

Learning-Oriented Assessment in the Context of Iran: Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

In tandem with communicative approaches to language teaching, there is a growing understanding in SLA that assessment needs to be integrated into language learning. This contention has led to the development of the Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) approach for assessing language skills and aspects in language classrooms. To our knowledge, interventionist studies to improve EFL teachers' LOA-based assessment practices are in their infancy. The present study examined Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives on LOA in language teaching. To this end, the researchers selected 44 EFL teachers in four language institutes in Urmia (Iran) and provided them with tailor-made LOA-based training in 12 sessions for one month. The teachers were informed that LOA procedures are to be adopted and used in their classes. During the following semester, the researchers observed the participants' classes periodically and provided them with comments on their LOA procedures. Following the course, interviews were held with the participants to probe into their perspectives on LOA. Drawing upon thematic analysis, the researchers analyzed the recordings to develop a model for the participants' perspectives on LOA procedures. Development of teacher noticing skills in LOA procedure, its beneficial impact on language learning vis-à-vis traditional testing procedures, implementation challenges, widespread use at all proficiency levels, and the need to develop user-friendly LOA-compatible software and applications constituted the major themes based on the interview data. The findings demonstrate that the participants harbored favorable views on LOA and regarded it to be more efficacious than traditional testing procedures.

1. Introduction

A close perusal of the multitudinous studies in recent years (e.g., Aliakbari et al., 2023; Almalki, 2019; Alsowat, 2022; Amirian et al., 2023; Azizi, & Namaziandost, 2023; Carless, 2015; Christison, 2018; Farhady, 2021; Fazel & Ali, 2022; Gao, 2017; Ghiasvand & Banitalebi, 2023; Mohammed et al., 2023; Momeni & Salimi, 2023; Naraghizadeh, et al., 2023; Rastegar & Zarei, 2023; Tavassoli & Sorat, 2023; Zolfaghari, et al., 2023) highlights the fact that language assessment has attracted considerable attention in the field of Second language Acquisition (SLA). Language assessment constitutes a formative process of assessing language skills and aspects for empowering the learners to monitor their language performance, determine their language acquisition problems, and examine the congruence between their performance and their pre-determined language-learning objectives (Gebriel, 2021).

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The above-mentioned definition of language assessment highlights the fact that it is contrasted with traditional language testing procedures (Keppell et al., 2006). These procedures adopted a summative approach to language knowledge assessment. They focused on learners' output or test performance to enable the teachers to make decisions about their language competence or to place them at different proficiency levels (Kim & Kim, 2017). The focus on the result of the learners' performance in the traditional tests stemmed from the assumption that language instruction and language testing were two distinct fields that did not affect each other (Mak & Lee, 2014). More specifically, testing was considered inferior to instruction and used solely by language teachers or other stakeholders to make decisions about the learners' language studies (Mann et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, the communicative approaches to language teaching, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its offshoots, such as task-based language learning and collaborative language learning, highlighted the utility of the language assessment procedures for ameliorating the learners' acquisition of the diverse aspects of the target language (Kim & Kim, 2017; Purpura, 2016). Consequently, the SLA researchers supported the contention that assessment had to be integrated into language learning in task performance (Phongsirikul, 2018). This contention resulted in the development of the Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) approach to assessing language skills and aspects in language classrooms (Todd, 2019).

The SLA researchers (e.g., Carless, 2015; Turner & Purpura, 2015) have defined LOA differently. Nonetheless, all of these definitions highlight the integration of language assessment into the language learning process. Turner and Purpura (2016) provided a practical definition of LOA. As they explained, LOA constitutes an approach to language assessment that makes the learners aware of the assessment techniques and empowers them to take advantage of its results to deal with their language learning difficulties by combining the learning tasks with assessment procedures. According to them, this definition of LOA underlines the fact that this approach encourages the learners' to supervise their acquisition process by prompting them to take advantage of self-assessment, teacher assessment, and peer assessment in the classroom context. Likewise, Turner and Purpura (2016) defined LOA as the assessment approach that focuses on the learners' acquisition process by involving them in diverse assessment procedures, including peer assessment and self-assessment. According to them, the learners' understanding of the above-mentioned assessment procedures in LOA promotes their formative and summative assessment skills by empowering them to monitor their performance critically, specify their main learning difficulties, and develop and implement productive strategies for overcoming them.

An examination of the related literature (e.g., Carless, 2015; Jones & Saville, 2016) indicates that the SLA researchers have developed different frameworks of LOA. Among these frameworks, the framework that was developed by Turner and Purpura (2016) has attracted considerable attention. This framework emphasizes the importance of seven underlying dimensions of the language assessment process, *including contextual, elicitation, proficiency-based, learning, instructional, interactional, and affective dimensions*.

