

English Language Teacher Self-Assessment: Voices from Iran

Mostafa Nazari^{1,*} , Melika Jargani Tilaki²

¹ The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Kowloon, Hong Kong

² Islamic Azad University, Qaemshahr, Iran



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Abstract

Despite the significance of teacher self-assessment in general teacher education, this line of inquiry has not received the due attention it deserves in TESOL teacher education. The present mixed methods study aimed to fill part of the gap by reporting on Iranian English language teachers' self-assessments. Data were collected from 14 teachers through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and stimulated recall interviews. Descriptive and thematic data analyses indicated that while the teachers assessed themselves as less competent in knowing the subject matter, they specifically attempted to promote perceptions of diversity among the students and develop students who can become socio-culturally critical individuals. The findings also showed that despite the alleged perceptions about the traditional educational system of Iran, our focal EFL teachers are changing the landscape of language teaching/learning by stepping toward developing 21st-century skills in the students to reshape their literacy skills. We close the paper by providing implications regarding using teacher self-assessment as a novel professional development tool in teacher education courses to enhance teachers' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, various professional development tools have been introduced to contribute positively to teachers' professional growth. Among such tools, teacher self-assessment (TSA) has been argued to provide teachers and teacher educators with useful insights into developing enhanced reflectivity and facilitating teachers' development (e.g., Akram & Zepeda, 2015; Benson, 2011; Buenaño-Fernandez et al., 2020). The major argument undergirding TSA is that self-assessment enables teachers to develop criticality toward their own professional practices (Borg & Edmett, 2019; Towndrow & Tan, 2009), become reflective practitioners vis-à-vis educational performance (Borgmeier et al., 2016; Ross & Bruce, 2007), and come to novel understandings in how to positively contribute to students' learning and institutional accountability (Curtis & Cheng, 2001; Dayal & Alpana, 2020).

* **Corresponding Author:** Mostafa Nazari, Department of English and Communication, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Kowloon, Hong Kong. **Email:** Mostafanazari136969@gmail.com



Despite the significance of TSA in teacher development and its prevalent representation in general teacher education, this line of inquiry has received little attention in TESOL teacher education, especially through mixed methods approaches. Borg and Edmett (2019) particularly call for further research in this area in (second) language teacher education. In response to this call, we report on Iranian English language teachers' self-assessments in this study. As we show later, by using multiple data sources, this examination can provide useful insights into understanding how particularities of English language teaching in Iran shape the teachers' self-assessments and their divergent perceptions. The study is significant as it examines an underexplored area of research in TESOL teacher education and provides implications for policymakers and teacher educators to turn their conscious attention to using self-assessment as a professional development tool. Thus, this study aims to examine Iranian English language teachers' self-assessments by drawing on the inventory Borg and Edmett (2019) developed.

Literature review

Teacher self-assessment

Self-assessment is a comprehensive concept in education that is considered both as a key practice to develop self-awareness about the educational process (Benson, 2011) and as an efficient way to promote autonomous teachers (Wallace & Bau, 1991). TSA is related to teachers' judgment about their efficiency and adequacy of knowledge and performance (Akram & Zepeda, 2015). TSA is also a formal and systematic process that enables teacher performance evaluation (Buenaño-Fernandez et al., 2020). Within this perspective, TSA requires teachers to look at their practice from a number of angles and assess the surroundings to develop strategies appropriate for enhancing their practice (Dayal & Alpana, 2020).

Self-assessment offers multiple benefits to teachers and their professional growth. One such benefit is that TSA provides a fuller picture of teacher competence as compared to classroom observations conducted by external assessors. In fact, TSA engages teachers more directly in self-evaluation and professional development, giving them a higher sense of ownership in the assessment process and in further decisions about the areas in need of progress (Borg & Edmett, 2019). Moreover, it is essential for teachers to self-assess and select the most suitable style(s) for classroom teaching efficiency, to enhance the teaching-learning process, and to guarantee educational accountability, which helps them enhance their professional performances (Curtis & Cheng, 2001).

Self-assessment can also help teachers become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, consequently helping them improve their efficiency (Montgomery & Baker, 2007). In fact, assessing teachers in terms of identifying their strengths or weaknesses is an important process in that effective teachers are expected to demonstrate high levels of teaching skills in order to meet the required standards of responsibility and accountability and to care deeply about students and their success (Buenaño-Fernandez et al., 2020). As TSA contributes to teachers' professional practice by gathering new meanings of different situations (Dayal & Alpana, 2020), it compels teachers to assess what they do regularly and to strive to improve their practice (Dayal & Alpana, 2020). Moreover, by self-assessment, teachers can enhance not only their teaching practices but also improve learning outcomes (Rispoli et al., 2017). Since the way teachers plan, accomplish, and assess their lessons indicates their knowledge, abilities, and learning outcomes, self-assessment also provides a door into teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Al Darwish, 2021).

