

Investigating the Relationship Between Iranian EFL Teachers' Assessment Literacy Components, Reflective Teaching and Language Teaching Experience

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Abstract. The present piece of research was after investigating the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment literacy, their reflective teaching, and their teaching experience. The participants of the present study consisted of fifty Iranian EFL English language teachers of both genders, teaching at different educational contexts with the teaching experience of five to twenty years. The instruments used in the study included a classroom assessment literacy inventory (Mertler, 2003) and a teacher reflectivity questionnaire (Akbarpour, Behzadpour and Dadvand, 2010). In order to collect the data, after obtaining informed consent, the two questionnaires were sent to the participants to be filled in. A set of correlational analyses and Multiple Regressions Analysis were run in order to analyze the data. Results of data analysis procedure demonstrated that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' assessment literacy and their reflective teaching. Results also revealed that teachers' teaching experience had no significant relationship with their assessment literacy and reflective teaching.

Keywords: Assessment literacy, reflective teaching, teaching experience

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1. Introduction

Teachers need to know whether the students learn or not. To make sure about students' learning and achievement authentic and sound assessment is needed since good assessment yields good information about the results of teaching. Assessment literacy was presented for the first time by Stiggins (1991). Stiggins (1999) claims that the quality of the assessment used in the classroom demonstrates the effectiveness of teachers' teaching method. Brookhart (1999) also claims that assessment literacy means gathering and interpreting information about students' achievement and learning. Mertler and Campbell (2005) and Volante and Fazio (2007) define assessment literacy is a solid and sound educational assessment knowledge and skills that teachers need to assess students' mastery of learning outcome. Stiggins (2005) claims that teachers need a great understanding of assessment in order to pinpoint learners' areas of strength and need and also measure their level of achievement (Andrade & Cizek, as cited in Murphy Odo, 2015).

In addition to the role of assessment literacy in teaching, the role and importance of another factor, i.e., reflective teaching is noticeable. The notion of reflective teaching was suggested for the first time by Dewey (1909). Dewey (1933) defines it as an active and cognitive process that provides sequences of interconnected ideas that emphasize underlying beliefs and knowledge. According to Khanam (2015) the word reflection can be defined as a number of mirror images of teachers' actions, thinking deeply about their experiences and making their past experience an asset for their future, turning their memories into learning experiences. Reflective teaching is a process of looking back for teacher's own teaching. It is more than just summarizing what happened in the classroom. It is about spending time to discuss the events of the lesson (Serra, 2015). It includes thinking and rethinking about one's performance before, during and after class. Teachers should reflect the problems and weaknesses of students which may happen during achievement of goals and consider the teaching strategies they need to deliver the expected lesson (Artzt, Curcio, Gural & Thomas, as cited in Zahid & Khanam, 2019).

There is also another important factor in effective teaching, i.e. teachers' teaching experience. Most teachers regard experience as a main source for gaining knowledge about teaching. Regarding the importance of teaching experience, Di Carlo (2010) claims that experience is actually one of the observable teacher characteristics that is correlated with achievement. Zarei and Afshari (2012) believe that teaching experience has a remarkable effect on instruction quality. Teachers can be differentiated from each other because they have different experience throughout their teaching career.

It may be worth noting that researches on the importance and effect of working experience on effective and successful teaching have different findings; some studies indicate that teachers' teaching experience has a crucial role in teaching-related issues (Schiefelbein & Valenzuela, as cited in Sarani & Rezaee, 2017), while others do not put emphasis on it (Jar, 2012). The present study attempts to demonstrate the relationship between assessment literacy, reflective teaching, and working experience, and whether they affect effective teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Assessment literacy

Teachers and their knowledge play an important role in language teaching. One aspect of teacher knowledge is how to assess learners' abilities. Teachers must be equipped with an understanding of the types of assessment like the tools, as well as the reasons to use assessment in the classroom and purposes for that (Siegel and Wissehr, as cited in Bayat & Rezaei, 2015). Besides, Stiggins (1999) claims that the quality of the assessment used in the classroom demonstrates the effectiveness of teachers' teaching method. Therefore, the results of classroom assessments should be reliable and valid (Brookhart, as cited in Ali Salimi & Farsi, 2018).

Assessment can play an important role in educating, learning and also policy making. Stiggins (1999, p. 20) claims that "the quality of instruction in any ... classroom turns on the quality of the assessments used there" (as cited in Janatifar & Mardani, 2018). Chappuis, Stiggins, Chappuis, and Arter (2012) state that classroom assessment literacy is

the necessary knowledge and skill for gathering data about students' achievement and evaluating the effectiveness of teachers' teaching and assessment outcomes.

