The Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment and Their Self-efficacy

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationships between Iranian EFL teachers' conceptions of assessment and their self-efficacy. For this purpose, 154 Iranian EFL teachers were selected through purposeful sampling and completed the 27-item teachers' conceptions of assessment scale (TCoA) (Brown, 2006), and the 24-item teachers' self-efficacy scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Multiple regression analysis and ANOVA were used to analyze the data. The results showed that teachers considered assessment as a tool to determine how much have their students learned from instruction, assessment results can be used to modify teaching practices and assessment processes may be inaccurate. Moreover, they argued that assessment is an indicator of school performance and, at the same time, assessment results should be treated cautiously. In addition, the results showed that Iranian EFL teachers had a high level of self-efficacy, were good at asking appropriate questions and answering students' difficult questions, can assess students' learning, and provide alternative explanations and examples when learners are confused. Multiple regression analysis results showed that school accountability and irrelevance predicted students' engagement, students' accountability predicted classroom management and improvement predicted instructional strategies. These results may have some implications for EFL teachers' professional development.

Keywords: assessment; conception of assessment; EFL teachers; self-efficacy

1. Introduction

Conceptions may affect teachers' classroom practices including teaching techniques and strategies to motivate students (Barnes, Fives & Dacey, 2017). According to Brown (2004, p. 303), "all pedagogical acts, including teachers' perceptions and evaluations of students' behavior and performance (i.e., assessment) are affected by the conceptions teachers have about many educational processes, such as teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum, and teacher efficacy". Teachers' conception of assessment can strongly impact their decisions (Pishghadam et al., 2014). According to Brown (2008, p. 9), "conceptions of assessment refer to the perceptions people have

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about assessment, based on their experiences with and of assessment." Conceptions of assessment have a direct influence on teachers' performance which, in turn, may influence their self-efficacy. Teachers' self-efficacy is being considered important in schools as previous studies showed its implications for teaching practices, instructional effectiveness, and students' academic achievements (Klassen et al., 2009; Klassen & Tze, 2014). According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), teachers' sense of efficacy is related to their ability to be successful in language classrooms and achieve desired results. To set the scene, teachers' self-efficacy has been associated with other variables including perfectionism (Comerchero, 2008), job satisfaction (Moe, Pazzaglia, & Ronconi, 2010), and emotional intelligence (Moafian & Ghanizadeh, 2009; Rastegar & Memarpour, 2009). However, negative associations have been reported between teachers' self-efficacy and their burnout (Brouwers, Evers, & Tomic, 2000; Comerchero, 2008). Synthesizing the previous research, there are still some unresolved issues considering the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy with other variables.

The problem highlighted in this study was that only a few studies investigated the relationships between teachers' self-efficacy with their conceptions of assessment. For example, Levy-Vered and Nasser-Abu Alhija (2015) modeled teachers' assessment literacy in associations with their conceptions of assessment and self-efficacy. The researchers showed that there were direct and indirect relationships between assessment literacy and self-efficacy. Moreover, Noben et al. (2021) linked teachers' self-efficacy and teaching conceptions. The researchers concluded that changes in teachers' conceptions may be in line with their increased self-efficacy. In spite of these findings, no study has investigated teachers' self-efficacy related to their conceptions of assessment among Iranian teachers. Therefore, investigation of teachers' assessment conceptions associated with their self-efficacy is noteworthy on two grounds. On the one hand, assessments are used to evaluate schools and teachers' quality and certify students' learning, and, on the other hand, assessments are used to inform teachers, administrators, governments, parents, and students as to which aspects of learning have been mastered and which aspects need more work. All these factors can directly or indirectly affect teachers' self-efficacy which in turn may bring significant consequences to their classroom practices.