Moreover, self-assessment contributes to teacher self-efficacy, as teachers who believe that they are successful in self-evaluation are more likely to become successful and effective professionals (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Additionally, TSA can enhance teachers' sense of authority and contribute to their professional development (Borg & Edmett, 2019). In a related study, Ross and Bruce

(2007) defined a theory of teacher change that linked TSA to professional growth. They conducted an explanatory case study in which the use of self-assessment, alongside other tools, contributed to change and growth in the instructional practices of a mathematics teacher. The authors asserted that self-assessment could be used as a constructive strategy for improving the effectiveness of in-service teacher education if combined with other professional development strategies such as peer coaching and observation.

Furthermore, Borgmeier et al. (2016) employed TSA to examine evidence-based classroom practices for effective classroom management and instructional practices. They studied 612 general education teachers in primary, intermediate, and secondary schools in which they completed an online self-assessment questionnaire using evidence-based classroom practices. Statistical analyses showed significant differences in teachers' self-reported use of evidence-based classroom practices across different school levels. Additionally, there were variations across teachers at the levels of elementary, middle, and high school, both on total aggregated scores and all 25 individual items. The self-assessed use of evidence-based classroom practices was rated highest among elementary teachers, with a consistent decrease for middle- and high-school levels.

Drawing on change as a driving force in language teaching, Curtis and Cheng (2001) asked 35 proficient secondary school English teachers in Hong Kong to assess their own change-related knowledge, skills, and personality characteristics. The study aimed to figure out the teachers' ability to assess themselves in diverse areas and to consider whether such information could be beneficial in identifying change-related support needs. The results revealed that the teachers self-assessed some of their change-related knowledge, skills, and personality characteristics as more developed and some as less developed compared to others. Furthermore, it was concluded that besides asking the teachers to think about their experiences of change after the event, it would be better first to ask them to assess change-related knowledge, skills, and personality characteristics based on their aggregated experiences of change.

Despite the wide range of benefits offered by TSA to developing teachers' professional skills, TESOL teachers' perceptions of self-assessment have remained underexplored, which is addressed in the present study. This line of argumentation rises to increased prominence when TSA increasingly gains attention in academic discussions, professional development initiatives, and international courses offered to teachers (e.g., Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Korthagen, 2017).

Representation of TSA in international documents

TSA has also been widely discussed in various international documents. For example, Mirici and Hergüner (2015) put forth some practical suggestions on the functions and effectiveness of EPOSTL in English Language Teaching and German Language Teaching departments in a state university in Turkey. EPOSTL stands for the "European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages", which is a digital self-assessment tool for students in foreign language teacher training programs across Europe. It was developed for use in pre-service contexts and consisted of a self-assessment section that contains 193 competence descriptors related to language teaching (Borg & Edmett, 2019). The descriptors were considered as a set of essential competencies that language teachers should endeavor to achieve. It also helped student teachers of foreign languages to reflect purposefully on their teaching experiences, efficiency, and development in the course of teacher education. EPOSTL was considered as helpful in developing student teachers' metacognitive strategies as autonomous teachers.

Moreover, the "British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes" (BALEAP) is another case of self-assessment tool that contains a Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes. The framework involves several goals, one of which is self-assessment of professional development (Mateva et al., 2011). Moreover, Akram and Zepeda

(2015) accomplished an exploratory study to develop a “Self-assessment Instrument for Teacher Evaluation” SITE-II, based on five National Professional Standards for Teachers developed by the Ministry of Education, Pakistan. SITE-II is a valid and reliable ($\alpha=.94$) scale that provides initial data-based proof of the usefulness of the National Professional Standards in Pakistan.

The European Framework for the “Digital Competence of Educators” DigCompEdu, released in 2017, specifies the digital competencies particular to the teaching profession (Redecker, 2017) and is a self-assessment tool for assessing teachers’ digital competence. Additionally, in Georgia, Moor (2020) tried to validate the “Assessment of Teachers’ Pedagogical Content Knowledge” ATPCK, a self-assessment tool. Construct validity and reliability of the ATPCK were measured through confirmatory factor analyses of TSA scores at various grade levels. ATPCK, as a valid and reliable TSA tool, could be utilized to enhance professional development practices and teachers’ professional growth.