The term assessment literacy has been used to describe the knowledge teachers should have about assessment. Effective assessment supports and promotes learning, so a teacher's ability to engage with a range of teaching, learning, and assessment practices is vital. As Crusan, Plakans, and Gebril (2016) suggest, it is the students who lose out if assessment practices are poor. Therefore, Malone (2011) describes assessment literacy as an understanding of the measurement basics related directly to classroom learning (as cited in Berry, Sheehan, & Munro, 2019).

Although teachers' role and knowledge in assessment is a vital element in successful teaching and learning, Mertler (2003) believes that many teachers claim that assessment training they receive do not prepare them to assess learners and make decision based on the information gathered through assessment (as cited in Hudaya, 2017). Mertler and Campbell (2005) also claim that assessing student performance is one of the most essential responsibilities of teachers but teachers report feeling inadequately prepared to meet this challenge. It has been estimated that teachers spend up to 50 percent of their time on assessment-related activities (Plake, 1993; Stiggins, as cited in Mertler & Campbell, 2005).

Mellati and Khademi (2018) claim that many Iranian teachers overlook the educational and classroom assessment. For these teachers, the only exposure to the practice of assessment might have been a few sessions in their teacher-education. The main reason of this overlooking is the lack of inappropriate practical tasks and projects in their education programs.

Therefore, it can be said that there are two main reasons for the lack of reliable educational assessment. First, according to Stiggins (2001) and Suah (2012), inaccurate and invalid educational assessment is mainly because of the low levels of assessment literacy among teachers and school administrators. Second, some previous studies show that school teachers do not follow the fundamental principles of educational assessment recommended by experts (Brookhart, 1993; Frary, Cross, & Weber,

1993; Suah, as cited in Lian & Yew, 2016). Furthermore, limited time and an abundance of possible content to cover, curricular and instructional methodology is often given priority over assessment strategies in teacher education courses. As a result, teachers rely on their class experience in students' assessment than what they have learnt through their education coursework (Clark, 2015).

2.2 Reflective teaching

According to Quesada (2011), when something goes wrong in our lives, one needs to think about why it happens and if one could have done something to prevent that. This introspection is commonly called reflection, and professionals have used it in order to improve their practice. For educators, reflection involves critical thinking about the past and current experiences that occur in the classroom. People unfamiliar with reflective teaching may think that reflective teaching is an isolated practice of being alone and thinking, while it is a serious process that teachers should stop, slow-down in order to notice, analyze what they are doing. Researchers often refer to reflective teaching as a process of critical thinking toward improvement (Dewey, 1938; Marzano, 2012; York-Barr et al., as cited in Disu, 2017).

“effective thinking is not an innovation in teaching. It has its roots in the work of a number of educational theorists and practitioners. The concept has been around for more than 50 years” (Quesada, 2011, p. 1). Quesada (2011) also believes that Dewey in 1909 was among the first to promote reflection as a means of professional development in teaching distinguishes between a reflective and a routine action. According to Quesada (2011), reflection is the most important quality a teacher needs to have, and it has much more impact on the quality of schools and their instructions than the teaching techniques teachers may use. It is also suggested that teachers need to develop, examine, re-examine and check both their self-knowledge and their capacity to use this knowledge to improve their professional practice (Sellars, 2012).

Serra (2015) believes that reflective teaching is more than just summarizing what has happened in the classroom. Reflective teaching is a quieter and more systemic approach than just looking at what hap-

pened. It needs patience, and careful observation of the entire lesson's experience. According to Richard (1990), reflection refers to an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated (as cited in Serra, 2015). DeLuca and colleagues (2012) identify three parts of successful development related to assessment literacy: active and collaborative learning, ongoing and contextualized learning, and process-based learning and reflective practice (as cited in Wright, 2017).

Reflective teaching is beneficial for both experienced and inexperienced teachers. Because it offers more advantages than disadvantages, it can be even effective for teacher education programs to become more devoted to developing reflective practices in their student teachers. These programs attempt to help inexperienced teachers become more aware of decision-making processes to help them determine the effect their decisions have on teaching (as cited in Quesada, 2011). In order to help teachers to be great reflective teachers, lots of suggestions and tools are suggested. Fatemipour (2013) presents three reflective tools as: teacher diary, peer observation, audio recording, and students' feedback. The results show that teacher diary is the most effective reflective tool with the coefficient of correlation between the obtained data from this tool and the mean of all data appeared to be 0.84.