2. Review of the literature
2.1. Conceptions of assessment

Teachers are considered cornerstones of every educational system playing key roles in changing assessment information for the purpose of learning (Brown et al., 2009). Consideration of conception of assessment is an enlightening research area ignored for many years (Pishghadam, et al., 2014). Prior research (James & Pedder, 2006; Tan, 2013) have shown that teachers depend on their conceptions of assessment to construct, implement and adjust activities for learners or plan future actions based on assessment results. Brown (2008) suggested assessment purposes can be categorized into two groups characterizing as '"purposes" and anti-purpose". Three purposes of assessment are (National Research Council, 2001): assessment as improvement, assessment as making schools accountable, and assessment as making students accountable. There is an anti-
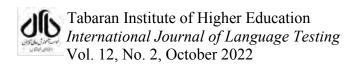
purpose according to which assessment is irrelevant to teaching (Shohamy, 2001). Assessment as improvement is related to learners' learning and quality of education. By using valid and reliable information, learners' performance should be described and diagnosed (Brown, 2004). Assessment as making schools accountable is related to public demonstration of schools and teachers' performance and following determined standards (Fulmer, Tan & Lee, 2017). Quality education improvement is at the heart of this conception. Holding learners responsible for their learning by the use of grades and scores, classifications, and assigning standards is the third premise of assessment (Brown, 2004). Followers of the anti-purpose conception believe that assessment is not related to the process of learning and teaching (Brown, 2004) and it compromises teachers' sense of autonomy and professionalism (Dixon, 1999).

Teachers' conception of assessment has been examined through the self-administered Teacher Conceptions of Assessment (TCoA) inventory (Brown, 2008). Brown (2004) concluded that improvement and making schools accountable were supported by primary teachers as conceptions of assessment. Brown and Harris (2009) suggested that school levels play a significant role in variation in teachers' conception of assessment. Brown et al. (2009) investigated Hong Kong Primary and secondary school teachers' CoA and concluded that assessment is considered as a tool to make students accountable. Davis and Neitzel (2011) investigated US middle schools' TCoA and showed that students' accountability, individual and whole-class improvements were considered as conceptions of assessment. In another study by Brown et al. (2011), conducted in Hong Kong and southern China contexts, three more constructs were identified. These results were attributed to cultural and social varieties and high-stake assessment systems of these contexts.

In the context of Iran, some studies have investigated TCoA. Pishghadam and Shayesteh (2012) studied Iranian EFL teachers' conception of assessment. Results showed that teachers conceptualized assessment as making students accountable. In another study, Pishghadam et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between teachers' conception of assessment and burnout. Results showed that conceptions of assessment and three dimensions of burnout were significantly correlated and that a four-factor TCoA construct was retained for Iranian EFL teachers. Watmani, Asadollahfam & Behin (2020) showed that Iranian high school teachers were not familiar with assessment literacy principles and procedures. Hazim Jawad (2020) argued that those Iraqi EFL teachers who believed that formative assessment is useful in improving students learning tend to actually employ it in their teaching. However, to the best of researchers' knowledge, no study has investigated the relationships between conceptions of assessment and teachers' self-efficacy among Iranian EFL teachers. This study attempted to fill the gap in the literature in this regard.

2.2. Teachers' Self-efficacy

Bandura (1992) believed that personal agency is a leading factor in individuals' functioning. The author argued that individuals use their potential to control their functioning and perform more efficiently. According to Bandura (2006), the way individuals think, feel and encourage themselves, or their cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective behaviors, are directly related to their self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy beliefs can exercise an influence over

individuals from different dimensions including goals and strategies, persistence in the face of difficulty, endeavor to obtain goals and challenges of a particular situation (Bandura, 2006). Scholars characterized self-efficacy as teachers' beliefs in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities that are required to attain given educational goals (Levy-Vered & Nasser-Abu Alhija, 2015). Bandura (2006) argued that teachers can improve their sense of efficacy by considering themselves proficient and capable, observing other successful teachers, trying to teach new materials (curriculum, textbooks, method), and conducting stress reduction practices.

