

2014

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Recommended Citation

Karimi, M., & Shafiee, Z. (2014). Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Dynamic Assessment: Exploring the Role of Education and Length of Service. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(8).
<https://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n8.10>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol39/iss8/9>

Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Dynamic Assessment: Exploring the Role of Education and Length of Service

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Abstract: The present study reports on the thematic analysis of Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of dynamic assessment in relation to their academic degree and length of service. To this end, 42 Iranian EFL teachers participated in the study. Of these teachers, 22 held BA and 20 held MA degrees in ELT-related subjects, with varying lengths of service. Semi-structured interviews were used to inquire into the teachers' perceptions of dynamic assessment. The four major themes that emerged from the content analysis of the audiotaped interviews revealed significant variations in participants' patterns of perceptions and concerns towards dynamic assessment. The major themes comprised of teachers' understanding of dynamic assessment as a classroom practice, viewing their own agency in application of dynamic assessment, the place of learners in this practice, and their awareness about contextual constraints affecting application of dynamic assessment. Suggestions for further research as well as limitations of the study are also discussed.

Introduction

With its mark deeply left on the conceptualization of language assessment, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), during recent decades, has signposted the dialectic unity of instruction and assessment as a yardstick for the feasibility of instruction in the field of ELT, *inter alia* (Lantolf, 2009). This dialectic unity manifests instruction and assessment as the two united moments in learning process (Lantolf, 2009). According to this perspective, promotion of language learning entails reformulation of teachers' and assessors' competencies of conducting classroom assessment beyond constraints of the conventional psychometric issues and shortcomings of standardized tests (Haywood & Lidz, 2007; Inbar-Lourie, 2008). Consequently, research on assessment as an inseparable part of instruction, and also as a social practice, has recently gained a currency evoked by social constructivist perspectives as well as poststructuralist transgressive challenges which illuminate boundary making effects of language practices (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; McNamara, 2012a). These epistemological evolutions in the social sciences (also see McNamara, 2001) turn the spotlight on the needs to engage all ELT stakeholders in instruction and assessment, teachers in particular. Accordingly, teachers are encouraged to engage in the critical reflection of classroom-based assessment to gain awareness about classroom performance, progress, score interpretation, issues of validity, value-laden constructs, social and political character of assessment, etc. (McNamara, 2012a). To this end, as Shohamy (2005) maintains, teacher development programs should keep high in their agenda teachers' exposure to theory and practice of assessment and its residual outcomes. This entails developing teachers as active decision makers who are "responsible and involved leaders in their assessment practices by obtaining training and knowledge in assessment" (Shohamy, 2005, p. 107).

To encourage the dialectical praxis and the awareness mentioned above, dynamic assessment (DA) provides a substantial platform for language teachers. Built upon sociocultural theory, DA is defined as the unification of instruction and assessment as two

components of educational process (Lantolf, 2009). Constructing and reconstructing language teachers' perceptions of DA requires the integration teachers' theoretical knowledge of assessment with the knowledge of teaching methodology they gain through education. This gained tacit theoretical knowledge is, then, proceduralized via actual classroom practice as a long-term learning approach (Inbar-Lourie, 2008). As such, education and experience contribute to development of teachers' perspectives regarding DA, which entails investigating and improving their constructivist approaches towards assessment, according to context and culture (Troudi, Coombe, & Al-Hamli, 2009). However, despite the recognition which DA has attracted in the literature, little, if any, research has been conducted to help contextualize EFL teachers' beliefs and values about DA. Thus, the significance of this study lies in the fact that in spite of the relatively rich record of research on DA in Iran, a major share of research in this area is mostly classroom-based (Derakhshan, Rezaei, & Alemi, 2011). That is, research primarily incorporates investigating the effects of DA on teaching and learning processes (e.g. Alavi, Kaivanpanah, & Shabani, 2012; Mardani & Tavakoli, 2012; Najafi Far, 2011; Nezakatgoo, 2011; Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). In line with this, the present study aims at exploring Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives regarding DA as a function of their academic credentials and length of service.

Theoretical Framework and Review of the Related Literature

As demonstrated by Hill and McNamara (2011), assessment should incorporate illumination of processes rather than mere description of the outcomes. Accordingly, they define assessment as "...any reflection by teachers (and/or learners) on the qualities of a learner's (or group of learners') work and the use of that information by teachers (and/or learners) for teaching, learning (feedback), reporting, management or socialization purposes" (Hill & McNamara, 2011 p. 396).

The above definition takes account of classroom assessment as a social and constructive practice that puts at the core a sociocultural approach towards language assessment. Subsequently, a brief account of sociocultural essence of DA more adequately explains the notion of a sociocultural type of assessment, i.e. DA. Originated from Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development (ZPD), DA is based on sociocultural theory that considers cognitive change as influenced by "the productive intrusion of other people and cultural tools in the [developmental] process" (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989, p. 68). Accordingly, cultural affordances that provide mediation for the learners to be engaged in social activity, allow for "the emergence of specifically human psychological processes as the person appropriates the affordances" (Lantolf, 2007, p. 52), and this, in effect, results in development in that activity, in this case second language learning (Lantolf, 2007). These mediational effects on cognitive development have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention in the field of second language acquisition, among other fields (e.g. Golombek, 2011; Johnson, 2006; Lantolf & Aljaafreh, 1995; Lantolf & Johnson, 2007; Murphy, 2011; Poehner, 2008; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, 2011).