2.3 Teaching experience

Being a teacher can be a demanding and stressful job. Some teachers stay positive, committed and motivated, whereas others are occupied with troubles and become demotivated (Hargreaves & Hargreaves, 2005, as cited in Want, Schellings & Mommers, 2018). Most teachers regard experience as a main source for gaining knowledge about teaching. Experience is defined as the direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge and the length of such participation is important (Merriam-Webster, as cited in Hopper, 2014). This process of gaining knowledge to become more experienced is considered difficult and painful and often with irritating errors, although it sounds inevitable (Merriam-Webster, as cited in Hopper, 2014).

Some studies reveal that teachers' teaching experience has a crucial role in teaching-related issues, while others do not put emphasis

on it. Kershaw (1993) suggests that some teachers' characteristics such as teaching experience affect teachers' attitude toward assessment and their use of students' assessment data for educational decision making (as cited in Wright, 2017). Rice (2010) believes that teachers' experience is a key factor in their policies toward teaching. The underlying assumption is that teaching experience makes the teachers more effective. Rice (2010) also believes that experience matters, but it does not mean that more experience is always better. Zhang (2008) also emphasizes the importance of teaching experience. Teacher experience is considered as an important factor related to teacher quality. The employment of experienced teachers who are likely to be more reflective can help provide quality learning for students (Zhang, as cited in Kheirzade & Sistani, 2018).

Clark (2015) claims that teachers' school experiences can shape their perception of assessment and significantly impact their assessment decisions, as well as many other instructional decisions (Campbell & Evans, 2000; Heafner, 2004). As a whole, some pieces of research on assessment literacy indicate that inexperienced teachers often develop their assessment literacy based on their school experiences. Furthermore, they attempt to become literate in assessment by adopting traditional assessment practices, or the practices and strategies of the school context where they taught (Sigel & Wissehr, as cited in Clark, 2015). A lot of teachers emphasize that although they have studied at institutions of teacher education, participated in related courses, and read articles, their professional ability has been acquired through experience. Experience not only provides professional ability, but also gives the teacher confidence in her/his job (Shkedi, 1996).

The present piece of research aimed at investigating the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment literacy components, reflective teaching and language teaching experience through the following research questions:

RQ1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL teachers' assessment literacy and reflective teaching?

RQ2. Does language teaching experience affect teachers' assessment lit-

eracy and their reflective teaching?

RQ3. Which of the components of assessment literacy best predicts reflective teaching?

3. Methods

3.1 Design of the study

The design of the study was a quantitative, non-experimental design of survey type to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' assessment literacy components, reflective teaching and language teaching experience.

3.2 Participants

The participants of the present study consisted of 50 male and 50 female English language teachers with years of experience ranging from 5 to 20. Their age varied from 23 to 45. The participants were chosen from different educational contexts, i.e., university, high school and language institutes based on non-probability convenience sampling.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Classroom assessment literacy inventory (CALI)

This inventory was designed and validated by Mertler (2003). It included 31 Likert-type items based on a 4-point scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. The reliability of the questionnaire was reestablished by the researcher through Cronbach's alpha, and the results showed a coefficient of .83 which was considered to be acceptable.

3.3.2 Teacher reflectivity questionnaire

For measuring teachers' reflecting teaching, the teacher reflectivity questionnaire was used which had been designed by Akbary, Behzadpour and Dadvand (2010). It included 29 items on a 5-point scale: never, rarely, sometimes, often, always. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire was also reestablished before the study. The correlation coefficient for this scale was .87 through Cronbach's alpha. Teachers were asked to write their years of teaching experience on one of the questionnaires.

3.4 Data collection procedures

To collect the data, the two questionnaires were distributed among EFL

teachers working at different educational contexts, i.e., high school, university, and language institutes. After obtaining informed consent from the participants, they were asked to fill in the questionnaires and return them when possible. Any questions were answered and ambiguities were resolved. The researcher's phone number and e-mail address were provided to the participants for further reference. The participants were ensured that their information would remain anonymous. The data collection procedures took about one month considering different schools' regulations and also teachers' time limits. The questionnaires were distributed among more participants than intended to take part in the study. After the necessary data was obtained, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was run to investigate whether the data was ready to be analyzed using parametric tests.