The above-mentioned characteristics of LOA have prompted the SLA researchers to examine its various aspects. Nonetheless, the review of the empirical studies of this language assessment approach shows that they have focused on specific lines of research to the exclusion of others. First, a large number of related studies (e.g., Almalki, 2019; Carless, 2015; Figueras, 2021; Gao, 2017; Keppell et al., 2006) have examined the utility of LOA for improving the learners' acquisition of the different aspects of the second language. Moreover, some of these studies (e.g., Purpura, 2016; Purpura & Turner, 2014; Todd, 2019) have investigated how EFL teachers can put the LOA theory into practice in their classes. Furthermore, certain studies (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2017) have strived to determine the utility of LOA procedures in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Lastly, very few studies (e.g., Derakhshan & Ghasvand, 2022; Jalilzadeh & Coombe, 2023) have focused on the EFL teachers' perspectives on their challenges of using LOA in the context of the classroom.

Notwithstanding, the above-mentioned studies have disregarded the language teachers' perspectives on the various aspects of LOA in the instruction process. More specifically, these studies have not built a clear and satisfactory picture of the language teachers' opinions about the advantages, disadvantages, challenges, constraints, and requirements of LOA in the second and foreign language learning contexts. The present study strived to deal with this issue in the EFL context of Iran. To this

end, it aimed to answer the following question: What are Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives on learning-oriented assessment?

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Setting

Considering the aforementioned objectives of the study, the researchers used convenience sampling to select 44 Iranian EFL teachers (i.e., 24 male teachers and 20 female teachers) who had a B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. degree in English Language Teaching from among the English instructors of four well-known language institutes in Urmia (Iran) as the participants of the present study. These language institutes use stringent criteria for selecting their teachers and employ instructors knowledgeable about the fundamental tenets of second language acquisition. Moreover, all of them offer their general English courses in one-month terms. The selected participants ranged in age from 26 to 42; all spoke Persian as the country's official language and were native Azerbaijani Turkish (majority), Persian (a few), or Kurdish (some) speakers. Moreover, their language instruction experience ranged from 6 to 18 years.

2.2. Instrument

This study used a researcher-developed 6-item semi-structured interview protocol to expound on the English teachers' attitudes towards Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA). They developed this interview protocol based on the extracted themes of the focus-group interview session of the present study. The questions of the interview protocol focused on the teachers' perspectives on the impact of the LOA on the teachers' assessment skills, the effect of LOA on the learners' language learning, the advantages and disadvantages of the use of LOA, the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of LOA in comparison with the traditional testing procedures, the practicality of LOA at various levels, and the prerequisites to the use of LOA in the context of the classroom. To determine the validity of the developed interview protocol, the researchers took advantage of member checking or respondent validation and expert validation techniques (Tanggaard, 2008). More specifically, they provided the members of the focus-group interview and 20 university professors with the relevant protocol and asked them to evaluate its items in terms of content appropriateness. The professors and focus-group interview members' feedback assured the researchers of the content validity of the developed interview protocol.

Considering the study's objectives, the researchers tried to conduct the study in the language institutes that set the highest standards of teacher employment and enforced similar instructional regulations. They provided their teachers with comparable teacher education. Considering these issues, first, they hand-picked ten language institutes in different areas of Urmia (Iran), which were considered eligible institutes based on the applied criteria. Second, they contacted the managers of the relevant institutes and apprised them of the purpose of the present study. Six managers did not consent to participate in the study due largely to their strict instructional regulations.

Notwithstanding, the remaining four managers approved of the study and assisted the researchers in using the facilities of their institutes in the study process. All these institutes employed the teachers based on their performances on a written general English test, a written English Language Teaching test, a semi-structured interview, and a demo lesson. Moreover, these institutes offered their pre-service teachers a 10-session teacher education course to enable the relevant teachers to use efficient techniques and strategies for facilitating the learners' acquisition of the various aspects of the target language. Furthermore, all of the relevant institutes had sufficient well-equipped classrooms, which enabled the teachers and learners to use the Internet and various language learning software.

2.2. Instrumentation

2.2.1 Tailor-Made LOA Teacher Education Course

In the present study, the researchers utilized Turner and Purpura's (2016) LOA framework to provide the participants with tailor-made LOA education. This framework particularizes seven dimensions of LOA, including the affective, instructional, interactional, contextual, elicitation, proficiency, and learning dimensions in the classroom context. As Purpura and Turner (2014) pointed out, the lines of demarcation between these dimensions are blurred and tend to intermingle during instruction. Accordingly, in each session of the relevant LOA teacher education course, the researchers gave the participants adequate information on these dimensions in the first 30-minute session. More specifically, they prompted the teachers to take account of the learners' characteristics during the learning tasks. They encouraged them to adapt their explanations of the various aspects of the target

language to the learners' communicative competence level to deal with the affective and instructional dimensions, respectively.