Furthermore, Westling Allodi et al. (2015) conducted a pilot study of the TSA tool of “Goals, Attitudes and Values in School” (GAVIS) in educational contexts to assess its validity. In fact, GAVIS can be used to get a visual account of the learning context of a classroom, which is valuable for the self-assessment of teacher performance. The GAVIS is aimed to be used by the teachers only as an internal self-assessment tool for development, not as an assessment in external evaluations, nor for school accommodations or liability purposes. Additionally, Borg and Edmett (2019) developed a self-assessment tool (SAT) for English language teachers and analyzed responses from 1,716 teachers worldwide. The study focused on designing the SAT and how teachers responded to it. The purpose of the SAT was to conceptualize a measure of teacher competence that could be used by ELT practitioners around the world and which could inform further decisions about teacher professional development. 86% of the teachers agreed on the relevance of the SAT, and only 3% of the respondents felt that the SAT was not relevant to their context, while over 93% agreed that the SAT provides the main knowledge and skills of teachers. This scale was also used in the present study because it focally addresses English language teachers, which is the focus of this study.

As the review of the above inventories shows, TSA is considered a central component of teacher professionalism. It can help teachers hone their professional skills, gain further awareness of their professional practice, and reflect on their teaching. Thus, it merits further empirical attention, especially in TESOL, a field in which TSA has received inadequate empirical attention.

Purpose of the study

The above body of theoretical and empirical knowledge shows that TSA is turning into an active agenda in educational milieus as it helps teachers develop their competencies and reflectively contribute to educational accountability. Moreover, given that (second language) teacher education is now argued to act more responsively and to account for individual sense-making (Freeman, 2020; Johnson & Golombek, 2020), it is significant to explore how English language teachers view self-assessment. This line of inquiry is of particular importance in language education as despite the fact that reflectivity has been a vibrant line of research in TESOL, and reflectivity is at the heart of self-assessment, little research has examined TESOL teachers’ self-assessment beliefs, a point also emphasized by Borg and Edmett (2019). Against this background, in this study, we examine Iranian English language teachers’ self-assessment by addressing the following questions that were informed by the TSA questionnaire:

1. How do Iranian English language teachers assess their professional abilities based on the self-assessment tool?
2. What does the teachers’ reasoning involve for assessing their competence?

3. What impacts does teacher self-assessment have on the teachers in light of their strengths and weaknesses?
4. What suggestions do the teachers provide for improving the Self-Assessment Tool?

2. METHODOLOGY

Context and participants

This study was conducted in Iran. The study setting was a private language school, which followed its exclusive policy and planning in relation to curriculum, syllabus, materials, and teacher recruitment/education. The policy and planning focused on developing students' skills and sub-skills by covering materials published by international publishers. The school recruited teachers from a wide range of candidates who generally had a good command of English. The students could advance to higher levels based on during-class assessments of teachers and final exams that were delivered face-to-face. Based on the second researcher's (who collected the data) experience in working with the school, we realized that the teachers generally had a negative attitude toward their own competence, which provided a suitable opportunity to explore how teachers assess themselves. This contextual motivation guided the study in exploring the teachers' views toward self-assessment.

The participants were 14 teachers whose ages and experience ranged from 20 to 30 and two to six, respectively. We selected teachers from all the proficiency levels of the school to have as many representative participants as possible. The teachers (T1-T14) had an educational profile of BA and MA in various disciplines, including English Language Teaching, Translation Studies, English Literature, and Educational Administration. The teachers were selected through convenience sampling as the second author knew them, and after obtaining the approval of teachers and policymakers, the data collection process was initiated.

Design and data collection

TSA can be accomplished in different ways. According to Borg and Edmett (2019), TSA could be drawn by an external assessment, a course or a situation, a specific condition, and a purposefully administered self-assessment tool. For this study, we collected data from various data collection methods, all organized around the teachers' self-assessment, to gain an in-depth understanding of how Iranian English language teachers view self-assessment. In line with this purpose, data were collected from questionnaires, stimulated recall interviews, written journals, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, with the latter functioning as complementary to our understanding of TSA. The data collection tools are explained below in accordance with the research questions presented above. The design of the study was organized around the SAT as designed and proposed by Borg and Edmett (2019).