Over the years, scholars have investigated teachers' self-efficacy from different perspectives. It was found that using learners-centered instructional methods and respecting learners' autonomy were directly related to teachers' high sense of self-efficacy (Deemer, 2004; Swars, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Chacon (2005) investigating teachers' self-efficacy in an EFL context concluded that there was a direct relationship between teachers' language proficiency and their efficacy as it was found that teachers with higher language proficiency were more efficacious in their practice. Ross and Bruce (2007) in a study designed to improve teachers' sense of efficacy within teacher education programs argued that the efficacy is amenable to instruction. The relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their burnout was investigated by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010). Results showed that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were negatively correlated with teachers' self-efficacy. The researchers concluded that educational context is an important determinant of teachers' self-efficacy.

In the context of Iran, some scholars have investigated Iranian EFL teachers' sense of efficacy. Akbari and Moradkhani (2010) reported relationships among teachers' self-efficacy, academic degree, and experience. It was found that Iranian teachers had a high sense of efficacy. The researchers argued that experience was significantly correlated with teachers' self-efficacy while academic degree didn't show a high correlation. Akbari and Tavassoli (2011) examined the relationship among teachers' self-efficacy, burnout, teaching style, and emotional intelligence. The results showed that Iranian EFL teachers had a high sense of self-efficacy. Moreover, it was found that teachers' self-efficacy was significantly correlated with the teaching style and emotional intelligence while the relationship with burnout was weak.

Teacher efficacy has been studied in relation to many factors as demonstrated above. It is considered a very significant factor in the language teaching profession. However, the relationships between teachers' self-efficacy and their assessment practices have been ignored as very few studies may be found to delve into it. For this purpose, the researchers in this study attempted to investigate the relationships between Iranian EFL teachers' self-efficacy and their conceptions of assessment. Therefore, the following research question was examined in this study?
RQ1. What is the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' conceptions of assessment and their self-efficacy?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

In the current study, the researchers used a quasi-experimental design to investigate the relationship between variables in this study. A purposeful sampling method was used to select the sample.

3.2. Participants

The sample recruited in this study consisted of 158 Iranian English language teachers working at public schools and private language institutes. Two questionnaires were emailed to 452 EFL teachers. The population included those teachers who participated in different TELLSI conferences being held annually in Iran. From this population, 89 questionnaires were returned to the researchers. The remaining 69 questionnaires were collected by hand from different cities including Tehran (11), Mashhad (16), Shiraz (22) Ahvaz (9), and Zahedan (11). Participants were initially assured of anonymity during the study. They were both male (n=54) and female (n=104) teachers aged between 20 and 38 years old (Mean=26) with teaching experiences ranging from 2 to 13 years (Mean = 7.3). Teachers held academic degrees including BA (n=38), MA (n=97), and PhD (n=23) in English Language teaching. The rationale behind selecting participants from both language institutes and public schools was, according to Pishghadam et al. (2014), using two educational policies on the English assessment in Iran. In the public sector, the system is centralized. Freedom of action is limited for teachers as decisions are made by higher order policy makers. On the other hand, private language institutes follow a de-centralized system where teachers and stakeholders in the language institutes decide on the assessment processes.

3.3. Instruments

To collect data, two instruments were used: The teachers' self-efficacy scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and the Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment inventory (Brown, 2006).

3.3.1. Teacher Conceptions of Assessment Inventory. To measure Iranian EFL teachers' conception of assessment, an abridged form of TCoA inventory-III (Brown, 2006) was given to the participants in this study. TCoA is a 27-item self-report questionnaire designed to investigate teachers' conception of assessment. It has four components: improvement, school accountability, student accountability, and irrelevance. The questionnaire was validated via structural equation modeling (Brown, 2006). The statements in the questionnaire, derived from the literature, examine participants' opinions on assessment practices (Brown, 2004). Employing a 6-point positively-packed agreement rating scale consisting of two negative and four positive rating points, participants identified the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement (see Brown, 2004). Researchers in this study used Cronbach Alpha to examine the instrument reliability and reported a 0.85 reliability index.