Furthermore, they directed the teachers' attention to the significance of interactional feedback scenarios to empower them to deal with the interactional dimension of LOA. Moreover, the researchers motivated the relevant English teachers to pay attention to their characteristics and the learners' culture to take account of the contextual dimension. In addition, they apprised the teachers of the consequential role of the planned and spontaneous assessment procedures. They informed them about the necessity of evaluating the learners' progressions regarding the various aspects of the target language to empower them to deal with the elicitation and proficiency dimensions, respectively. Finally, the researchers encouraged the teachers to utilize various instructional resources, take advantage of unplanned self-assessment and peer-assessment procedures, and provide the learners with constructive feedback to deal with the learning dimension of LOA.

Second, the researchers took advantage of demo lessons to assist the participants in putting the theory of LOA into practice in the second 30-minute time period of each session. To this end, they planned a sample lesson for each session and taught it to the participants based on the underlying principles and the above-mentioned dimensions of LOA. For instance, the researchers prompted the teachers to follow the following steps to teach reading skills. First, select a text whose content is compatible with the language learners' cultural norms (i.e., contextual dimension). Second, ask the learners certain questions about the topic of the reading section to activate their background knowledge and to prompt them to relate it to their own lives by providing the teacher with personal examples (i.e., affective dimension). Third, provide the learners with information about the meaning of key and novel vocabulary items and problematic structures in the texts (i.e., instructional dimension). Fourth, encourage the learners to read the relevant texts and provide them with feedback in the reading process to expedite their reading comprehension (i.e., interactional dimension). Fifth, ask the learners to answer several comprehension questions about the texts to determine the degree to which they have grasped the main idea and the supporting ideas (i.e., proficiency dimension). Sixth, assign the learners to small groups and encourage them to interact with each other and to answer several inference-based questions by supporting their answers with the help of text-based evidence (i.e., elicitation dimension). Lastly, encourage the learners to evaluate their peers' answers to the inference-based questions and to provide them with feedback on their answers (i.e., learning dimension).

Finally, the researchers asked one of the participants in each class to teach a demo lesson to determine the degree to which they could adopt the LOA procedure in the third 30-minute time period of each session. Table 1 provides information on the objective and content of the tailor-made LOA teacher-education course for one sample session, namely teaching listening.

Table 1
Objective and Content of Tailor-Made LOA Teacher Education Course Sample Session

Session	Objective	Content
1	Teaching listening	a) Providing information on LOA dimensions (30 minutes); b) Teaching a demo lesson on listening skill instruction based on LOA procedures (30 minutes) c) Observing one of the participants' demo lessons on listening skill instruction based on LOA procedures (30 minutes)

The same procedure was adopted for 11 sessions in teaching four language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), each skill taking two sessions, and language components (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), each component in one session.

2.2.2 Focus-Group Interview

Colucci (2007) noted that the focus-group interview constitutes a research technique used to specify a group of people's perspectives on a certain issue. He explained that, in these groups, each member's characteristics are akin to the other members' characteristics. According to him, the similarities among the group members enable the researchers to determine their collective perspective

on the examined phenomenon. Accordingly, in this study, the researchers used the *focus-group interview technique* to develop the semi-structured interview protocol of this study. To this end, first, they contacted five experienced English teachers in different language institutes in Urmia (Iran), informed them about the study's objectives, and obtained their consent to participate before the interview session. Second, the researchers arranged the interview session with the above-mentioned teachers and asked them to attend it. Third, in the focus-group interview session, they exhorted the teachers to offer their perspectives on the various aspects of LOA and recorded the focus-group interview session. Fourth, they used *thematic analysis* to extract the predominant patterns or *themes* in the text of the recorded interview session. Finally, they developed the semi-structured interview protocol of the study based on the above-mentioned extracted themes.

2.2.3 Respondent Validation and Expert Validation

In this study, the researchers used respondent validation (i.e., member checking) and expert validation research techniques to determine the validity of the developed semi-structured interview protocol. Moreover, they used respondent validation to examine the study's credibility (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). To this end, they provided the participants with the transcribed texts of their interviews and asked them to confirm their truth value.

2.2.4 Thick Description

Hammersley (2008) pointed out that thick description is considered a research technique that qualitative researchers use to ensure the transferability of the findings of their studies. He noted that to employ this technique, the researchers provide detailed information on the participants' characteristics and research methods to enable the other researchers to replicate their study. Accordingly, in this study, the researchers used the thick description technique. They expounded on the participants' characteristics and the data collection settings, and they utilized research techniques to ensure that the findings were transferable to other language learning contexts and settings.

2.2.5 Peer Review

Grinnel and Unrau (2008) averred that peer review is a qualitative research technique that enables researchers to determine the consistency and confirmability of their findings. They noted that to employ this technique, the qualitative researchers ask their peers to examine their findings and provide feedback on their consistency. Considering these discussions, in this study, the researchers held numerous peer review sessions with two of their colleagues to ensure the dependability and confirmability of the study findings. The researchers' colleagues were two university professors with sufficient experience conducting qualitative research studies. The researchers apprised them of the objectives of the study, the data collection procedure, and the data analysis technique to facilitate their evaluation of the reliability of the study findings.