Questionnaire

The first stage of data collection involved questionnaire administration. The questionnaire adopted from Borg and Edmett (2019) has 48 items and nine components: (1) Planning lessons and courses, (2) managing the lesson, (3) understanding learners, (4) knowing the subject, (5) managing resources, (6) assessing learning, (7) integrating information and communications technology, (8) using inclusive practices, and (9) promoting 21st-century skills. The questionnaire items (Likert-type) ranged from 1 to 4: 1. I'm not quite sure how to do this. 2. I can do this, but not very effectively. 3. I can do this quite well. 4. I can do this very well. This questionnaire was specifically designed to assess English language teachers' professional abilities and competence, which, as mentioned earlier, was the main reason for using it in the present study. Moreover, according to Borg and Edmett (2019), the questionnaire covers most of the areas that have already

been significant in the literature on general teacher education and thus is comprehensive enough to be used as the research instrument. The reliability of the questionnaire has also been checked by Borg and Edmett (2019), yet due to our concerns with descriptive analyses of the questionnaire, we did not run reliability indices.

Stimulated recall interviews

After collecting the questionnaire data, we asked the teachers to participate in stimulated recall interviews in which they could reason about their selected items. As awareness about professional practice has been argued to lie at the heart of TSA (see Borg & Edmett, 2019; Dayal & Alpana, 2020), we collected data from recall interviews (in Persian, L1) to examine the reasons behind the teachers' selected items. These interviews (involving adapted questions based on the questionnaire) enabled us to triangulate the data from the other sources regarding how the teachers view their competence and professional skills in light of the questionnaire responses. The interview procedure involved asking the teachers to explain why they selected the items in each of the questionnaire components. We also observed one session of each teacher's classroom instruction (overall 14 sessions), yet due to space limitations, the data from this research method has been excluded from this paper. However, the observations helped us become more familiar with the teachers' self-assessments by tracking their dispositions during classroom instruction.

Reflective journals and semi-structured interviews

We then asked the teachers to write short reflective journals in response to questions concerning their own strengths and weaknesses as teachers. Reflective journals could facilitate capturing how teachers perceive professional events and how they make sense of those events based on contextual particularities. In this sense, the teachers could write about their strengths and weaknesses as another tool that could complement our understanding of their self-assessment. The journals helped us gain further understanding of the teachers' awareness of self-assessment as the teachers' responses could complement the data from the recall interviews and facilitate interpreting the questionnaire responses. We used reflective journals so the teachers could think more deeply about their strengths and weaknesses and feel at ease when responding. After the teachers' journals were obtained, we conducted semi-structured interviews with them to enhance our understanding of TSA. The interviews (developed based on the journals and the questionnaire) tapped into two aspects: (1) the impacts of teachers' self-assessment on their cognitions (which functioned as a sequel to the reflective journals) and (2) the positive and negative dimensions of the questionnaire. We intentionally conducted the interviews as the final stage of data collection to be able to have the teachers' complete responses to the first question. The second question arose from Borg and Edmett's (2019) suggestion that future research should examine the positive and negative points of the questionnaire to reach a more complete understanding of the effectiveness of the questionnaire.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Once the data were collected, we analyzed them based on quantitative and qualitative methods. The data from the questionnaires were analyzed by examining the most frequently selected option across the questionnaire components mentioned above, as presented below. For example, in the component "planning lessons and courses", question 26 was marked by nine teachers. Then, the sum of the teachers' responses was divided by the items of the components so that the average of the scores could be obtained. This way of analyzing the data helped us gain a deep understanding of the overarching picture that the teachers followed in their responses, both across the components and the whole questionnaire. The data from stimulated recall interviews, journals, and semi-

structured interviews were analyzed via thematic analysis. In this regard, we first engaged in iterative reading of the data to develop the initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As to the recall interviews, two main categories were then developed for each of the nine components, as presented below. For example, when the teachers referred to the importance of planning the lessons carefully for instructional purposes, this was labeled as “to keep track of classroom instruction”. This coding process was also applied to the journals and interviews in developing the codes and categories. By further refining the codes in a constant-comparison manner, we developed the categories that characterized each dataset. Across this process, the researchers engaged in joint discussions and negotiations to enhance the credibility of the interpretations.

4. FINDINGS

This study explored how Iranian English language teachers view their competence and professional abilities based on the SAT. To this end, we collected data from several data collection methods, the results of which are presented below.

Teachers' self-assessment

The first research question examined the way teachers assess their own competence. Table 1 shows the teachers' responses.

