessment tasks, provide targeted feedback, and utilize innovative assessment methods. This, in turn, can lead to improved learning outcomes for students. To build on this study, future research could explore the longitudinal effects of sustained reflection-for-action on teachers' assessment practices and student performance. Investigating the transferability of improved assessment literacy to other areas of teaching and the examination of the impact of reflection-for-action on diverse teacher populations could provide a more comprehensive understanding of its efficacy.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The sample size was relatively small and focused on a specific context, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study's timeframe was limited, warranting further

investigation into the long-term sustainability of the observed enhancements in assessment literacy.

In conclusion, this study underscores the effectiveness of reflection-for-action in bolstering Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) among Iranian EFL teachers. The positive impact observed on participants' assessment literacy aligns with the broader discourse on reflective practices' role in professional growth and instructional enhancement. By exploring the reciprocal relationship between reflection-for-action and assessment literacy, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on effective pedagogical practices in language education. Reflective practices emerge as a powerful tool in shaping teachers' assessment practices, promoting student engagement, and fostering a more dynamic and impactful learning environment.

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