Notably, the emergence of DA is attributed to Vygotsky's criticism of traditional assessment (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Shabani et al., 2010). As such, in his reaction to the insufficiencies of traditional psychometric-based school assessment, Vygotsky (1962) asserted that traditional assessment accounts only for the already attained developments rather than a prospective development viable to emerge (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, Vygotsky (1998) emphasizes that "a true diagnosis must provide an explanation, prediction, and scientific basis for practical prescription" (p. 205). Thus, Vygotskian psychology paves the way for diagnosing and measuring the fully matured as well as dynamically emergent abilities (Lidz & Gindis,

2003), and, DA, by placing zone of proximal development at the core, represents a dialectically integrated means to the assessment of a dynamic and ever-emerging goal in instruction (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). Therefore, since in instruction, and in this case in second language acquisition, the outcome stands as a touchstone for its effectiveness, the edifice of language testing and assessment, though still standing on its psychometric-based traditional pillars, has reluctantly and skeptically started paying gradual attention to DA as a viable alternative (e.g. Elder, 1997; Lafford, 2007; Messik, 1989; Pienemann, 1998; Poehner, 2007; Shohamy, 2006, Tsui, 2005). More specifically, the surge of interest directed towards the implementation and application of DA addresses it as a solution to the shortcomings of standardized, normative testing (Haywood & Lidz, 2007).

To further elaborate on the above mentioned shortcomings of traditional psychometric-based assessment, McNamara (2012b) draws upon the indeterminacy, ambiguity, and uncertainty of test score interpretation. He also maintains that the psychometric measure of validity, instead of eradicating uncertainties, infuses more ambiguity in interpretations of that test score due to expression of discriminating and multiple, conflicting interpretations of either the construct or test score caused by various sociocultural, ideological and institutional values (Elder, 1997, cited in McNamara, 2012b; Messik, 1989; Shohamy, 2006). Besides validity of assessment, Lantolf (2009) asserts that consistency of measure (reliability) attained by controlling mediation of environment, contradicts Vygotskian social constructivism since Vygotsky's theory highlights environment as the very essence of development. Thus, at the core of effective assessment stands the notion of change; as opposed to stability and consistency of measure advocated by the psychometric tradition. The contradiction here rises from what is intended to shed light on the developmental level (i.e. ZPD). As such, the inevitable effects of mediation in repeated assessment administrations result in dynamic change of outcomes; this variation mirrors development. Conversely, reliability rejects inconsistency in the outcome of assessment; this inconsistency marks the assessment as an erroneous process (Lantolf, 2009).

Taking account of a trajectory of issues in second language assessment, Stoyhoff (2012) pinpoints the gradual fall of "the hegemony of the psychometric orientation to assessment" (p. 527) and the rise of sociocultural and constructivist perspectives during the past five decades (Stoyhoff, 2012). Moreover, he highlights the role that teachers' assessment knowledge and beliefs play in their classroom-based assessment practices. Enhancing teachers' professional development, as suggested by Stoyhoff, incorporates teachers' reflection on their assessment practices, determining the use of these practices and their results, and optimal utilization of assessments by appropriating assessment procedures for fulfilling curricular aims (Stoyhoff, 2012). Finally, he underscores the necessity of developing teachers' sufficient level of assessment expertise, and the importance of investigating how teachers arrive at new findings through classroom assessment practices and share these findings with other teachers (Stoyhoff, 2012).

Literature in recent decade witnesses much research interest regarding ELT teachers' knowledge of DA (e.g., Golombek, 2011; Lidz & Gindis, 2003; Murphy, 2011; Poehner, 2007, 2008; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). To further spotlight the importance of education in teachers' assessment competence, and to compensate for the gap between theory and practice, Taras and Davis (2012) highlighted the dichotomy between assessment theory, classroom assessment, and learning process due to separation between practitioners and educationalists. Criticizing the ignorance towards learning assessment theories on the part of teachers, they stressed the role of theoretical knowledge in generating coherence across "institutional quality, curriculum, courses and degrees"(p. 51). Additionally, to bridge the chasm between academics' methodological constraints and practitioners' intuitive assessment, Yi (2013) calls for establishing a shared ground for practice between these two

poles to encompass language teaching and assessment with "a dynamic, relevant, and culturally appropriate understanding" (Yi, 2013 p. 77).

Aside from the effects of formal education and length of service, studies that address assessment within the field of second language acquisition (e.g. Anton, 1999; Donato, 1994; Kramsch, 2000; Nassaji & Swain, 2000); as well as studies on summative and formative assessment (FA) (e.g. Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000; Xie, & Andrews, 2013), signify the importance of contextualization of research in this field due to sociocultural as well as political variations of different educational systems. Similarly, findings of Bullock's research (2011) centralize the leading role of teachers in the implementation and establishment of innovative approaches in assessment. She emphasizes that appreciation and enhancement of teachers' role through gaining insight into teachers' beliefs leads to operationalization of their specific beliefs and choice of appropriate methodology (Borg, 2003; Pajares, 1992).

Regarding the pivotal role that teachers play in the instruction-assessment process, research on the ELT teachers' beliefs towards DA sheds light on the causes and effects of implementation of assessment in any educational context. For instance, putting pedagogical functions of assessment in perspective, Rea-Dickins and Gardner (2000) surveyed teachers' ideas towards formative assessment through a series of interviews to find out that teachers benefited from it in four major ways: planning and managing their teaching; providing evidence regarding students' learning; identifying the developmental extent for teachers and students alike as determined by curriculum; and providing feedback on their own teaching (Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000). A more recent study is conducted by Troudi et al., (2009) to investigate philosophies of EFL teachers about language assessment and teachers' own role in the implementation of second language assessment in the United Arab Emirate and Kuwait. Findings indicated that EFL teachers' conceptualizations of the role of assessment as well as their own role in assessment are based on their knowledge of the field, the contextual milieu, and employment policies. Accordingly, the top-down managerial approaches to assessment are claimed to manipulate the role of teachers in application of classroom assessment.