Table 1: The Teachers' Questionnaire Responses

Component	Item	Option	Number of teachers	Mean
Planning lessons and courses	1. I can select activities which help meet the aims of the lesson.			
	2. I can write lesson aims which describe the intended learning outcomes for a class.	4	1	
	3. I can anticipate problems that may arise during the lessons and decide how to respond.	3	2	
	4. I can describe how learner understanding will be assessed.	3	8	9.2
	5. I can describe how feedback on learner performance will be provided.	4	2	
Managing the lesson	6. I can create a positive learning environment.	4	1	
	7. I can give explanations that the learners are able to understand.	2	2	
	8. I can give instructions effectively.	2	1	9
	9. I can check learners' understanding during the lesson.	2	2	
	10. I can monitor learner engagement.	3	1	
Understanding learners	11. I understand my learners' level of English.			
	12. I understand my learners' motivation to learn English.	2	1	
	13. I understand my learners' interests.	4	8	
	14. I understand my learners' preferred ways of learning.	3	1	9
	15. I understand my learners' special educational needs.	2	2	
Knowing the subject	16. I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach vocabulary to	3	2	6.1

Component	Item	Option	Number of teachers	Mean
Managing resources	my learners.	3	1	9
	17. I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach reading skills.	4	6	
	18. I can use a range of engaging techniques to introduce new grammar to my learners.	4	1	
	19. I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach my learners to speak English.	3	1	
	20. I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach listening skills.	3	1	
	21. I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach writing skills.	3	1	
	22. I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach pronunciation to my learners.			
	23. I can select materials from a range of different sources.			
	24. I can select materials and resources based on learner needs.	2	2	
	25. I can develop materials to supplement the course book I use.	4	8	
	26. I can evaluate the effectiveness of the materials and resources I use during lessons.	2	2	
	27. I can work with colleagues to design materials collaboratively.	2	1	
	28. I can give learners feedback on errors that helps them improve.	3	1	
	29. I can measure learners' progress effectively.	3	1	
Assessing learning	30. I can assess learners in a range of ways.	4	10	10.6
	31. I can reflect on the effectiveness of the assessment I use.	3	1	
	32. I can use assessment results to inform subsequent teaching.	4	1	
	33. I can use technology confidently for the purposes of teaching			
Integrating information and communications technology (ICT)	34. I can locate appropriate digital content effectively.	4	6	7.4
	English.	2	2	
	35. I can use digital tools effectively to help my students learn English.	2	2	
	36. I can evaluate the quality of digital content.	1	3	
	37. I can use technology to design and create teaching and learning materials.	2	1	
Using inclusive practices	38. I treat all my learners equally and with respect.			8.6
	39. I develop positive attitudes towards diversity in my classroom.	3	2	
	40. I can reflect on my own bias/beliefs and the impact this might have in the classroom.	3	2	
	41. I help my learners identify individual learning goals.	4	1	
	42. I involve parents, learners and any other relevant persons in an inclusive learning environment.	3	2	

Component	Item	Option	Number of teachers	Mean
Promoting 21st-century skills	43. I promote collaboration and communication.			
	44. I promote creativity and imagination.	4	9	
	45. I promote critical thinking and problem solving.	4	1	
	46. I promote student leadership and personal development.	4	1	9.3
	47. I promote digital literacy	4	1	
	48. I promote citizenship.	4	1	

Regarding “planning lessons and courses” ($M = 9.2$), question 3 was answered by eight teachers who selected option three the most. Among the questions of “managing the lesson” ($M = 9$), question 6 received the highest frequency, and eight teachers selected option 4. Question 12 was marked by eight teachers who chose option 4 in the component “understanding learners” ($M = 9$). Similarly, six teachers chose option 4 in response to question 18 regarding the “knowing the subject” component ($M = 6.1$). As to “managing resources” ($M = 9$), question 24 was marked the highest by eight teachers who chose option 4. Moreover, 10 teachers chose option 4 in response to question 30 regarding the “assessing learning” component ($M = 10.6$). “Integrating information and communications technology (ICT)” ($M = 7.4$) was marked by six teachers as to option 4 in response to question 33. In regard to “using inclusive practices” ($M = 8.6$), seven teachers marked option 3 in response to question 42. Finally, nine teachers chose option 4 in response to question 43, which was related to the “promoting 21st-century skills” component ($M = 9.3$).

An overall examination of the questionnaire responses reveals that while the teachers assessed themselves as least competent in knowing the subject matter, the components of “assessing learning” and “promoting 21st-century skills” were the most frequently-selected components because their means were 10.6 and 9.3, respectively, more than the other components. This was followed by the components of “planning lessons and courses”, “managing lessons”, “understanding learners”, “managing resources”, “using inclusive practices”, “Integrating information and communications technology (ICT)”, and finally “knowing the subject”.