2.2.6 Audit Trail

Koch (2006) pointed out that an audit trail is a qualitative research technique borrowed from accounting. He explained that, based on the rules, firms are required to allow certain government auditors to scrutinize their accounts to specify their potential errors or to detect their fraud. According to him, this concept has motivated qualitative researchers to develop audit trails to ensure the confirmability of their findings. As Akkerman et al. (2006) pointed out, an audit trail refers to a written description of the qualitative researchers' methodological decisions, which empowers the other researchers to determine the logic behind the adopted procedures and to evaluate the objectivity of the reported findings. Considering these issues, in this study, the researchers used the audit trail technique to ensure the confirmability of the findings. More specifically, they endeavored to keep a detailed written record of their methodological decisions in the study process.

2.2.7 Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2012) noted that thematic analysis constitutes a qualitative research technique that empowers the researchers to specify and expound on the major patterns or *themes* in the collected qualitative data. As they explained, to employ this technique, the researchers must examine the collected data numerous times to acquaint themselves with them. Second, they must take various notes and determine the primary codes by arranging the participants' quotations. Third, the researchers must revise their determined codes to specify the relevant themes in the collected data. Fourth, they have to investigate the potential themes in the relevant data. Fifth, they should hold numerous sessions with their co-researchers to define and label the extracted themes. Finally, the researchers should report

the themes of their study using coherent models. Accordingly, in the present study, the researchers: a) examined the transcribed semi-structured-interview data numerous times; b) determined the primary codes by making notes of the participants' quotations; c) revised the notes and extracted the primary themes; d) examined the potential themes; e) named the relevant themes; and f) developed a model of the English instructors' perspectives on LOA.

2.2.8 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that in qualitative research studies, the researchers must examine the trustworthiness of their findings. They defined trustworthiness as the degree to which the researchers are confident about the appropriateness of their data collection procedures, authenticity of their interpretations, and effectiveness of their research methods. According to them, trustworthiness can be appraised based on four main criteria: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. As they explained, credibility determines the extent to which the findings of a certain study are accurate. Moreover, transferability refers to the possibility of transferring the findings of research studies to similar contexts and settings.

Furthermore, dependability expounds on the consistency of the findings of qualitative studies. Finally, confirmability specifies the degree to which the findings of the qualitative studies reflect the participants' attitudes toward the examined phenomenon rather than the researchers' subjective interpretations. In the present study, the researchers used respondent validation and thick description research techniques to ensure the credibility and transferability of the findings. In addition, they took advantage of peer review and audit trail research techniques to guarantee the dependability and conformability of the study's findings, respectively.

2.3. Procedure

In this study, first, the researchers contacted the managers of four well-known language institutes in Urmia (Iran) and apprised them of the study's major objectives. More specifically, they informed the managers about the main characteristics of the tailor-made LOA teacher education course and the necessary modifications of the methodology of their classes. Furthermore, they assured the managers of the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the collected data. Moreover, the researchers reassured the managers that participation in the study was voluntary and that the participants could withdraw from the study at any stage. After gaining the managers' approval, the researchers asked them to provide the WhatsApp numbers of teachers with a B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. degree in English Language Teaching. The managers of the relevant research institutes provided the researchers with the number of 57 eligible English teachers. Second, the researchers contacted each of these teachers, informed them about the study's aims, assured them of their anonymity and data confidentiality, and provided them with information on the study's procedure. Thirteen of the above-mentioned English instructors did not consent to participate in the study due mainly to their busy schedules. Third, they obtained the written consent of the remaining 44 English instructors (i.e., 24 male and 20 female) prior to the onset of the study.

Fourth, during the relevant tailor-made teacher education course, the researchers provided the English teachers in each pertinent language institute with LOA education in 12 ninety-minute sessions for one month. In each session, the researchers apprised the teachers of the theoretical discussions of LOA and provided them with guidelines to help them put the LOA theory into practice. Moreover, they assigned each teacher a language learning task and prompted them to adopt the LOA procedure during the other teachers' task performance. Furthermore, the researchers encouraged the other teachers to perform the students' roles and simulate the conditions of an authentic language classroom. After the teacher education sessions were terminated, the researchers informed the teachers that they needed to take advantage of LOA in their classes in the following term. Fifth, during the following term of each relevant institute, the researchers periodically observed the participants' classes and provided them with constructive comments on their LOA procedure. Moreover, they prompted the teachers to contact the researchers if they had inquiries about the LOA procedure in their classrooms.

Sixth, after the termination of the relevant term, the researchers arranged the interview session with each participant in the relevant institutes. Seventh, they utilized the researcher-developed semi-structured interview protocol of the study to conduct 20-minute Farsi interviews in one week to determine the participants' perspectives on LOA. The researchers recorded all of the interview sessions.