3.3.2. Teachers Self-Efficacy Scale. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) teachers' self-efficacy scale was used in this study. It has a short form with 12 items and a long form with 24 items. During construction, both versions were analyzed using factor analysis. Factor analysis

results demonstrated that self-efficacy has three components: (1) efficacy for students' engagement, (2) efficacy for instructional strategies, and (3) efficacy for classroom management. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) estimated the reliability of both scales and results showed a reliability of 0.94 and 0.90 for 24-item and 12-item formats, respectively. The scale was adjusted to fit the EFL context by adding "English class" or substituting "English" or "learning English" for "school work" in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 17, 18 and 19. The reliability of the scale in this study was found to be 0.87, and reliability for subscales were computed as 0.82 for efficacy in students' engagement, 0.84 for efficacy in instructional strategies, and 0.83 for efficacy in classroom management. The rationale behind selecting this instrument was that it was validated cross-culturally in five countries and a similar factorial design was extracted (Klassen et al., 2009).

3.4. Procedure

A number of 158 participants completed both questionnaires. The researchers used SPSS (version 21) software to analyze data. Components in the efficacy questionnaire including efficacy for instructional strategies, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for students' engagement were considered as dependent variables while components comprising the TCoA questionnaire including improvement, irrelevance, school accountability, and students' accountability were considered as independent variables. Researchers used multiple regression analysis and ANOVA tests to investigate the relationships among dependent and independent variables.

4. Results and discussion

The following table provides descriptive statistics on the items in the questionnaires.

Table 1.
Descriptive information for the TCoA scale

	Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
Assessment provides feedback to students about their performance	2%	0%	18%	11%	42%	27%
Assessment helps students improve their learning	2%	13%	11%	22%	36%	16%
Assessment is a way to determine how much students have learned from teaching	7%	4%	7%	7%	60%	16%
Assessment determines if students meet qualifications standards	2%	7%	24%	16%	44%	7%
Assessment measures students' higher order thinking skills	0%	16%	27%	25%	23%	9%
Assessment allows different students to get different instruction	7%	19%	16%	19%	35%	5%
Assessment establishes what students have learned	2%	9%	16%	22%	36%	16%

Assessment is integrated with teaching practice	4%	0%	9%	29%	29%	29%
Assessment places students into categories	7%	16%	9%	13%	47%	9%
Assessment is unfair to students	20%	51%	16%	7%	7%	0%
Assessment is a good way to evaluate a school	4%	11%	16%	29%	31%	9%
Assessment information modifies ongoing teaching of students	0%	2%	11%	38%	42%	7%
Assessment interferes with teaching	9%	28%	23%	19%	16%	5%
Assessment is assigning a grade or level to student work	9%	0%	20%	27%	36%	7%
Assessment feeds back to students their learning needs	2%	11%	20%	20%	38%	9%
Assessment results are consistent	16%	20%	29%	20%	13%	2%
Assessment is an accurate indicator of a school's quality	2%	16%	32%	20%	20%	9%
Assessment is an imprecise process	7%	24%	26%	17%	17%	9%
Teachers conduct assessments but make little use of the results	7%	11%	11%	24%	36%	11%
Teachers should take into account the error and imprecision in all assessment	4%	2%	4%	16%	42%	31%
Assessment results are trustworthy	0%	17%	33%	29%	19%	2%
Assessment results can be depended on	2%	5%	27%	23%	34%	9%
Assessment results are filed & ignored	7%	32%	16%	7%	34%	5%
Assessment forces teachers to teach in a way against their beliefs	7%	33%	20%	20%	18%	2%
Assessment has little impact on teaching	18%	62%	4%	11%	4%	0%
Assessment provides information on how well schools are doing	11%	9%	16%	27%	40%	11%
Assessment results should be treated cautiously because of measurement error	2%	7%	13%	13%	47%	18%

Table 1 provided descriptive statistics for the TCoA scale. Accordingly, around 70 percent of participants agreed that assessment provides feedback to students about their performance. Teachers believed that assessment is a way to determine how much have students learned from instruction, assessment results can be used to modify teaching practices, assessment process may be inaccurate, assessment is an indicator of school performance and assessment results should be treated cautiously. However, teachers also believed that assessment results are inconsistent, they make little use of assessment results and assessment results may not be trustworthy. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for the teachers' self-efficacy scale.