Teachers’ reasoning

To tap into the details of the teachers’ responses and their self-assessment cognitions (research question 2), we also sought their reasoning for the selected items. Table 2 shows the teachers’ thematized reasoning across the nine components of the SAT. This table indicates that across the nine components of the SAT, the teachers sought various reasons for selecting the items relative to the nature of the component and questions. In coding the data for this question, as explained in the data analysis section in adopting thematic analysis, we had in mind the SAT components and sought the teachers’ reasoning as connected to the content of each component. For example, regarding the “managing resources” component, the teachers’ reasoning chiefly revolved around how to gear instruction to learners’ needs and render teaching as a responsive undertaking. This procedure of data coding was followed for all the components and the associated data.

Table 2: The Teachers' Reasoning for the Selected items

Component	Reasoning
Planning lessons and courses	To keep track of classroom instruction To provide appropriate feedback to students
Managing the lesson	To make the content learnable To relieve the students psychologically
Understanding learners	To tailor the instruction to student level To establish better rapport
Knowing the subject	To approximate teaching to students' level To differentiate the instruction
Managing resources	To enact responsive education To account for students' ongoing needs
Assessing learning	To avoid students' errors/mistakes To diagnose instructional flaws
Integrating information and communications technology (ICT)	To make instruction multimodal To engage the students despite little usage
Using inclusive practices	To create a culture of diversity To develop socially desirable individuals
Promoting 21st-century skills	To develop students' literacy across various areas To prepare students ready for life challenges

Effects of SAT

The third research question examined the effects of completing the SAT on the teachers' cognitions. To this aim, the teachers were first asked to detail their strengths and weaknesses. Table 3 shows the findings regarding this aspect as emerging from the data related to reflective journals. In this regard, we inductively sought the strengths and weaknesses per teacher response and gradually turned them into major categories. These categories were then refined to reach superordinates. We coded the data both separately (per teacher) and integratively (constant comparison) so that a clear set of categories could be obtained.

Table 3: The Teachers' Stated Strengths and Weaknesses

Weaknesses	Lack of competency in using appropriate assessment techniques, using technology, and teaching speaking effectively Problems in classroom management Excessive leniency and strictness Problems in scaffolding the students and motivating them Personality problems such as bias toward students and lack of personal planning
Strengths	Establishing effective rapport with students Having a good command of English skills Being punctual, good-tempered, and meticulous Having effective lesson planning skills Employing supplementary materials effectively

Moreover, the teachers were later asked about the effects of completing the SAT on them. The teachers argued that they have been sensitized to improving parts of their professional careers, especially in personal, pedagogical, and professional aspects. For example, regarding the personal aspects, T8 referred to the contributions of the questionnaire to her knowledge base of teaching: *“The questionnaire has deepened my knowledge of English language”* (T8). T1 mentioned a similar point regarding her ability to pay more attention to subsequent issues in the class: *“I think that I can now pay more attention to how I should manage the lesson more effectively”*. T2 linked this issue to his greater awareness of classroom interaction with the students: *“I have become more sensitive to my connection with students and what I say in the class.”* Furthermore, T3 mentioned the effects of the questionnaire on her own personal standards of conduct and planning: *“It sensitized me to improve my work as a teacher and revise my current classroom policies”*. Here, T3 explains how she has been sensitized to improving her work and reconsidering parts of her instruction.

As to pedagogical effects, the teachers referred to multiple instructional dimensions including the use of technology and more effective teaching and testing skills. For example, T11 referred to testing skills and that the questionnaire has influenced her tendency to hone her pedagogical skills: *“I have been sensitized to pursue testing skills and improve my testing proficiency”*. A similar observation was made by T9, who emphasized the effect of the questionnaire on him to incorporate technology more in his instruction: *“It sensitized me to revise my methodology and incorporate technology in my teaching methodology.”* T3 mentioned an extended point regarding the integration of technology and testing: *“The questionnaire and my reflections on it have prompted me to pay more attention to how technology and testing could be mixed. I know that many problems could occur, and we are partly doing it right now, but a deeper mixture is in my mind”*. These statements generally highlight that the teachers have been able to pay more attention to the role of questionnaire contents in their classes.

Finally, regarding professional aspects, the teachers noted points in relation to disciplinary specificities and the general landscape of their professional career as teachers. For example, T5 stated: *“By asking new questions that I haven’t thought about yet, the questionnaire sensitized me to new dimensions of TEFL, so that I could improve my teaching proficiency”*. Here, T5 views the questionnaire content as bringing her novel insights with regard to TEFL-related issues, which can help her develop her knowledge base. Moreover, T10 referred to the interpersonal effects of the questionnaire on his ability to develop more effective relationships with the students and parents as factors undergirding professional work: *“It made me revise and establish a better relationship with my students and their parents and at the same time maintain my policy”*. Another point was mentioned by T14 regarding how the SAT components have made him think more deeply about the macrostructural issues undergirding professional practice: *“When I saw the planning component, it prompted me how the bigger picture is important. Actually, everything starts from there and influences our work. I am thinking about this and similar issues more these days”*. Here, T14 shares how he has become more cognizant of the role of policy and planning in institutional work and that this issue has occupied his mind in the then-current period.