Consequently, effectiveness of DA assigns a significant agency to EFL teachers whose philosophies and conceptualizations are rooted in social and contextual constraints, teachers' education and experience, and their own personal beliefs and values. Thus, exploring EFL teachers' tacit perceptions and beliefs in different contexts can illuminate and reinforce potentials for the development of the 'assessment literacy' (Inbar-Lourie, 2008). To this end, the present study tries to report on Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of DA. Considering length of service and educational achievement as possible sources of variation, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of dynamic assessment?
2. How do Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of dynamic assessment vary as a function of their academic degree?
3. How do Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of dynamic assessment vary as a function of their length of service?

Methodology

Participants

A total of 42 teachers (30 female and 12 male) participated in this study. Of the 42 participants, 22 held BA and 20 others held MA in ELT-related courses. The participants were divided into BA Group (G_{BA}) and MA Group (G_{MA}) each including participants with varying lengths of service. The participants were selected from different pedagogical contexts

including private language institutes, schools, universities (ESAP instructors) and business sector or English for Occupational Purposes (EOP); some worked in more than one sector. Based on length of service, the participants were divided into five groups including 'Pre-Service' (G1), '1-5 years' (G2), '6-10 years' (G3), '11-15 years' (G4), and '15+ years' of experience (G5).

Data Collection, Design, and Procedure

The exploratory nature of the research made the researchers prefer interview as the main method of data collection as it provides a flexible approach by which participants can discuss their conceptualization of their world, best expressed in Cohen, Manion, and Morrison's (2007) words: "...interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, [and that] its human embeddedness is inescapable" (p. 349). Moreover, as maintained by Richards (2009), the interactional essence of interview provides substantial evidence for probing individuals' perceptions for the data analysis process, and also addressing underlying beliefs and values calls for more flexibility for in-depth exploration of its nuances. Thus, semi-structured interview was used as the method of collecting data for the present study, which were then audiotaped and later on transcribed.

To protect privacy of individuals, their consent for recording their voice and using the data for research purposes was obtained. Besides, interviewees' anonymity was observed by numbering files and transcripts: T 1 (Teacher 1), T 2... T 42. Preparing interview conditions to be face to face and in an appropriate atmosphere catered for eliminating disturbing factors that might prevent interviewees from comfortably expressing their beliefs. To thoroughly elicit teachers' beliefs and values on the issue, interview sessions were run in interviewees' mother tongue (Persian). Questions of the semi-structured interviews addressed topics related to teachers' beliefs about DA, their own professional experiences, and their concerns about the contextual factors. Participants' theoretical knowledge and their suggestion for more efficient application of DA were probed, too. Finally, the interviews closed with asking the participants about any concern beyond the questions asked.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, audiotaped interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized into four major themes by going through the systematic approach of open, axial, and selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1998). Subsequently, total frequencies of the emerged themes across the groups (G_{BA} vs. G_{MA} , as well as in relation to participants' length of service) were counted. Reliability of frequencies was checked through rating 10% of the data by a trained third party (with an MA degree) experienced in content analysis. Inter-rater reliability was calculated to be 89. Chi-square was run for the purpose of investigating potential significant differences between and among the groups.

Results and Discussion

1. Iranian EFL Teachers' Perception of Dynamic Assessment

In order to address the first research question, content analysis of transcribed audiotaped interviews, through coding of transcripts and categorizing related codes, led to the emergence

of four major themes encapsulating nine sub-themes each. The major themes included: 1) 'Teachers' understanding of DA as a classroom practice', 2) 'Teachers' perceptions of DA in relation to the agency of the assessor', 3) 'Teachers' perceptions of DA in relation to the learners as its major targets', and 4) 'Teachers' concerns towards application of DA as a social practice'. Sub-themes of each category incorporated different aspects of assessment as viewed by the participants (Appendices 1-4). For instance, the first category of themes encompassed participants' general understanding of DA and how they dealt with feedback either as a yardstick to probe learners' effort and development or as a touchstone for effectiveness of instruction (Appendix 1). This theme also drew upon the teachers' preferences of interactionist and interventionist DA, as well as utilization of multiple types and modalities of assessment to enhance effectiveness of DA. Moreover, participants' concerns towards teachers' role in application of DA appeared in sub-themes of the second category (Appendix 2). As such, teachers assumed different roles to themselves as classroom assessors. Whereas some viewed themselves as informants, learning facilitators, and decision makers applying DA, some others assigned a more important role to the institutions' decision making in this respect. Role of teachers' reflectivity, criticality, innovation, and burnout in effectiveness of DA, and importance of their familiarity with DA theory and its application criteria, were also incorporated in this category.

Since the goal of DA is believed to be learners' improvement, teachers represented substantial concern to learners' variables including their affective domain and individual differences as elements affecting learning (Appendix 3). For instance, motivation, either as a catalyst or as an outcome of DA, was claimed by many participants to be a major feature of DA. In addition, learners' autonomy, awareness of the reasons behind what they learn and are assessed for, self reflection and critical thinking were stated as factors influencing success of DA, either interventionist or interactionist. Finally, the fourth category included sub-themes regarding the sociocultural challenges as perceived and/or experienced by participants manipulating application and effectiveness of DA (Appendix 4). Of their major concerns were institutional demands, the effects of syllabus and materials, sociocultural factors shaping scoring system, as well as ethics and fairness of DA compared with traditional assessment. Moreover, some participants highlighted the importance of social acceptance of DA, and its applicability and practicality due to the contextual constraints of a psychometric-based mainstream assessment system.