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics on the teachers' self-efficacy scale

	Percentage	
	Item Mean	Per %
How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	7	56%
To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	6	63%
How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	7	43%
To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	7	49%
How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	6	38%
To what extent can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	6	40%
How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	6	68%
How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	7	39%
How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	6	72%
How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?	6	58%
How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	6	62%
How well can you respond to defiant students?	6	78%
To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	6	68%
How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	7	53%
How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	6	61%
How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	6	59%
How much can you do to help your students think critically?	6	37%
How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	5	44%
How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	6	50%
How much can you do to foster student creativity?	6	51%
How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	6	46%
How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	6	49%
How much can you do to help your students value learning?	6	53%
How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?	6	40%

In order to investigate the relationship between teachers' conceptions of assessment and their self-efficacy, researchers used multiple regression analyses. The results of multiple regression analysis for students' engagement is provided in the following tables.

Table 3.
Correlation box for students' engagement

		Student engagement total	Sig. (-tailed)
	Student engagement	1.000	.
	School accountability	.485	.004
Pearson Correlation	Student accountability	-.041	.101
	Improvement	-.033	.152
	Irrelevance	-.270	.014

The above results showed that school accountability (0.485) had a weak positive relationship with students' engagement which means that as teachers' conception of school accountability increases, their engagement with students increases. Moreover, irrelevance (-0.270) had a very weak negative relationship with engagement indicating that when teachers consider assessment as irrelevant to students' life, their perception of students' engagement decreases. The other two factors didn't show a significant correlation with students' engagement. R square in the model summary showed that school accountability and irrelevance predicted 32.7 percent of the variance in students' engagement. Moreover, the standard error of the estimate was 9.71 which can be an acceptable point for the model precision. The ANOVA results showed a statistical significance ($p<.05$). Consulting the coefficient table, school accountability showed a significant ($p<.05$) beta index of 0.15 which was the highest among predictors. This index can show the unique contributions of each variable to the whole model, and the highest index showed the highest contribution. Accordingly, having high school accountability can lead to having a high perception of students' engagement.

Conceptions of school and teacher accountability are concerned with the public demonstration of good performance of teachers and schools (Smith et al., 2014) and make teachers and schools face some consequences otherwise they achieve certain standards. According to this conception, teachers and schools should provide some evidence that they are delivering quality instruction (Willis, Adie & Klenowski, 2013) and, at the same time, focus on the improvement of this quality (Farangi & Mehrpour, 2022; Tan, 2013). This conception is directly associated with the efficacy of students' engagement. Eight items explored teachers' self-efficacy for students' engagement. These items investigated how much teachers can, "1. get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork? 2. help students value learning? 3. motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork? 4. assist families in helping their children do well in schools? 5. improve understanding of a student who is failing? 6. help students think critically? 7. foster student creativity? and 8. get through to the most difficult students?". All these items directly or indirectly showed that teachers were interested to improve students' performance in schools by motivating them and assisting their families so that the quality of education increases in schools. Furthermore, Pishghadam et al. (2014) argued that assessment results have high consequences for Iranian

schools and institutes as most language teachers and school principals attribute their success or failure to the performance of their students. In line with Brown et al. (2011), this may show that teachers were concerned with negative consequences of weak performance in assessment as it may sabotage schools and teachers' public face. When students perform well in schools and their parents are satisfied with their results, schools and teachers' public image will increase and this can lead to higher self-efficacy for teachers. The results of multiple regression analysis for classroom management are provided in the following tables.

Table 4.
Correlation box for classroom management

		Classroom management total	Sig. (1-tailed)
	Classroom management total	1.000	
	School accountability	.051	.057
Pearson Correlation	Student accountability	.579	.000
	Improvement	-.049	.063
	Irrelevance	-.003	.467

Table 4 showed associations between teachers' conceptions of assessment and their classroom management as a factor of self-efficacy. According to the results, only students' accountability showed an acceptable (.579) and significant ($p<.05$) relationship with classroom management. These results showed that higher scores in students' accountability can lead to higher scores in classroom management factor. The R model showed that students' accountability explained 31.3 percent of the variability in the whole model. Furthermore, a standard error of estimate equal to 7.94 showed an acceptable precision in the model. Then, the beta value for students' accountability was higher than the other component and also it showed a significant value (Beta= .18, P>0.017) indicating that when the variance for all other variables is controlled, students' accountability had the strongest unique contribution on the dependent variable.