3.5 Data analysis

In order to analyze the data obtained from the two questionnaires, IBM SPSS version 22 was used. Firstly, the normality of the distributions regarding the three sets of data was checked, and after that, a set of correlational analyses were used in order to examine the relationship between EFL teachers' assessment literacy, their reflective teaching and their teaching experience. Multiple Regressions Analysis was also used to see which of the components of assessment literacy best predict reflective teaching.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the frequency and gender of the participants of the present study.

Table 1: Frequency and Gender Percentage of Language Teachers

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Female	32	64	100
Male	18	36	36
Total	50	100	

As shown in the table above, the work experience of most English language teaching teachers (76) was between 5 and 20 years. As it is shown in Table 1, above, 36 % of teachers were male and 64% were female.

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of qualifications of language teachers participating in the study.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of the Participants Based on Educational Level

Education	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Ph.D.	3	6	100
Master of Art	17	34	94
Bachelor	20	40	60
No Degree	10	20	20
Total	50	100	

As shown in Table 2, the majority of teachers (74%) had undergraduate and graduate degrees. Only 6 percent of the participants held Ph.D., and 20 percent had no degree on English language teaching.

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of work experience of language teachers.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of the Participants Regarding Teaching Experience

Experience	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
16-20 years	5	10	100
11-15 years	5	14	90
5-10 years	34	76	76
Total	50	100	

As shown in the table above, the work experience of most English language teaching teachers (76) was between 5 and 20 years.

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation of research variables by Considering Gender

Variable	Male		Female		Total	
	Mean	Std	Mean	Std	Mean	Std
Reflective Teaching	96.57	10.55	95.47	8.08	95.89	8.99
Assessment Literacy	92.19	12.52	92.91	11.09	92.63	11.50
Teaching Experience	11.33	4.32	8.25	3.83	8.79	4.03

As shown in the table above, the average reflective teaching of male teachers was slightly higher than that of female teachers. However, there was not much difference between the mean of literacy assessment of male and female teachers.

4.2 Inferential statistics

In order to investigate the relationship between reflective teaching and assessment literacy, Pearson's correlation coefficient was run which showed the following results.

Table 5: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient to Examine the Relationship between Reflective Teaching and Assessment Literacy

Reflective Teaching	R	N	Sig.
Assessment Literacy	0.34	50	0.04

As it can be seen in the table above, there is a significant positive relationship between reflective teaching of language teachers and their assessment literacy. In other words, an increase in reflective teaching is associated with an increase in assessment literacy.

Multiple Regression was used to predict teachers' evaluation literacy from reflective teaching components. Thus, the reflective teaching components as the predictor variables and the overall evaluation literacy score as the criterion variable were entered into the regression equation. Table 6 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 6: Summary of Regression Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.77	0.59	0.52	7.95

As it can be seen in table 6, among the reflective teaching components, the affective, and metacognitive components were positive and the cognitive component was the negative and significant predictors for language literacy assessment teachers. In other words, an increase in affective and metacognitive components was associated with an increase in assessment literacy, and an increase in cognitive component was associated with a decrease in teacher assessment literacy. The critical and practical

components were not significant predictors of teacher assessment literacy. Predictive variables accounted for 59% of the variance in teacher evaluation.

Table 7: Result of ANOVA for Testing the Significance of Regression Sum of Square

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2943	5.00	588.54	9.32	0.0001
	Residual	2083	33.00	63.13		
	Total	5026	38			

As it can be seen in Table 7, the teaching experience of language teachers has no significant relationship with reflective teaching and assessment literacy.

Table 8: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis to Predict Reflective Teaching by Means of Assessment Literacy Components

Predictors	B	β	R	R^2	T	P
Practical	1.07	0.32	0.77	0.59	2.65	0.01
Cognitive	-1.17	-0.41			-3.15	0.00
Affective	2.04	0.41			3.00	0.01
Metacognitive	1.30	0.47			3.31	0.00
Critical	0.37	0.17			1.46	0.15

Table 9: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient to Examine the Relationship between Teachers' Teaching Experience, Reflective Teaching and Assessment Literacy

Experience	R	P	N
Reflective Teaching	- 0.11	0.52	44
Assessment Literacy	- 0.07	0.67	44

5. Discussion

According to the results, the questions of the present study were answered as follows. The first research question considered whether there was any significant relationship between EFL teachers' assessment literacy and their reflective teaching. Referring to the results of Table 5, there was a significant positive relationship between reflective teaching

of language teachers and their assessment literacy. Therefore, the first research question was answered positively, and the first null hypothesis was rejected.