Teachers’ suggestions

The last research question examined the teachers’ suggestions for improving the SAT. The teachers highlighted four areas that need consideration. The first area pertained to disambiguating vague items. For example, T11 stated that: *“The questionnaire comprised some ambiguous and double-barreled statements, making answering them cumbersome”*. The second area was related to repetitious items. For example, T13 argued that *“the questionnaire posed one single issue in the form of several statements and this would lead to repetitive responses on my part as a teacher”*.

The third area involved shortening the questionnaire so that respondent boredom is taken into account. For instance, T7 held that: *“The questionnaire was long and consisted of multiple questions so that this would make answering it a boring task”*. The last area was related to the importance of embedding items that tap into teachers’ physical and psychological states. For example, T9 stated: *“It should take into account issues like psychological and physical states of the teachers”*.

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined Iranian English language teachers’ self-assessments, the reasoning behind their self-assessments, the impacts the TSA had on them, and their suggestions to improve the SAT.

The first research question examined the way teachers assessed their own competence based on the SAT. Data analyses showed that among the nine components of the SAT, although there were several components whose mean equaled nine, “assessing learning” and “promoting 21st-century skills” were selected as the most frequent components of the SAT. Considering assessment, it seems that the teachers are over-reliant on assessing the learners so that it makes them confident of the amount of knowledge gained by the learners. Another reason might be that the desired results of the learners’ assessment represent good performance on the part of the teachers in such a way that assessing learners acts as a means to measure the teachers’ own professional performance. This finding aligns with Akram and Zepada (2015) who argue that teachers view learners’ performance as a reflection of their own competence. Thus, in the case of our teachers, it appears that the teachers assessed their own competence and professional skills in light of students’ assessment performance, which highlights both the nature of the teachers’ assessment-induced work and their personal standards of professionalism.

Moreover, that the teachers assessed their competence quite well in promoting students’ 21st-century skills shows that they view learner literacy as beyond traditional perspectives of competence. While this finding is relatively surprising, considering the configurations of language instruction in the Iranian context are possibly still lagging behind state-of-the-art macro-structural and infrastructural developments, it also indicates that Iranian teachers are moving toward changing the landscape of language learning by developing skills and competencies in the learners that respond to the needs of the current society. This finding parallels the emphasis Borg and Edmett (2018), Buenaño-Fernandez et al. (2020), and Dayal and Alpana (2020) put on the changing nature of teacher self-assessment toward embracing competencies that align with the requirements of life in the 21st century. In this regard, our teachers considered themselves as competent in developing such perspectives in the learners, which shows that the teachers are constantly honing their skills to become more adaptable to the nature of current learners.

The second research question examined the reasoning teachers sought for assessing their competence. Data analysis showed that the teachers primarily attempted to positively contribute to the learners’ social and cultural development. Particularly, developing learners’ social skills and promoting a culture of diversity were prominently emphasized by the teachers. This finding is novel in that it situates teachers’ professional performance within a pedagogical level that could effectively help learners become socially desirable individuals. Embracing such competencies is considered as quintessential to professional performance in current societies and particularly in educational settings (e.g., Benson, 2011; Borgmeier et al., 2014; Ross & Bruce, 2007). Thus, the teachers seem to have both personally envisaged and interpersonally constructed teaching as a social practice that should account for learners’ sociocultural skills. This finding also parallels the set of competencies that are promoted in international teacher self-assessment documents,

especially BALEAP, which emphasizes teachers' ability to contribute to students' social skills in addition to didactic purposes.

Additionally, the teachers' reasoning to psychologically relieve the students shows that they attempt to gear instruction to the students' needs to act responsively and make the students mentally ready for the lesson content. In this regard, Curtis and Cheng (2001) also argue that students' role features as one of the most important elements in teachers' self-assessment, which is because teachers strive for a pedagogy that roots in learner satisfaction first and ultimately leads to teachers' own satisfaction. An immediately relevant point concerns the teachers' pedagogical reasons for their selected items. A number of reasons, including differentiating the instruction, rendering the instruction responsive, reducing the gap between teaching and students' level, and diagnosing instructional shortcomings were among the teachers' responses, which parallels the scholarship on the significance of such issues in effective lesson delivery (see Freeman, 2020; Johnson & Golombek, 2020). For our teachers, however, this meant that they were aware of the significance of such issues and perceived their own competence in light of the importance of the issues. These findings show firstly that the teachers attempt to adopt a caring pedagogy in relation to the students, and second, through such a pedagogy, they form schemes of interpretation regarding their own professional practice.