According to Brown (2006), assessment makes students accountable for their own learning by assignment of grades, examining students' performance on pre-specified criteria, assigning students to groups, categories, and classes based on their performance, and providing criteria for graduation and entry purposes to higher education. If teachers conceive assessment as a tool to fulfill these objectives, they should show a higher level of classroom management abilities. In classes full of noisy and disruptive students, it would be difficult for teachers to manage the class, provide acceptable group and pair work activities, and ask students to follow classroom rules. Determining if students meet qualification standards and checking students' progress necessitates an appropriately established classroom management system in which teachers' expectations of students' behavior are clearly defined. It is ensured that activities are moving smoothly and in line with the objectives and teachers do their best to keep a few problematic students from ruining the

whole class. Therefore, higher scores in the conception of assessment as students' accountability should lead to higher levels of classroom management capabilities. The results of multiple regression analysis for instructional strategies are provided in the following table.

Table 5.
Correlation box for instructional strategies

		Instructional strategies total	Sig. (1-tailed)
	Instructional strategies total	1.000	
	School accountability	.320	.000
Pearson Correlation	Student accountability	-.010	.373
	Improvement	.633	.000
	Irrelevance	.005	.251

The correlations between school accountability and improvement with instructional strategies were significant (p<.05). School accountability showed a correlation of 0.32 and improvement showed a correlation of .63 with instructional strategies. These results showed that improvement had an acceptable correlation with instructional strategies. The researchers consulted the R-square column in the R model table. The results showed that school accountability and improvement explained 43.2 percent of variability in the instructional strategies. This could be an acceptable level of prediction of the model. ANOVA results showed that there were significant differences between the three groups (p<0.05). To examine which factor had the strongest contribution to the model, the researchers consulted the beta level in the coefficient table. The coefficient table showed a beta value of 0.23 and a significant level of 0.00 for the improvement factor. These results showed that improvement had the strongest unique contribution to the instructional strategies.

Remesal and Brown (2015) and Leong (2014) argued that assessment can improve learners' learning and the quality of teaching. Those individuals who consider assessment as a tool for improvement are looking for change towards betterment in students' performance and teaching practice. It is inevitable for most teachers to conduct an assessment in order to see if their instructional practices and strategies have been effective or not. The improvement component of TCoA is made up of four sub-components including description, learning, teaching, and validation. Teachers who consider assessment as a valid tool for diagnosis and description will use it as a means for improvement. When teachers consider assessment as a tool for improvement, they use those instructional strategies which will lead them towards their objectives. Using a variety of assessment strategies, providing alternative examples and explanations, crafting good questions, implementing alternative strategies, responding to difficult questions, adjusting lessons to the level of students, gauging students' comprehension of what has been taught, and providing appropriate

challenges for capable students are among the strategies which teachers can use to improve their own practice and students' learning experience.

This view of assessment as improvement is in line with Kennedy's (2007) socio-cultural model of assessment. This view is also in line with the summative model of assessment where the purpose is to improve both assessment and instructional performances and, as a consequence, students' learning. When a teacher provides learners with various assessment strategies, he or she considers the results of the assessment to be valid and trustworthy and do his or her best to provide feedback to students about their performance. When teachers consider assessment as a tool for improvement, they use its information to find out about students' strengths and weaknesses and so to modify ongoing teaching of students based on them. These results were also in line with other studies in the Asian contexts such as Brown et al. (2011) and Hawe (2002) studies as they also found that teachers consider assessment as a tool for improvement.
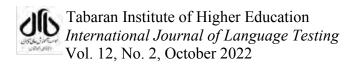
5. Conclusion and Implication