The frequency of occurrence of sub-themes in the above mentioned categories showed patterns in relation to participants' academic degree and length of service, which fed the two other questions that are elaborated on in the following sections.

2. Teachers' Academic Degree and their Perception of Dynamic Assessment

Finding the frequencies of the themes and subthemes provided grounds for addressing the second research question, which meant to probe the potential differences in patterns of perceptions across academic degrees. The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test, as reported in Table 1, indicated a significant difference across BA and MA groups both in overall perceptions of DA, $\chi^2(3, N = 42) = 85.3, p = .05$, and in each of the themes regarding their perceptions of DA. That is, $\chi^2(4, N = 42) = 39.91, p = .05$ for Theme 1, $\chi^2(4, N = 42) = 64.18, p = .05$ for Theme 2, $\chi^2(4, N = 42) = 45.63, p = .05$ for Theme 3, and $\chi^2(4, N = 42) = 13.41, p = .05$ for theme 4.

Pearson Chi-Square		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
G_{BA} vs. G_{MA} (overall)		85.304	3	.000
G_{BA} vs. G_{MA} (Across Themes)	Theme 1	39.910	4	.000
	Theme 2	64.181	4	.000
	Theme 3	45.636	4	.009
	Theme 4	13.414	4	.000

Table 1: Results of chi-square Tests for teachers' Perceptions of DA across Academic Degrees

Variations across themes account for the overall patterns across themes (see Figure 1). Besides, analyzing delicate differences between the sub-themes of each category further clarifies different patterns of participants' perceptions of DA.

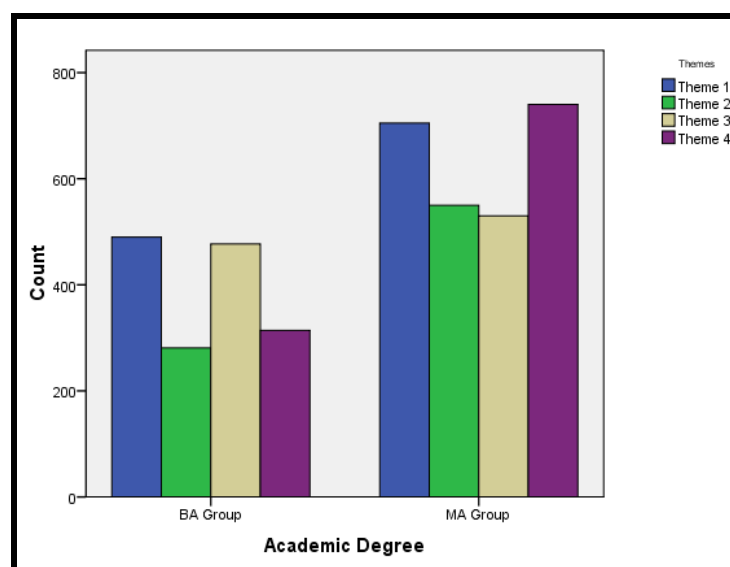


Figure 1: Thematic Variations of G_{BA} and G_{MA} Groups of Participants

2.1. Patterns of Perception across Sub-Themes

The two groups, as shown in Table 1, proved to have significantly different perceptions regarding understanding of DA as a classroom practice (see Table 1). Given the subtle differences within Theme 1, sub-themes' frequency of occurrence revealed different patterns. For instance, conceptualizing DA as an ongoing, dynamic, and challenging learning opportunity (60% of G_{MA} vs. 13.5% of G_{BA}), emphasizing feedback as a drive for development of teachers (95% of G_{MA} vs. 50% of G_{BA}), as well as preference for both interactionist DA and interventionist DA (70% of G_{MA} vs. 30% of G_{BA}) were reflected in the ideas of the majority of MA Group. Preferences for only interventionist DA (13.5% of G_{MA} vs. 70% of G_{BA}) was, however, reflected in the ideas of BA Group members much more. Appendix 1 presents differences and similarities in the views of the two groups of participants. The following are two sample excerpts from their expressed perceptions (authors' translation):

- (1) *“Indeed, in my application of DA, class activities would affect their [leaners'] total score but a unified exam is the best way to stop students from complaining about tests' unfairness. (T 8, G_{BA})*

- (2) *“I believe we don't have to be dismissive. I mean as we are being immersed in the issue of DA, we shouldn't dismiss all the old methods. Who says discrete-point tests are completely wrong? These days we focus on consciousness raising, and discrete-point tests can raise consciousness. It is important what we focus on in assessment; besides, the feeling we give to learners, should be a beautiful one.”* (T 41, G_{MA})

Regarding the second theme □ perceptions of DA in relation to the agency of the assessor □ the participants echoed significantly different philosophies towards their own agency in relation to the application of DA (see Table 1 and also Appendix 2). For instance, in contrast to 41% of G_{BA}, only 5% of G_{MA} viewed themselves as passive agents in application of DA due to institutional policies. In addition, the importance of reflectivity and criticality of teachers towards learners' progress proved a sharp contrast between the two groups (40% of G_{MA} vs. 7% of G_{BA}). Even more, the majority of MA Group (70% of G_{MA} vs. 13.5 % of G_{BA}) reported to employ their personal innovations in application of DA to probe and enhance learners' learning process. Finally, some participants (20% of G_{MA} vs. 13.5% of G_{BA}) reported teachers' burnout and loss of enthusiasm towards DA as compared with the first years of their career. Regarding the fact that the participants who reported burnout worked at state schools and universities, the role that contextual and institutional constraints play in shaping teachers' philosophies and epistemologies about DA should be taken into account. Below are two excerpts about the role of teachers (authors' translation):