Eight, the researchers transcribed the recorded interview sessions. Finally, they used the thematic analysis research technique to analyze the collected interview data. More specifically, they examined the data numerous times, specified the primary codes, integrated the codes to extract the relevant themes, labeled the extracted themes, and developed the model of the study which expounded on Iranian English teachers' perspectives on LOA.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the transcribed interview data accentuated the existence of six underlying themes in the participants' responses to the pertinent interview questions. Table 2 indicates the specified codes and the extracted themes in the data:

Table 2

Codes and Themes in the Data on Iranian EFL Teachers' Attitudes toward LOA

Codes	Themes
Paying undivided attention to the learners' output Interpreting the learners' output in light of numerous factors Being forced to make major decisions Being willing to engage in constant interaction	Development of teacher noticing skills as desiderata in LOA procedure
Promoting the learners' interaction with their peers Focusing on the process of language acquisition Prompting the learners to make cognitive comparisons between their own language use and native speakers' language use	Advantageous Impact of LOA on language learning
Obviating the bias in the process of testing Developing a thorough understanding of the language learners' acquisition potentiality Making the learners aware of their language learning difficulties Lacking a sufficient attention and concentration span Being forced to follow innumerable teaching-assessment procedures Dealing with the learners' problems in the process of LOA	Supremacy of LOA over traditional testing procedures LOA implementation challenges
Enabling the teachers to adopt a learner-centered approach to language instruction in all of their classes Prompting the language learners, who are at various proficiency levels, to formulate and implement effective language learning strategies	LOA extension to all proficiency levels.
Encountering difficulties in performing the LOA in limited class time Feeling the need to use interesting software interfaces in the process of LOA	The need for developing user-friendly LOA-compatible applications

As shown in Table 2, the first theme in the participants' interview data was the *development of teacher noticing skills as desiderata in the LOA procedure*. Thirty-five participants stated they needed to develop and hone their teacher-noticing skills to adopt the LOA procedure efficiently. In this regard, participant 19 noted that:

I believe that language teachers cannot follow the LOA procedure if they do not avail themselves of noticing skills. For instance, teachers have to unravel the ambiguities in the learners' output and provide them with immediate feedback based on their individual characteristics. Consequently, teachers have to learn and improve their noticing skills satisfactorily.

Likewise, participant 31 highlighted the multi-layered nature of the LOA procedure and noted that:

In practice, LOA prompts the teachers to dovetail their instruction with the multitudinous requirements of the classrooms. More specifically, English teachers should be amenable to constant interaction. They must create and follow numerous instructional-assessment-oriented scenarios to ameliorate the learners' acquisition of specific aspects of the target language and assess their language progression.

Moreover, the second theme in the participants' responses to the pertinent questions of the interview protocol was the *advantageous impact of LOA on language learning*. Twenty-nine participants averred that LOA benefited the learners' acquisition of various aspects of the target language. In this regard, participant 7 pointed out that:

I think the interactive nature of LOA empowers language learners to acquire the formal aspects of the target language satisfactorily. More specifically, in the process of LOA, the language teachers provide the learners with feedback and urge them to expound on their linguistic choices. The learners' endeavors to explain the reasons for using their preferred linguistic forms help them better understand the functions of the relevant forms in various linguistic contexts.

Similarly, participant 40 underlined the educational value of LOA in the context of the classroom and noted that:

In most of the language classes, teachers are mainly concerned with examining the learners' second language knowledge and disregard the impact of tests on their language acquisition. LOA can be distinguished from traditional tests based on its educational value. That is, LOA provides the learners with constructive feedback and encourages them to make an endeavor to develop a native-like communicative competence.

Furthermore, the examination of the transcribed interview data accentuated that the third theme in the collected interview data was the *supremacy of LOA over traditional testing procedures*. Thirty-one of the participants noted that LOA constituted an efficacious procedure for assessing the learners' acquisition of the various aspects of the target language. Regarding this issue, participant 22 pointed out:

The information I obtained from the teacher education course on LOA enabled me to follow the LOA procedure effectively. For example, my knowledge of the dimensions of LOA empowered me to form various groups, determine the duration of learning tasks, provide the members of each group with constructive feedback, and make the learners cognizant of the non-native aspects of their language competence.

Likewise, participant 35 underscored the utility of LOA in language instruction and pointed out that:

In my opinion, communicative approaches to language instruction have highlighted the supremacy of LOA over traditional language testing procedures. LOA provides language teachers with the opportunity to assess the learners' second language ability accurately, mainly because it prevents bias in the testing procedures in the classroom context.