The second research question was concerned with if language teaching experience affected teachers' assessment literacy and their reflective teaching. Results depicted in Table 7 showed that the teaching experience of language teachers had no significant relationship with reflective teaching and assessment literacy. Therefore, the second research question was answered negatively, and the second null hypothesis was retained.

According to the findings of the study, there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' assessment literacy and their reflective teaching. This shows that the more teachers being assessment literate, the more they are reflective teachers in teaching. In other words, by increasing teachers' assessment literacy, their reflection on their teaching increases too. The result of the study is consistent with the findings of Yazdani, Amirian and Hedayati (2015) who claim that there is a positive relationship between reflective teaching and EFL teachers' evaluation of students' achievement. Moreover, Malmir (2018) claims that the reflective teaching and self-efficacy both have significant relationships with teachers' professional success. Fani (2017) concludes that there is a positive correlation of 0.264 between reflective teaching and teacher autonomy. The finding of this research is also consistent with Black and William's (1998) study to explicitly highlight the central importance of assessment for improving student achievement (Jing & Zonghui, 2016).

The second finding of this study was that there was no significant relationship between teachers' teaching experience and their assessment literacy and reflective teaching. It implies that working experience may not be an indicating factor and predictor for evaluating teachers' assessment literacy and reflectivity. This finding is consistent with some pieces of research like Kershaw (1993) who finds no significant relationships between different teachers' characteristics, such as experience and teachers' use of assessment data for educational decision making (as cited in Wright, 2017). Also Jar (2012) finds no significant relationship between years of teaching experience and performance on assessment result interpretation but he reports that teachers participated in some

form of professional development related to the use of assessment had higher levels of assessment self-confidence (as cited in Wright, 2017).

6. Conclusion

Due to the importance of teachers' assessment literacy and their reflective teaching, the present study attempted to explore the relationship between these two variables. The findings of the study revealed that there was a positive correlation between teachers' assessment literacy and their reflective teaching. In other words, an increase in reflective teaching is associated with an increase in assessment literacy. The findings showed that meta- cognitive, affective, and cognitive components of assessment literacy best predict reflective teaching. Moreover, although some studies found a meaningful relationship between teachers' assessment literacy, their reflective teaching and teaching experience, the findings of this research showed that teaching experience does not have a significant relationship with teachers' assessment literacy and their reflective teaching.

The role of assessment literacy in education and successful teaching is undeniable. An effective learning needs good assessment literacy from the part of the teacher. In fact, it can be said that the quality of instruction in any classroom depends on the quality of the assessments used in that classroom. Assessment literacy is important since it covers the knowledge and skills teachers need for collecting information about their learners' performance and achievement. The achieved outcome can be used in improving the teaching of the teachers and also the learning of the learners (Yamtim and Wongwanich, 2013). According to Rea-Dickins (2004) assessment literacy is used in making decisions about lesson content and sequencing, materials, and learning tasks.

Thomas, Allman, & Beech (2004) believe that assessment literacy is helpful for both teachers and students in different ways. It provides teachers with the essential information in improving their teaching. It helps the teachers to monitor the learners' learning and progress throughout the year to improve their learning. It provides the data that can be used to select the most appropriate teaching methods for each group of learners (as cited in Yamtim, Wongwanich, 2004).

Reflective teaching is also regarded as an important factor in language learning and teaching. It is defined simply as the ability to think about what one does and why, assess past actions and current situations, and intended outcomes (Richert, 1990). It is also a kind of self-evaluation. Self-evaluation makes teachers have a great understanding of the way they behave and teach.

Reflective teaching provides teachers with some changes and improvement in their thinking, it can be considered as professional means of development (Tice, 2004). It is also a self-questioning process about the teaching practices and the way teachers presents the materials in the classroom and make a relationship with other colleagues who have the same question (Ashraf, Samir and Yazdi 2016). Reflective teaching helps the teachers in re-examining their teaching and using problem-solving techniques to improve upon their work. It is also mentioned that through reflective teaching practice, teachers will derive meaning from their experiences, thereby improving on their work. (Disu, 2017).

Wajhryb (1999) states that when teachers observe their teaching, they discover the classroom from a different perspectives other than what they actually engage in (as cited in Quesada, 2011). It is obvious that teachers cannot continue their successful teaching by routine. Instead, they should bring fundamental changes in the classroom guided by reflection (Quesada, 2011). In order to help teachers to be great reflective teachers, lots of suggestions and tools are suggested. As an example, Fatemipour (2013) presents three reflective tools as: teacher diary, peer observation, audio recording, and students' feedback.

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