The third research question aimed to examine the effects of completing the TSA on the teachers. The most important point in relation to this question was that it *sensitized* the teachers to pay more conscious attention to the dimensions of their professional practice. We must stress that we have intentionally used the term "sensitized" as claiming for empirical effect demands employing more rigorous data collection tools and longitudinal examination of levels of the effect. This is an issue that merits further attention from future researchers. Nonetheless, the questionnaire sensitized our teachers to personal, pedagogical, and professional dimensions of their career, showing that the teachers have paid focal attention to these dimensions as sources that can influence their professionalism, though it might be fleeting or the influence might be insignificant. What matters here is that such small degrees of exposure (i.e., completing the questionnaire) can trigger initiatives in teachers' professional practice that could be effectively employed by institutional policymakers and teacher educators to positively contribute to teachers' development. This is one of the fundamental issues Johnson and Golombek (2020) argued for in discussing a pedagogy of influence that creates significant links between teacher practice and student learning.

The last research question sought the teachers' recommendations for improving the SAT questionnaire, following Borg and Edmett's (2019) call for such an undertaking. Besides the need for disambiguating the items, shortening the questionnaire, and removing repetitious items, an interesting argument by our teachers was that teachers' psychological and physical states be embedded in the questionnaire. We consider this argument as helpful as current scholarship on teacher professionalism (e.g., Freeman, 2020; Korthagen, 2017) supports accounting for teachers' psycho-physiological states and well-being as essential factors that undergird teachers' professional practice. This suggestion could also be considered by future researchers in developing inventories that account for teachers' self-assessment of their psycho-physiological states and well-being. Traces of such issues have been embedded in previous self-assessment inventories (e.g., Akram & Zepeda, 2015; Mirici & Hergüner, 2015; Redecker, 2017; Westling Allodi, 2015), yet this issue merits concerted efforts for developing a devoted inventory.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In response to the lack and significance of research on English language teachers' self-assessments, this study examined how Iranian teachers assessed their own competence. We took several steps further and examined the teachers' reasoning for their self-assessment as well as the

impact completing the questionnaire had on them. Collectively, our findings showed that while the teachers did not assess themselves as highly competent in knowing the subject, they most prominently considered themselves as competent in assessing the learners and promoting their 21st-century skills. This finding was corroborated by the teachers' reasoning for developing students who can act socially desirable, pedagogically effective, and personally accountable. Moreover, the teachers were sensitized to attending more focally to aspects of their professional career by completing the questionnaire and referring to several factors to be embedded in the questionnaire. These findings add to the thin body of knowledge on English language teachers' self-assessment by bringing to the fore the ideas of teachers who are now looking at language teaching and learning with more awareness, as we argued above.

The study findings provide implications for teacher educators to employ the rigor of TSA as a professional development tool in educating teachers who build on their own appraisal of their professional practice. Reflective practice is currently considered as one of the most effective alternatives in teacher education courses (see Johnson & Golombek, 2020). Effective reflective practice happens when teachers engage in basing their learning on experiential learning from their own professional practice (Freeman, 2020; Korthagen, 2017). TSA could be one such reflective-practice agenda as it stems from the teachers' own self-appraisal and serves as a basis for professional growth. This potential of TSA could be employed by teacher educators to run professional development courses that account for the range of issues involved in teachers' practice. This way, teacher educators can build on the teachers' own appraisal and then contribute to their development through peer mentoring, reflective groups, lesson studies, observation, and other professional activities.

This study had limitations that provide a suitable basis for further research. First, we collected data from 14 teachers, and apparently, a greater number of teachers could better show how English teachers view self-assessment. However, this was primarily due to the qualitative nature and weighting of the study. Second, although we used classroom observations to support our understanding of the teachers' self-assessment, we did not report the congruity/incongruity in the teachers' questionnaire responses and the extent to which the teachers reflect such perspectives in their classes, which could be addressed by future researchers. Third, regarding the impacts of the questionnaire on the teachers, there is a need to examine such an effect over time to see whether the effects are fleeting or enduring. Acknowledging these limitations, we hope that future researchers could address such limitations and we also hope that teacher educators open more room for utilizing self-assessment as a professional tool in helping the teachers grow.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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