Additionally, the analysis of the transcribed data showed that the fourth theme in the participants' answers to the interview items was the *travails of the LOA procedure*. Twenty-eight participants noted that they experienced numerous problems in the process of LOA. In this regard, participant 6 noted that:

Sometimes, the requirements of LOA proved to be overwhelming in the instruction process. In some of my classes, I had to create multiple teaching-assessment scenarios and follow them precisely to teach and assess a few points simultaneously during a short period of my class.

Similarly, participant 34 highlighted the difficulties that the learners experienced in the process of LOA and noted that:

Language learners encountered several difficulties when I applied LOA in my classes. For instance, some of the students were perplexed when I provided detailed feedback and asked them to expound on their linguistic choices during the interaction process.

In addition, the perusal of the transcribed interview data accentuated that the fifth theme in the collected data was the *utility of LOA at all proficiency levels*. Twenty-one participants stated that LOA constituted a viable assessment procedure and could ameliorate learners' language acquisition at various proficiency levels. In this regard, participant 16 noted that:

I believe that LOA may benefit the teachers' ability to assess their participants' language competence at all proficiency levels. This assessment procedure enables the teachers to identify and deal with their learners' needs effectively. Consequently, language institutes should integrate this procedure into the methodology of their classes.

Likewise, participant 42 capitalized on the educational utility of LOA in language classes and stated that:

In my opinion, language institutes should take advantage of LOA to provide their learners with abundant language learning opportunities at all proficiency levels. The use of this procedure in numerous classes has underscored its effectiveness. It has indicated that it benefits the learners' acquisition of diverse aspects of the target language. This issue highlights the need to follow this assessment procedure in all language classes.

Finally, scrutinizing the transcribed interview data showed that the sixth theme in the participants' responses was *the necessity of developing user-friendly applications for carrying out LOA*. Thirty-two participants averred that developing a user-friendly application was essential to efficient LOA in language classes. Regarding this issue, participant 25 noted that:

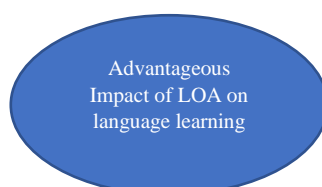
Teachers need user-friendly applications to follow the LOA procedure effectively. These applications may empower the teachers to take advantage of LOA outside the classroom context.

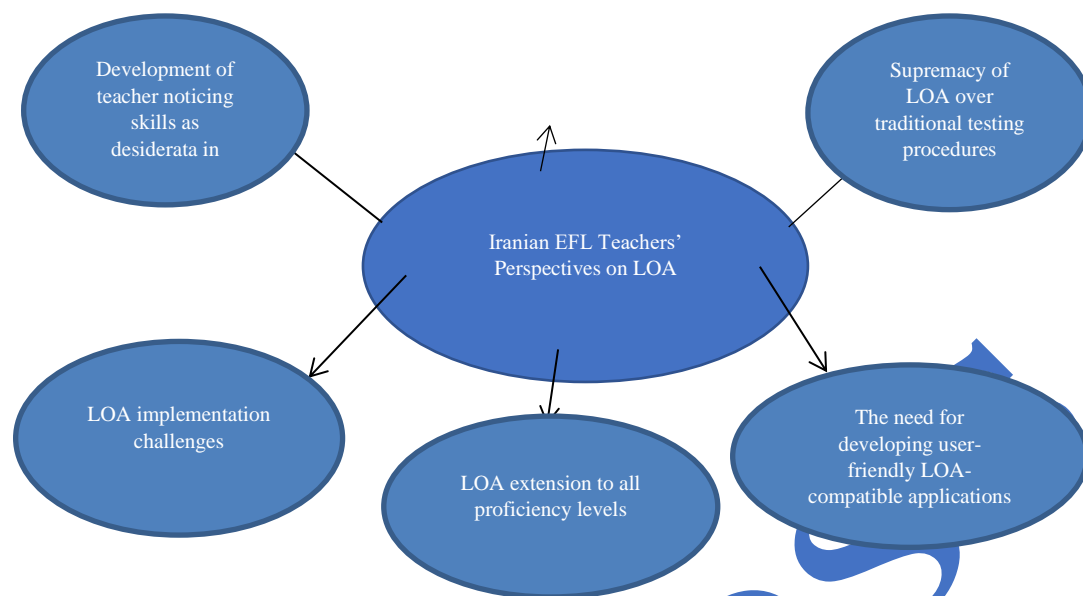
Similarly, participant 18 highlighted the need for LOA software with attractive interfaces and noted that:

I believe there is a need to develop applications with appealing interfaces to encourage learners to engage in the process of LOA. Integrating technological advancements with LOA may prove to be more fruitful than the orthodox LOA procedures.