- (3) *“During first couple of years of my teaching career at state schools, I used to take DA seriously: I had a notebook in that to jot down a brief report of students' performance after each session. Then, I would instruct and give exams accordingly. Now I'm no longer interested; I have no time; they hardly ever care about this kind of effort at schools.”* (T 19, G_{BA})
- (4) *“The DA which is dealt with in socio-cultural theory is not really applied at our schools, even at our universities; maybe partially at institutes. There are limitations like the large number of learners in each class, the scoring system that society demands, teachers don't receive help, etc. These factors lead to application of no DA or a deficient DA.”* (T 38, G_{MA})

In spite of the overall significant differences in the participants' perceptions of the Theme 3 (see Table 1), the relative proximity of the two groups concerning learners as major targets of DA application is observable in some of the sub-themes. For instance, the two groups reported similar concerns towards learners' affective variables at exams and during performance-based assessments as a point of reference in DA (82% of G_{BA} and 75% of G_{MA} about motivation and 77% of G_{BA} and 55% of G_{MA} anxiety). Likewise, individual differences in application of DA revealed the similar concern of 68% of BA Group and 65% of MA Group. However, as presented in Appendix 3, MA Group showed a significantly higher concern towards learners' self reflection and critical thinking (0% G_{BA} vs. 35% of G_{MA}), and awareness of the reason behind what they learn and are assessed for (4.5% G_{BA} vs. 60% of G_{MA}). The two following excerpts further illustrate the above mentioned patterns (authors' translation):

- (5) *“I think DA doesn't do a good job unless teachers observe classes to see learners' progress in each area. It can be through class performance, weekly quizzes, final and mid-term paper and pencil tests, or any other type.”* (T 2, G_{BA})
- (6) *“Maybe learners develop a fluid and fluent oral proficiency and learn a few more vocabulary. But their perceptions remain intact. It's because they don't think about the reason of coming to institute; they don't know their needs; they don't know whether their needs and interest match. To succeed in applying DA, I always ask them to have a*

'why' for what they do or want to do. I believe in developing learners' reflection to let them think; to help them deal with mismatches they encounter." (T 40, G_{MA})

As shown in Appendix 4, education plays a remarkable role in improvement of participants' perception of DA as a social practice (Theme 4). The awareness and criticality towards the educational status quo (45% of G_{BA} vs. 73% of G_{MA}), the effects of syllabus and materials on application of DA (13.5% of G_{BA} vs. 85% of G_{MA}) and formation of scoring system (45% of G_{BA} vs. 80% of G_{MA}), a realistic view about application of DA due to its practicality and social acceptance (13.5% of G_{BA} vs. 90% of G_{MA}), all hand in hand, spotlight the crucial roles of education and theoretical instruction in teachers' perception of DA. The following examples can help better illuminate the point (authors' translation):

(7) *"DA needs time and teachers' concentration. We are pressed in time to cover the syllabus within a two-month term. This doesn't leave me enough time to assess 30-35 students one by one."* (T 27, G_{BA})

(8) *"In dynamic assessment, the objective is promotion of learners' performance. Even when I don't have time to assess their [learners'] classroom performance, I explore their weaknesses during paper and pencil test. Then, I help them with these weaknesses or even run remedial courses for them."* (T 36, G_{MA})

The emerging patterns, as shown in Appendices 1 to 4 and instantiated by excerpts from interviews, all highlight contribution of education as a key factor in teachers' perceptions and application of DA. Consequently, different perceptions of BA and MA Groups towards DA (Appendices 1-4) cater for the way Vygotsky distinguishes "everyday concepts and scientific concepts" [emphasis in original] (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 2). Accordingly, theoretical and pedagogical instruction and related scientific concepts should be brought "to bear on concrete practical activity, connecting them to their everyday knowledge and the goal-directed activities of teaching" (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 2). Moreover, aside from understanding of DA and teachers' agency as classroom assessors of their students (Themes 1 to 3), as exemplified in Theme 4, education plays a leading part in the development of teachers' cognition (Borg, 2003), teacher identity, and awareness towards the limitations of the educational status quo (Miller, 2009). As such, Miller (2009) introduces teacher identity as a lens to scrutinize sociocultural elements in ELT enterprise, as well as ideological aspects of language, leading to either empowering or disenfranchising speakers' voice by the use of language and discourse. Consequently, the frequency of occurrence in the emerged categories and their sub-themes displayed a significant difference between BA and MA Groups indicating the vital role of academic education in participants' perceptions of DA.

3. Teachers' Length of Service and their Perception of Dynamic Assessment

The third research question sought to probe any potential significant variations in the participants' patterns of perception of DA as a function of their length of service. To this end, as shown in Table 2, Pearson Chi-Square test revealed a significant difference between the five groups regarding their perceptions of DA, $\chi^2(12, N=42) = 3.604, p=.05$.