This study investigated Iranian EFL teachers' conception of assessment and their self-efficacy. Teachers believed that assessment is a way to determine students' learning. They also believed that assessment can be an effective tool to provide information about school success. At the same time, most of the teachers contended that we should use assessment results cautiously as they may be unfair to students or influenced by other irrelevant factors. Teachers suggested that assessment is liable to errors and mistakes and making decisions about students' future based on the assessment results should be done cautiously. The majority of participant teachers in this study admitted that assessment results are not consistent. They argued that assessment can provide feedback on students' learning of particular subjects. They also believed that assessment information can help them modify their teaching practice to the benefit of learners. The assessment was considered a fair practice by most participants in this study as it may deliver noteworthy information. Further, teachers believed that assessment is in line with their teaching practice and can put learners into different groups based on its results.

In addition, they suggested that assessment may be a good way to show teaching success and students' learning of materials. These arguments may be in line with the Iranian assessment system. A de-centralized top-down system in which assessment policies are determined by higher authorities (Brown, et al., 2014). Teachers act as conveyors of determined policies and programs with the least role in decision making (Brown et al., 2014). High-stake standardized tests for university entrance examinations and 3rd grade of high school make teachers follow the curriculum specified to them by higher-order authorities. As these tests have high effects on students and some teachers' future success, they leave little room for teachers' maneuver. Although teachers believe that high-stake assessment is full of problems, they dare not to change the process as they may face criticisms from both higher authorities and students and their parents. Learners with different background experiences are judged for a 12-year period of schooling by a single test at the end and, afterward, every decision is made based on these test results.

Furthermore, the results showed that Iranian EFL teachers had a high level of self-efficacy. Five items in the scale had means higher than 7 and 18 items had means higher than 6 and 1 item had a mean of 5. Accordingly, Iranian EFL teachers are good at posing appropriate questions to students and answering their difficult questions. The results also showed that teachers can assess students' learning and provide alternative explanations and examples when learners are confused. Teachers also believed that they are capable of providing appropriate challenges for proficient learners and making them follow classroom rules. Teachers believed that they can respond well to defiant learners and make their expectations clear about students' behavior. On the whole, Iranian EFL teachers showed a high level of self-efficacy regarding their teaching practice. Besides, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that school accountability and irrelevance predicted students' engagement, students' accountability predicted classroom management and improvement predicted instructional strategies. These results were in line with the results of Levy-Vered and Nasser-Abu Alhija's (2015) and Noben et al. (2021) studies as they also showed some associations between teachers' conceptions of assessment and their self-efficacy.

These results had some implications for language teachers and policy makers. Accordingly, it should be argued that Iranian assessment practices have had significant contributions to shaping Iranian EFL teachers' conception of assessment. A high-stake standardized assessment culture forces teachers to act against most of their instructional beliefs. In this system, teachers with conceptions contradictory to the system will be oppressed and, in turn, their self-efficacy will be lowered. Moreover, teachers' self-efficacy is deeply rooted in the consequences of their actions. In a context like Iran, teachers are mainly judged based on students' actions in a high-stake standardized test. Therefore, language policy makers and authorities can partly influence Iranian EFL teachers' self-efficacy by implementing assessment policies in line with their conceptions of assessment. The results also had some implications for the teacher preparation program. If teachers consider assessment as a tool for school accountability, they need to engage students in learning and assessment processes. Public demonstration of teachers and school performance can greatly touch upon their self-efficacy beliefs. This fact is dependent on students' performance in different assessment situations. Higher students' engagement in learning and assessment processes can enhance teachers' and schools' public face. Therefore, teachers need to be educated on how to engage learners in the learning and assessment processes.

This study suffered from its own limitations. First of all, the number of participants in this study was low. For obtaining a more effective profile of EFL teachers' conception of assessment and their self-efficacy, future researchers need a larger number of participants. Then, teachers were not differentiated based on their academic degree or gender both of which may have enormous effects on the results. Then, two questionnaires were used to collect data in this study. Like all the other studies, data collection using questionnaires had its own limitations. Finally, teachers' background knowledge and experience were not controlled in this study. These may have had significant contributions to the study results.

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