Considering the above-mentioned findings, the researchers produced a schematic diagram of Iranian English teachers' perspectives on LOA. Figure 1 shows this diagram:

Figure 1
Iranian EFL Teachers' Perspectives on LOA





The present study tried to determine Iranian English instructors' perspectives on LOA. The analysis of the qualitative interview data accentuated that the *development of teacher noticing skills as desiderata in LOA procedure* constituted the first major theme in the participants' answers to the interview questions. This finding is in line with the obtained results of several studies, including the studies that were conducted by Sherin (2017), Jackson and Cho (2018), Jackson and Shirakawa (2020), Mann et al. (2020), and Jackson (2021). These studies have reported that language teachers consider developing teacher noticing skills an essential prerequisite to LOA.

Sherin and van Es (2009) noted that teacher noticing techniques enable language teachers to determine the significant events in the classroom context that may sway the learners' language acquisition process. Moreover, according to them, these techniques empower the instructors to specify the reasons behind the above-mentioned events using their locally contextualized knowledge of classroom dynamics. Finally, as noted, teachers use their knowledge of pedagogical tenets to relate the events to similar events to identify the barriers to the learners' language learning and modify their instructional approaches accordingly. In addition, Turner and Purpura (2016) pointed out that LOA prompts language teachers to monitor their learners' task performance to determine their weaknesses and deal with them in the instructional phase of the classroom. According to them, teachers need to relate the learners' learning behaviors to each other to develop a thorough understanding of the major instructional events in the classroom.

Considering these discussions, it can be argued that, in this study, the participants regarded teacher noticing skills as the prerequisites to the procedure of LOA due mainly to the fact that LOA forced them to develop teacher noticing skills by specifying the major instructional events, determining the causes of the relevant events, and relating the events to each other to determine the reasons behind the learners' language learning difficulties.

Furthermore, based on the findings, the *advantageous impact of LOA on language learning was the second main theme in the data obtained*. This finding supports the results of several pertinent studies, including the studies carried out by Navaie (2018), Phongsirikul (2018), Todd (2019), and Todd et al. (2021) and Derakhshan and Ghiasvand (2022). These studies have reported that LOA has a beneficial impact on the learners' acquisition of diverse aspects of the target language.

Inbar-Lourie (2017) averred that LOA constitutes an assessment approach that may facilitate the learners' acquisition of the various aspects of the target language more effectively than the other assessment approaches. As he explained, the utility of LOA stems from the fact that it blurs the line between learning and assessment and integrates assessment into the acquisition process to expedite the learners' acquisition process. Likewise, Turner and Purpura (2016) pointed out that LOA constitutes an

effective assessment procedure because it regards the assessment process as a formative process that enables the learners to determine the causes behind their strengths and weaknesses in task performance and to deal with their learning difficulties accordingly.

Considering these issues, it can be argued that the participants considered LOA an advantageous instructional procedure since it integrated assessment into the learners' language learning process and promoted their self-monitoring and self-assessment capabilities.

Moreover, based on the findings, the *supremacy of LOA over traditional testing procedures* was the third major theme in the participants' interview data. This finding underscores the results of the studies that were conducted by Carless (2015), Kim and Kim (2017), and Christison (2018). These studies have noted that teachers and learners consider LOA more advantageous than traditional tests.

Douglas (2010) noted that LOA may be considered a more efficacious assessment procedure than other assessment procedures because it bridges the gap between teaching and testing and relates them to each other effectively. More specifically, as he explained, while the traditional tests were completely detached from the language learning process and focused on the result of the acquisition process, LOA is mainly concerned with this process and integrates assessment into it to expedite the learners' language learning.

Consequently, it can be argued that, in the present study, the participants had favorable attitudes towards LOA and regarded it as a more effective assessment procedure than the traditional tests since they knew that LOA was not detached from the learners' acquisition process. Moreover, they were cognizant that LOA adopted a formative approach to assessing learners' performance to expedite it in the classroom context.

In addition, the findings indicated that *the travails of the LOA procedure constituted the fourth important theme in the study's interview data*. This finding is in line with the results of the studies that were carried out by Leung (2013), Mak and Lee (2014), Salamoura and Unsworth (2016), Derakhshan and Ghiasvand (2022), and Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023). These studies have reported that several language teachers experienced implementing LOA strategies in their classes.

Leung (2013) pointed out that most language instructors are not provided with adequate information on the LOA procedures and are not assisted in putting their theory into practice in the classroom context. As he explained, this issue prevents the teachers from formulating and implementing effective plans for using LOA in the classroom context. Similarly, Mak and Lee (2014) noted that the language teachers' hardships concerning LOA procedures can be ascribed to their inability to integrate assessment into learning. As they pointed out, the teachers' traditional testing habits do not allow them to implement LOA procedures effectively.

Therefore, it can be argued that, in this study, the participants experienced difficulty in implementing LOA strategies since their traditional testing habits did not allow them to align themselves with the procedures and objectives of LOA in an effective way. That is, they could not adequately disregard their customary practices to take advantage of LOA satisfactorily.