Pearson Chi-Square	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Between the five groups (overall)	3.604	12	.000

Table 2: Results of Chi-square Tests for Teachers' Perceptions of DA across Lengths of Service

Moreover, as illustrated in Figure 2, the two groups revealed differences in their perceptions of DA across themes. Thematic analysis of participants' perceptions of DA (see Appendices 1-4) will further shed light on these variations across groups with different lengths of service (see the sub-section Participants).

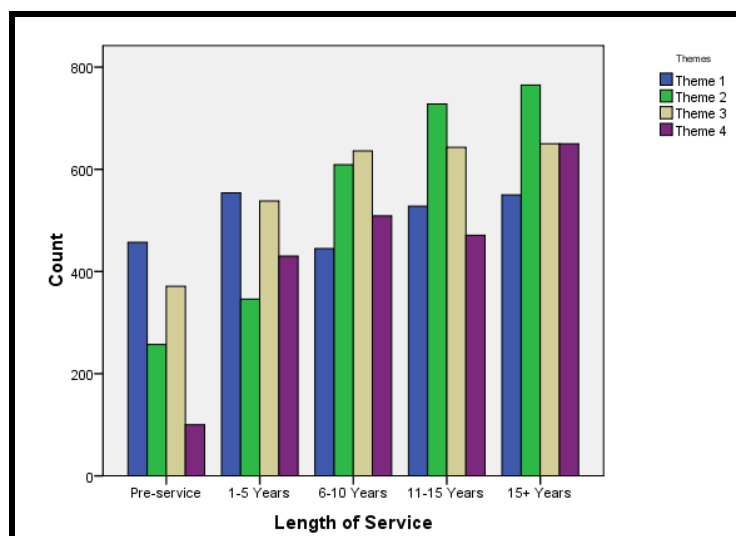


Figure 2: Thematic Variations across the Five Groups Regarding Lengths of Service

3.1. Patterns of Perception across Sub-Themes

According to Figure, participants' overall understanding of Theme 1 was reported to maintain a static state among the five groups. However, Sub-themes indicate different focuses for each group (see Appendix 1). For instance, perception of DA as a challenging learning opportunity showed more manifestation along with an increase in years of experience (G1 to G5, in order: 14%, 23%, 36%, 57%, 75%). Furthermore, whereas views supporting application of only interventionist DA as a unified, fair tool for assessment proved a relative decline across years of teaching experience (G1 to G5 in order: 71%, 31%, 45%, 14%, 25%), an opposite pattern was reported supporting application of both interventionist and interactionist DA to provide a dynamic, trustworthy and fair tool of assessment (G1 to G5 in order: 0%, 23%, 36%, 100%, 100%). Finally, while all the groups reported perceiving feedback as a facilitator of learning (100%), there was a relative increase over considering feedback as an indicator of effectiveness of instruction (G1 to G5 in order: 43%, 69%, 64%, 100%, 100%). The following excerpts clarify how length of service can be related to participants' views of learners' feedback (authors' translation):

- (9) *“I don't see language different from other subjects. If learners turn you back what you have taught them, this means they have learned it; no matter what type of assessment you use.” (T 31, G1)*
- (10) *“This Institute, with its traditional way of assessment, considers only a small portion of total score for class activities and we should abide by the rules. I can use learners' feedback mostly for seeing their strengths and weaknesses. There is no room for full application of DA.” (T 17, G3)*

As shown in Figure 2, years of experience play a role in participants' perceptions of their roles in application of DA (Theme 2). A more thorough analysis of sub-themes as reported in Appendix 2 further reveals this point. For instance, teachers' agency as the decision makers of classroom assessment in applying DA was reported to achieve a gradual importance

alongside increase in teaching experience (G1 to G5 in order: 0%, 31%, 64%, 71%, 75%). A similar pattern was seen in prioritizing teachers' knowledge of theory of DA (G1 to G2 in order: 14%, 54%, 82%, 100%, 100%). The following excerpts better illustrate necessity of knowing theory of DA as viewed by participants (authors' translation):

- (11) *“Some teachers are product-oriented and some are process-oriented. In dynamic assessment we should take a process-oriented approach so that we can hold a holistic view of learners' strengths and weaknesses.”* (T 16, G1)
- (12) *“Teachers who know theories and principles of DA know how to act in classroom to facilitate learners' understanding of, and dealing with their own progress. For example, if teachers don't know what to observe and what to look for, observation cannot be an efficient alternative assessment. Teachers should be trained first.”* (T 32, G4)

Placing learners' progress as the core of application of DA (Theme 3) is shown to gain more weight as participants become more experienced in the career (Figure 2). Appendix 3 reports a more detailed account of this ascending state. As such, while motivation attracts a great deal of attention among all groups with a slight increase (G1 to G5: 71%, 77%, 86%, 100%), a much sharper increase is observed in giving importance to learners' awareness of the reason behind what they learn and are assessed for (G1 to G5: 0%, 31%, 36%, 43%, 50) and learners' self-reflection and critical thinking (G1 to G5 : 0%, 0%, 36%, 28%, 50%). In terms of motivation, a similar pattern (G1 to G5: 71%, 77%, 73%, 85%, 100%) was revealed; however, targets for creating motivation varied along with increase in experience. The following excerpts further shed light on these variations (authors' translation):

- (13) *“In my opinion, assessment and motivation are directly related to each other. I try to keep my students motivated by considering their individual differences and mental and physical conditions at exam or in classroom assessments.”* (T 24, G2)
- (14) *“At the university classes where I instruct, I assign students tasks that need higher-level thinking. My evaluation involves detecting their developmental process of thought reflected in classroom discussion, lectures, and other tasks and activities. Dynamics of this type of assessment keeps them motivated because it gives their studies direction and purpose.”* (T 35, G4)

Figure 2 indicates that awareness towards contextual and institutional factors (Theme 4) increases as participants teach their way through years of experience. However, in spite of the sharp increase between G1 and G2 in the fourth theme, more experienced participants (i.e. G3, G4, and G5) revealed a relatively similar pattern (see Appendix 4). Accordingly, necessity of criticality towards contextual demands affecting application of DA (G1 to G5: 14%, 54% 95%, 57%, 75%), effects of syllabus and materials (G1 to G5: 0%, 31%, 64%, 71%, 100%), and importance of social acceptability (G1 to G5: 0%, 23%, 36% 28% 50%) and practicality(G1 to G5: 0%, 31% 82%, 86%, 100%), among others, reveal a similar pattern among participants' understanding of contextual constraints of educational system. Following are three examples clarifying this pattern (authors' translation):

- (15) *“This school has a better way of evaluation than the other ones in which I have worked. Here, in addition to midterm and final exam, learners' oral proficiency is assessed, too. Learners are interviewed every term and interview's grade is part of their total score.”* (T 4, G2)
- (16) *“Our assessment system is an orphan. It is neither qualitative nor quantitative; neither subjective nor objective. I cannot freely assess my students based on my familiarity with their competence and my choice of applying DA. Our culture demands a grading system and I have to apply it though I see it is not fair.”* (T 21, G3)
- (17) *“Designer methods were really appealing but they didn't last long because they didn't gain societies' acceptance. DA, like any other type of assessment, first should fit the*

needs and sociocultural characteristics of any context; then, it should be practical in that context." (TP 42, G4)

As reflected in the results, participants' epistemologies regarding DA undergo a more or less constant reconstruction process as teachers gain teaching experience. This result provides more empirical evidence for what Lantolf and Johnson (2007) maintain about teachers' cognition development. According to them, beside education, sociocultural and contextual factors cater for the formation of teachers' cognition through social activities during years of teaching career (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007). These social activities are believed to be crucial for constructing new forms of perception (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). In other words, the inert knowledge and conceptual underpinnings adopted from training and/or education tend to grow into well-established philosophies by practically experiencing abstract theories in concrete situations (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Reshaping teachers' conceptualization of DA and its related pedagogical, social, and contextual issues, especially reported in Theme 4, stand as an exemplar of what Miller (2009) introduces as teacher identity that equips teachers to conceive of contextual, ideological as well as sociopolitical factors affecting all aspects of teaching, in this case, application of DA.

Conclusion

The findings from the present study reported significant variations in Iranian ELT teachers' perceptions regarding DA as a function of their education and experience. These results provide empirical support for the sociocultural effects of education on the application of DA which stands in contrast to the traditional psychometrics-based assessment system. The undemocratic effects of such assessment system, which takes no heed of what happens to test-takers, to the knowledge generated by tests, and to the teachers who construct the tests, teachers are treated as passive agents carrying out prescribed orders (Shohamy, 2005). To redress these shortcomings, Inbar-Lourie (2008) seeks for development of a kind of knowledge and competency empowering teachers to make active, informed decisions regarding assessment. This competency which needs to be constantly constructed and reconstructed in reaction to constraints of the status quo, echoes a shift from the state of 'passive technicians' to a dynamic socially-negotiated and socioculturally-grounded (Golombek, 2011) developmental process that entails revisiting the means to change language teachers' perceptions. Furthermore, since language teaching is said to be a situated practice, it is difficult to find a criterion applicable to all contexts, for second language teacher development program (Leihardt, 1990 cited in Tsui, 2005). Thus, Tsui suggests three criteria; high above them stands teaching experience, followed by institutional recommendations and licenses, as well as feedback from learners' progress as a touchstone for effectiveness of instruction (Leihardt, 1990). These criteria explain the reconstruction of teachers' epistemologies about assessment to transmit from traditional testing paradigm to DA, based on teachers' sociocultural interaction, along with their education (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Whereas findings of this study cater for implications for teacher development programs to prioritize instruction of DA theory, generalizability of results seeks for caution due to some constraints limiting the study. For one thing, interviews, although reveal underlying mentality of the interviewee, do not account for actual implementation of the expressed views. Thus, increasing dependability of the findings calls for further study including observing lessons and assessment sessions to more deeply delve into teachers' perceptions about dynamics of classroom assessment. Another constraint to the study was the number of participants who took part in the study. The reluctance of many teachers for consent due to privacy policies and institutional considerations limited the number

of interviewees, so further research with a larger population is suggested to increase dependability of results.

Since teacher learning and cognition is conceptually and contextually conditioned (Borg, 2006), what they believe at the initial stages of teaching career undergoes changes during the years of teaching experience. Even the existing beliefs have different manifestations as teachers become more experienced (Borg, 2006). Thus, longitudinal case studies and ethnographic researches are suggested to shed more light on effects of experience and education on individual teachers' perceptions about DA. Finally, as Duff (2008) holds, replication of studies with a data-driven nature, like the present study, in different contexts provides more evidence to prove the grounded theory on which this type of study is based. In order to explicate perceptions of Iranian ELT teachers teaching in different contexts, the present study encompassed selecting teachers and instructors from institutes, state and private schools, universities, and business sectors. However this enriched the data, concentration on each context with its own administration regulations highlights the importance of replication in individual contexts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Frequency of Occurrence in Sub-Categories of Theme 1