Additionally, the findings showed that *LOA's utility at all proficiency levels* constituted the fifth central theme in the collected interview data. This finding supports the results of the studies that were carried out by Puckett and Black (2000), Purpura (2016), Zeng et al. (2018), and Yang, X. (2020). These studies have noted that LOA constitutes an advantageous assessment procedure for improving the learners' language acquisition at various proficiency levels in second and foreign language classes.

Keppell et al. (2006) pointed out that LOA is mainly concerned with the learners' acquisition of the different aspects of the target language and employs assessment procedures to expedite their acquisition process. Consequently, it empowers learners at all levels to use formative assessment to improve their language learning. Likewise, Gebril (2021) stated that LOA supplements the learners' acquisition process by making them aware of their weaknesses and empowering them to deal with their problems accordingly. As a result, it is useful at all proficiency levels.

Considering these discussions, it can be stated that in the present study, the participants regarded LOA as a helpful assessment procedure at all proficiency levels since they were mindful of the fact that its main focus was on the learners' acquisition process and supplemented it by taking advantage of formative assessment procedures in the process of task performance.

Finally, based on the study's findings, the necessity of developing *user-friendly applications for carrying out LOA* was the last main theme in the collected data. This finding supports the results of

the studies that were carried out by Gao (2017), Almalki (2019), Farhady (2021), Figueras (2021), Alsowat (2022), and Fazel and Ali (2022), Derakhshan and Ghiasvand (2022), and Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023).

Turner and Purpura (2016) pointed out that LOA mainly takes advantage of the techniques implemented in in-person classes. According to them, it is necessary to provide the teachers and learners with the opportunities to implement their strategies using virtual platforms and different software to adapt them to technological advancements and raise their pedagogical appeal. Likewise, Gebril (2021) pointed out that the development of applications for putting the theory of LOA into practice can enable teachers and learners to take advantage of LOA procedures inside and outside the classroom and may have a beneficial impact on the learners' ability to take advantage of assessment procedures in the process of their language learning.

Consequently, it can be argued that, in this study, the participants supported developing and using virtual platforms and applications for using LOA procedures mainly because they felt the need to acclimate LOA to technological advancement. Moreover, they were aware of the utility of using these procedures using the relevant applications for facilitating the learners' language acquisition inside and outside the classroom context.

4. Conclusion

The present study intended to determine Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives on LOL in their classes. The study's findings highlighted that, in general, these teachers had favorable attitudes towards this assessment approach and underlined its supremacy over the traditional testing procedures. It appears that it is possible to draw certain provisional conclusions considering the findings of this study. First, it is essential to redress the present teacher education courses offered to language teachers before the onset of their service and during their service in the language institute and other academic settings, including the school. The reformation process of these courses has to focus on two issues: the teacher educators and the course content. Examining the teacher educators' characteristics and qualifications indicates that most of them are experienced language teachers with degrees in language-related fields, have attended diverse national and international courses in teacher education, and have obtained prestigious teacher education certificates. Nonetheless, they are not adequately knowledgeable about the alternative approaches to language assessment, including LOA, and focus on the practical procedures of traditional testing. Consequently, it is necessary to re-educate these teacher educators. This type of education has to make them conscious of the utility of these alternative assessment approaches in language classes and should prompt them to apprise their student-teachers of this approach's underlying principles and practical implications in language instruction.

Moreover, there is a need to rework and revamp the content of the education courses. Many of the present teacher education courses at different academic settings, including the language institutes, prepare their teachers to teach the relevant textbooks of their studies. That is, they adopt a course-based-teacher-education approach to teacher education. As a result, they deprive their teachers of adequate assessment-oriented education, including LOA-based education. Therefore, it is essential to include a module in these courses that appraises the pre-service and in-service teachers of the different aspects of LOA and empowers them to put its theory into practice.

Second, there is a need to revise the EFL instructional materials and teacher manuals. The current materials do not provide teachers and learners sufficient opportunities to integrate language assessment into language learning. Therefore, the syllabus designers need to involve more LOA-oriented tasks in various sections of the EFL textbooks. Finally, the preponderance of the EFL teacher manuals in language institute settings focuses on practical consideration in the classrooms and disregards the theoretical aspects of assessment, including the LOA approach. Consequently, the syllabus designers must redress these manuals by involving adequate information on the theoretical and practical considerations of LOA to enable the teachers to take advantage of this assessment procedure in their classes.

Further studies are warranted to capitalize on the findings of the present study. To this end, it seems necessary to develop a reliable and valid scale for determining EFL teachers' perspectives on LOA in the Iranian context drawing upon the extracted themes of the present study. Moreover, researchers should conduct similar studies in other academic settings, including school and university

settings, to provide a better understanding of the practicality of LOA procedures in foreign language classes. Finally, researchers are recommended to conduct more studies in foreign and second language contexts to determine the similarities and differences between language teachers' perspectives on the LOA procedures in the relevant contexts.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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