Theme 1: Teachers' Understanding of Dynamic Assessment as a Classroom Practice	Academic Degree		Length of Service				
	BA group	MA group	Pre-Service	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	15 + Years
DA is a challenging learning opportunity for learners.	113.5	60%	14%	23%	36%	57%	75%
An ongoing, long-term, continuous, and constant learners' feedback which promotes leaning is obtained through application of DA.	70%	95%	71%	92%	64%	100%	75%
Relying on learners' feedback would be an indicator of learners' state of knowledge.	31%	10%	28%	8%	36%	14%	25%
Relying on learners' feedback, as a feature of DA, facilitates learning progress constantly.	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Learners' feedback reflects efficiency and effectiveness of instruction.	50%	95%	43%	69%	64%	100%	100%
Interventionist DA as a unified and standard assessment would provide a fair and trustworthy tool for evaluating learning.	70%	13.5%	71%	31%	45%	14%	25%
Both interactionist DA and interventionist DA are needed to provide dynamic, fair, and trustworthy assessment tools for evaluating learning process.	30%	70%	0%	23%	36%	100%	100%
Multiple types and modalities of tests should be applied in DA.	45%	75%	14%	62%	82%	71%	50%
Distinguishing between evaluation of different skills and components enhances application and effectiveness of DA.	45%	80%	28%	62%	82%	71%	50%

APPENDIX 2

Frequency of Occurrence in Sub-Categories of Theme 2

Theme 2: Teachers' Perception of Dynamic Assessment in Relation to their Agency as the Assessors	Academic Degree		Length of Service				
	BA group	MA group	Pre-Service	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	15 + Years
	Teachers would be informants, managing instruction-assessment nexus thorough DA.	60%	75%	43%	62%	73%	71%
Teachers would be facilitators of learning process via DA.	32%	80%	14%	62%	64%	57%	50%
Teachers can be decision makers regarding classroom assessment through DA.	22%	70%	0%	31%	64%	71%	%75
Institutes are arbiters of classroom assessment because they are better informed than teachers.	41%	5%	57%	15.5%	18%	14%	%25
Teachers need to be reflective and critical towards learners' performance to perceive learners' feedback and act on them accordingly.	7%	40%	0%	8%	36%	28%	%25
Teachers should be familiar with theory of assessment, especially DA.	0%	85%	14%	54%	82%	100%	%100
Teachers need to be familiar with the criteria and application of DA as a classroom practice.	41%	95%	14%	23%	%36	86%	%75
Teachers' personal innovation in application of DA helps probe and enhance learners' learning process.	13.5 %	70%	0%	8%	18%	28%	%75
Teachers' interest in the application of DA will change during years of teaching experience.	13.5 %	20%	43%	62%	55%	71%	25%

APPENDIX 3

Frequency of Occurrence in Sub-Categories of Theme 3

Theme 3: Teachers' Perception of Dynamic Assessment in Relation to the Learners as its Major Targets	Academic Degree		Length of Service				
	BA group	MA group	Pre-Service	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	15 + Years
	Learners' motivation enhances their learning progress during performance-based assessment.	82%	75%	71%	77%	73%	86%
Learners' anxiety in traditional assessment may impede instructional role of assessment.	77%	55%	86%	69%	64%	43%	75%
Mental and physical conditions of learners would affect their performance during traditional assessment. Instead of attributing the results to the learners' competence, both interventionist and interactionist DA should be employed.	63%	20%	43%	62%	27%	14%	100%
Individual differences among learners necessitate constant and varied teachers' feedbacks to enhance learning process continuously and dynamically.	68%	65%	14%	85%	64%	71%	100%
Engagement of learners in tasks helps assess their learning progress dynamically.	45%	60%	28%	69%	64%	57%	75%
Learners' confidence for self expression and assigning autonomy to them facilitate performance-based classroom assessment or interactionist DA.	45%	60%	43%	69%	45%	57%	25%
Learners' awareness of the reason behind what they learn and are assessed for boosts their motivation which enhances effectiveness of DA.	4.5%	60%	0%	31%	36%	43%	50%
Self-reflection and critical thinking among learners encourage higher-level thinking which promotes learning.	0%	35%	0%	0%	36%	28%	50%
Heterogeneous classrooms need variations in types of assessment beside DA.	40%	55%	14%	54%	36%	43%	75%

APPENDIX 4

Frequency of Occurrence in Sub-Categories of Theme 4

Theme 4: Teachers' Concerns towards Application of Dynamic Assessment as a Social Practice	Academic Degree		Length of Service				
	BA group	MA group	Pre-Service	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	15 + Years
Teachers should be critical towards contextual demands on their classroom practices including application of DA.	45%	75%	14%	54%	91%	57%	75%
Potential infeasibility of DA can be due to the gaps in the assessment systems.	55%	90%	14%	69%	82%	100%	100%
Syllabus and materials will affect effectiveness of DA.	13.5%	85%	0%	31%	64%	71%	100%
Setting instructional goal would be an important map for application of DA.	36%	70%	14%	62%	36%	100%	50%
Duality of teachers' and systems' criteria for assessment renders DA defunct.	9%	45%	0%	23%	36%	14%	0%
Sociocultural factors which demand scoring system may determine success or failure in application of DA.	45%	80%	14%	54%	91%	57%	100%
Ethics and fairness of DA vs. traditional assessment should be emphasized.	27%	75%	28%	31%	73%	28%	100%
Like any other type of assessment, DA should be socially accepted.	13.5%	90%	0%	23%	36%	28%	50%
Like any other type of assessment, DA should be contextually practical for and applicable.	27%	85%	0%	31%	82%	86%	100%